

REPORT FINDS THREE QUARTERS OF CORK SIMON SERVICE USERS SUFFER PHYSICAL OR MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION

Complex needs of those experiencing homelessness highlighted as Simon Week 2009, supported by EBS, kicks off

Monday, 5th October – The Simon Communities of Ireland today began seven days of action on homelessness. Simon Week 2009, proudly supported by EBS Building Society, takes place from 5th to 11th October 2009 with a wide range of activities and events taking place nationally and at local level.

Over the next seven days the Simon Communities in Cork, Dublin, Dundalk, Galway, the Midlands, the Mid West, the North West and the South East, along with the Simon Communities of Ireland Office, will be hosting events to raise awareness of the issue of homelessness in their local area and to encourage people to take action to end homelessness in Ireland.

Cork Simon Community began the week by publishing the stark findings of their report Sick and Tired of Homelessness – A Health Profile of People Using Cork Simon. Speaking this morning Colette Kelleher, Director of Cork Simon Community said “This study helps to build a picture of what we mean by complex needs: mental and physical ill-health, drug and alcohol use, behavioral issues, poor education, poverty and exclusion. As our health audit indicates, people with all of these needs tend to be the people who are long-term homeless. It helps to highlight how vulnerable and isolated people are. There are also broken or fractured family relations to consider, as well as developing coping skills, living skills and building social networks. All of these needs – complex needs – have to be addressed in tandem with appropriate housing. It’s the only way we will realise the government’s commitments of ending rough sleeping and long-term homelessness by 2010.”

The Health Audit was conducted among all 183 people using Cork Simon services during the first week of September. It found that 58% had a diagnosed mental health condition, 48% had a diagnosed physical health condition, while 77% had both. 82 percent reported using alcohol, almost half of which were described as heavy users. Thirty – nine percent used drugs, 40 percent of which were described as heavy users, and 36% used both alcohol and drugs, 37% of which were described as heavy users of both. Fifty two per cent of those with a diagnosed mental health condition also used alcohol and/or drugs.

Speaking at the start of Simon Week today, Simon Communities of Ireland CEO Patrick Burke said: “Simon Week represents an opportunity for us to raise awareness of homelessness in Ireland, to urge all sections of Irish Society to understand the causes of homelessness and to take action to bring homelessness to an end. During our seven days of action on homelessness we are calling on members of the general public, politicians, business people to visit www.simon.ie and find out more about the seven actions you can take to help end homelessness in Ireland.

“We are also taking the opportunity this week to remind the Government of its commitment to end rough sleeping and long-term homelessness in Ireland by 2010. The 2010 commitments will not be met until long-term needs and those of people with complex needs are specifically targeted. We firmly believe that this goal can still be achieved – even under the current difficult economic circumstances and we are fully committed to working with all stakeholders to ensure that this goal is realised.”

Aidan Power, Head of Marketing and CSR at EBS Building Society said: "EBS has been a long time supporter of the work of the Simon Communities in Ireland. Our business is uniquely focused on enabling people to buy their homes, but we are acutely aware of those on the margins of our society for whom the idea of owning their own home is out of reach. We are also aware that the number of people who are finding themselves in this position is rising, due to increasing unemployment. The work of the Simon Communities in Ireland is more important than ever and our aim is to assist them in raising awareness of homelessness during Simon Week 2009."

Some examples of events taking place around the country over the next seven days are:

- A celebration of Simon Volunteers with The President, Mary McAleese
- A half day seminar on ending homelessness
- The launch of new research on homelessness and mental health
- A Oireachtas briefing session on homelessness for all TD's and Senators
- Dublin Simon's annual Fun Run
- Launch of educational DVD 'Close to Home' in partnership with EBS Building Society
- Focus on the Simon/EBS Independent Living Initiative

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For further information please contact:

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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 individuals and families who experience – or are at risk of – homelessness on an annual basis.

About Simon Week 2009:

Simon Week 2009 takes place from 5th to 11th October 2009 with a wide range of activities and events taking place nationally and at local level. Simon Week 2009 is proudly supported by EBS Building Society.

Simon Week represents a unique opportunity for the Simon Communities of Ireland to raise awareness of homelessness, 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. The Week also celebrates the work of Simon's staff and volunteers throughout the country.

Simon Week aims to:

- Increase awareness of homelessness and associated issues in Ireland

- Create greater awareness of the Simon Communities of Ireland and the work that the Communities engage in
- Remind people that everyone has a role to play in ending homelessness and to encourage people to get involved by volunteering, participating in events and donations

About Sick and Tired of Homelessness – A Health Profile of People Using Cork Simon:

This Health Audit was conducted among all people using Cork Simon services during the first week of September 2009 to build a picture of some of those needs and to highlight the complex nature of homelessness among people using those services. Sick and Tired of Homelessness records diagnosed mental and physical health conditions, alcohol and drug use, behaviour and referrals to the Adult Homeless Multi Disciplinary Team (AHMDT).