

EBS AND SIMON COMMUNITIES OF IRELAND WORK TOGETHER TO HELP EDUCATE STUDENTS ON THE ROOT CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

Minister for Education & Science, Mr. Batt O’Keeffe T.D. launches the ‘Close to Home’ DVD for secondary students

Dublin 27th May 2009 – The Minister for Education and Science, Batt O’Keeffe TD, today launched the ‘Close to Home’ DVD at Larkin Community College, Cathal Brugha Street, Dublin 1. ‘Close to Home’ was developed by the Simon Communities of Ireland in partnership with EBS Building Society to provide secondary school students with a DVD which outlines in detail the root causes of homelessness and the steps that can be taken to help prevent people from becoming homeless. This is one of a number of projects that has been co-developed by the Simon Communities of Ireland and EBS Building Society as part of an ongoing campaign developed to reduce the level of homelessness in Ireland.

Homeless prevention is a central tenet of the Government’s Homeless Strategy ‘The Way Home’. Indeed awareness is a key tool in preventing homelessness from occurring in the first place. The ‘Close to Home’ DVD and resource pack comprises a 20 minute film on homelessness and the work of the Simon Communities around the country. In the film, students get first person accounts of the difficulties faced by individuals experiencing homelessness and the help and support they have received from the Simon Communities. The resource pack contains eight colourful information sheets on a range of topics such as ‘Homelessness in Ireland’, ‘Health and Homelessness’ and ‘Pathways out of Homelessness’. The pack encourages students to play their part in bringing an end to homelessness by organising a fundraising activity for their local Simon Community, or by discussing the issue of homelessness with friends and family. In addition, it highlights the necessary funding and support required from government to meet its own targets of ending the need to sleep rough and long term homelessness by 2010.

Speaking to students at Larkin Community College, Minister O’Keeffe said: “It’s very important that students are educated at an early age on homelessness and the preventative measures that can be taken to make sure this doesn’t happen to them. In these tough times when part time work isn’t as readily available to students as it has been some will already be feeling financial pressure. It is our responsibility as adults and mine as Minister for Education to make sure that all students are ready for the pressures of life ahead and I believe the ‘Close to Home’ resource pack, developed by Simon Communities and EBS, is an informative tool which will be of benefit to our students. I’d encourage all teachers to promote the pack among their students. I’d like to congratulate Simon and EBS for developing this initiative.”

Chief Executive of the Simon Communities of Ireland, Patrick Burke, commented saying: “The Simon Communities of Ireland has a long-standing tradition of working with students to encourage them to play a part in bringing an end to homelessness in Ireland

and to educate them on the subject. The staff members and volunteers in the Simon Communities visit schools across the country on a regular basis to give talks explaining the issues around homelessness in Ireland, its causes and solutions. Furthermore, second level students have contributed significantly to the work of the Simon Communities around the country by organising fundraising events. I hope that the 'Close to Home' pack will serve to further this tradition by helping to develop new relationships between second level schools and our Communities around the country.

"I would like to thank Minister Batt O'Keeffe TD for helping us to launch the 'Close to Home' DVD and resource pack this morning. I also want to sincerely thank EBS for its support in developing this pack and its ongoing commitment to the work of the Simon Communities of Ireland."

Bringing the launch to an end, Aidan Power, Head of Marketing at EBS, said: "EBS is delighted to be able to partner with Simon on this great initiative. In this time of economic uncertainty the risk of homelessness is increasing and it is even more important that we educate our children not just to prevent them from becoming homeless but also to encourage them to help those who are less fortunate than them. I believe the 'Close to Home' DVD and resource pack is a great tool for students and I hope all teachers around the country will support the initiative and encourage students to take the time to watch the DVD and read the leaflets. I would like to thank Minister O'Keeffe for his support of the project and to congratulate Simon for the development of the pack."

"EBS partners with the Simon Communities of Ireland as part of our CSR Programme, Positive Impact. The partnership was formed in 2004 and, together, we have succeeded in housing almost 100 families affected by homelessness through the Independent Living Initiative. We look forward to working on more successful programmes with Simon in the years ahead."

The 'Close to Home' pack will be available to schools around the country next September in time for the new school year. The 20 minute film can be downloaded from the Simon Communities of Ireland website www.simon.ie/closetohome.

ENDS/

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Notes to the Editor:

About 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. Simon delivered support and services to almost 5,000 individuals and families who experienced – or were at risk of – homelessness in 2007. 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.

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.