

IRISH CELEBRITIES COME OUT IN FORCE TO SUPPORT SIMON WEEK 2009

RESEARCH COMMISSIONED BY SIMON COMMUNITIES OF IRELAND AND EBS BUILDING SOCIETY SHOWS THAT 63% OF PEOPLE SURVEYED SUGGEST THAT HOMELESSNESS IS CAUSED BY POVERTY, UNEMPLOYMENT AND MONEY PROBLEMS

Dublin, 2nd October 2009 – Irish celebrities came together today in Dublin City Centre to show their support for Simon Week 2009 and to help raise awareness around the issue of homelessness in Ireland. Simon Week 2009, supported by EBS Building Society, kicks off next Monday the 5th of October and will involve an intense awareness campaign across the eight Simon Communities throughout Ireland for the duration of the week.

The Leinster and Munster team put their rivalry aside on the eve of their big clash to support Simon Week 2009 and to encourage people to do as much as they can to help end homelessness in Ireland. Speaking today Peter Stringer, Munster rugby player, said: "Raising awareness about homelessness in Ireland is important to me. I'm supporting Simon Week 2009 and I hope you will too – the work that Simon are doing with the support of EBS is phenomenal. Throughout the country Simon Communities work with some of the most vulnerable people in our society. They provide the care and support that these people need to get their lives back on track."

Shane Jennings, Leinster rugby player, echoed Stringer's words saying: "Simon Week 2009 is a great way to raise awareness about the rising problem of homelessness in Ireland. I'm delighted to endorse Simon's awareness initiative, supported by EBS and I'd encourage everyone to get involved in the week where they can and do their bit to prevent and reduce homelessness in Ireland. Now more than ever Simon and the homeless people in Ireland need your support."

Irish music sensation; The Script, Tipperary Hurler Lar Corbett, Irish model, TV presenter and journalist Laura Bermingham, former Miss Ireland, Sinead Noonan and the Dublin Gospel Choir also came out today to show their support for Simon Week 2009. Speaking today, Patrick Burke, Chief Executive of Simon Communities of Ireland, said: "Simon Week represents a great opportunity for us to raise awareness of homelessness in Ireland, to urge all sections of Irish Society to understand the causes of homelessness in Ireland and to take action to bring homelessness to an end. I'd also like to warmly welcome the support of all of the famous faces here today supporting our cause to end homelessness in Ireland. In addition, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank EBS once again for its support in helping to roll out Simon Week 2009. During our seven days of action on homelessness we are calling on members of the general public, politicians and business people to visit www.simon.ie and find out more about the seven actions you can take to help end homelessness in Ireland."

Aidan Power, Head of Marketing and CSR at EBS Building Society said: "EBS has been a long time supporter of the work of Simon in Ireland. Through this partnership we have achieved many goals and we hope that the awareness raised today and during Simon Week next week will somehow help to tackle the problem of homelessness all around Ireland. To have so many celebrities here today supporting the week is a fantastic start and I'd like to thank them all for their enthusiastic efforts."

The activities planned over the course of Simon Week are designed to help educate people about the issue of homelessness. Research commissioned by The Simon Communities of Ireland and EBS Building Society indicates a shift in perceptions in 2009 about the causes of homelessness in Ireland. Lack of employment and financial problems have risen as a factor believed to contribute to homelessness. Drug and alcohol use, family breakdown and mental health issues also featured amongst the results. Compared with research done in 2007, poverty has remained static at 17%. These results demonstrate that people are now more inclined to see the link between structural causes, change and homelessness.

Commenting on the research, Aidan Power, Head of Marketing and CSR, EBS said: "The research that we are releasing today reveals that 17% of people questioned believe that lack of employment is one of the reasons contributing to homelessness. This is something that was not considered an issue in similar research undertaken in 2007. Similarly 29% of people believe that financial problems are one of the main factors leading to homelessness. This has increased considerably as a factor since 2007 from 20% to 29%."

For further information on Simon Week 2009, supported by EBS Building Society, log onto www.simon.ie or call into your local EBS branch to see how you can support the week.

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Note for Editors

About the Simon Communities of Ireland:

The Simon Communities of Ireland is an affiliation of local Communities in Cork, Dublin, Dundalk, Galway, the Midlands, the South East, the North West and the Mid West. In addition, the National Office performs a coordinating role in terms of campaigning in the areas of housing/homeless policy and the wider poverty and social inclusion agenda; best practice in service delivery and working with people who are homeless; and in the area of full time volunteering promoting excellence and providing accredited training.

The Simon Communities throughout Ireland provide the best possible care, accommodation and support for people experiencing homelessness and those at risk. Together, with people who are homeless, we tackle the root causes, promote innovative responses and urge the government to fulfil their commitments.

Simon delivers support and service to almost 5,000 people who experience – or are at risk of – homelessness every year.

About the Simon / EBS Partnership:

EBS Building Society partners with the Simon Communities of Ireland as part of its CSR Programme, Positive Impact. The partnership was formed in 2004. Together, the partners created the Independent Living Initiative, a programme that marked a new venture by the Simon Communities of Ireland. Supported by EBS, the programme has provided over 90 housing units to those who are homeless or living in emergency accommodation. The initiative is on track to provide its 100th home.

About the research

EBS, as part of the work it does in conjunction with the Simon Communities of Ireland, commissioned Behaviour & Attitudes to carry out research amongst the general public. A questionnaire was developed and included in the Behaviour & Attitudes TeleBarometer survey. This uses a syndicated approach to collecting information from a national sample of 1000 adults.

Interviewing took place between 3rd and 15th September 2009.

In 2007 Behaviour & Attitudes reported on research undertaken on behalf of the Simon Communities of Ireland to explore general public awareness of and attitudes to homelessness and the Simon Community. This was part of Behaviour and Attitudes syndicated Barometer survey collecting information from a national sample of 1200 adults.

Limitations: It is important to note that these studies carried at two different points in time utilise different methodologies and had different objectives. However the same questions were asked in relation to the main causes of homeless in Ireland and comparison of the two sets of findings do give an indication of a general shift in terms of peoples perceptions.