

DUBLIN SIMON SERVICES WELCOME MINISTER FOR CONVERSATION ON HOMELESSNESS

Simon calls on all stakeholders to play their part in ending homelessness by 2010 during Simon Week

Dublin, 7th October 2009 - Dublin Simon Community today welcomed the Minister of State with responsibility for Housing and Local Services, Mr Michael Finneran TD, on a visit to a number of its services. The Minister also met with Dublin Simon service users as part of this visit and spoke with them about their experiences and the possible solutions to homelessness in Ireland. This is one of many events and activities organised as part of Simon Week 2009, proudly supported by EBS Building Society. Simon Week – Seven Days of Action on Homelessness - is 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 Minister visited Dublin Simon's emergency night shelter at Island House and met with residents and staff at that facility. He also paid a visit to the Rehab and Detox facilities at Ushers Island and met with Dublin Simon Service Users there.

Speaking on the occasion of the Minister's visit, Sam McGuinness, CEO of Dublin Simon said: "Since we opened our Island House night shelter in May 2008 we have been running at full capacity every night of the year. This service takes referrals directly from the night bus. In recent months we have witnessed increasing numbers trying to access our emergency shelters and we urge the Government to continue to focus on its 2010 commitments and end rough sleeping and long-term homelessness. Adequate move-on accommodation and supports must be provided so that people have the opportunity to move out of homelessness and move away from the routine of wandering the streets daily and waiting in line for a bed for a few hours every night. No one should have to experience a life like that.

"Today was a great opportunity to show the Minister around our Night Shelter and also our Treatment Services. Many of our residents were also there who spoke with the Minister about their own circumstances and experience of homelessness.

Minister Michael Finneran said: "It was very interesting to meet residents of Island House who will, I hope, soon progress to independent living in mainstream housing. That is the main aim of our Homelessness Strategy, which has more challenging targets than most, if not all, other European countries. We have a comprehensive national implementation plan, sponsored a series of reviews that will lead to major re-organisation of homeless services in Dublin, enacted new homeless legislation, increased funding for homeless accommodation and launched a new scheme to provide mainstream housing and supports to help people leave homelessness behind. Success now depends on action at local level and organisations like Simon, working with the local authorities, have a key role to play in this.

Sam McGuinness continued: "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. It is acknowledged that homelessness is a cross cutting issue and we call on all the other players for example the Health Service Executive and the Office of the Minister for Drugs who launched a new Substance Misuse Strategy in September to play their part. 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 it is realised.”

ENDS/

For more information on Dublin Simon Community and services please contact Lorna Cronnelly, Campaigns and Media Manager at lornacronnelly@dubsimon.ie or 086 1724253 or see www.dubsimon.ie

Note for Editors

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 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 on an annual basis.

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. EBS Building Society are proud supporters of Simon Week 2009.