



28th September 2008

Simon Week supported by EBS kicks off with first of its kind volunteering certificate

Simon Communities staff will be qualified to accredit full-time volunteers

The first ever **Simon Week**, supported by EBS, will kick off tomorrow (29.09.08), with the aim of raising awareness about the causes of homelessness and encouraging all sectors of society to play their part in ending homelessness.

The Week is being organised by the Simon Communities of Ireland and supported by EBS Building Society, and will run from 29th September to 5th October. Over the course of the Week, a number of events and activities will take place throughout the country to promote issues around homelessness and celebrate the work of Simon's staff and volunteers. Activities taking place include:

- A national radio and billboard campaign.
- A briefing day for politicians.
- Exhibitions, marathons, auctions, discussions and forums.

The start of **Simon Week** will be marked tomorrow with the launch of Ireland's first ever full-time volunteering course. The course is to be delivered by the Simon Communities in partnership with Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT).

The Certificate in Volunteering is a third-level course, whereby qualified Simon staff will be able to train and accredit full-time volunteers. This Certificate is accredited by DIT and is recognised throughout Europe.

Chief Executive of Simon, Patrick Burke, said, "The Simon Communities of Ireland is really pleased with the response we have received to our inaugural Simon Week. We see this as an opportunity to engage more effectively with all sections of Irish society, and to show people that everyone has a role to play in tackling homelessness.

"A significant aspect of the Week is celebrating the contribution made by our staff members and volunteers. The launch of the Certificate in Volunteering is a step forward for Simon and for the full-time volunteers that so generously give of their time to help those experiencing homelessness. For the past 18 months, we have been working together with DIT to train our staff in the programme's guidelines. Starting tomorrow, our 60 full-time volunteers, from Ireland and abroad, will be able to enrol in this programme in all of Ireland's Simon Communities.

"Both volunteering and education contribute to an individual's personal development, yet combining the two may be a challenge for some volunteers as their time may be limited. As we celebrate the contributions our volunteers have made during **Simon Week**, we are also proud to be

the first organisation in Ireland to offer this type of programme. We believe it will be an incentive for even more volunteers to get involved with Simon in the future."

DIT lecturer and Director of the DIT Community Links Programme, Joseph McGrath, said, "Dublin Institute of Technology recognises and celebrates the huge contribution made by volunteers. The Certificate in Volunteering is a landmark qualification designed to give academic accreditation to Irish and overseas volunteers. The design of the programme reflects the great personal learning opportunities that arise in the course of all volunteering efforts and the aim of the course is to make volunteers more effective as active citizens.

"DIT is proud to be associated with the work of the Simon Communities of Ireland and their goal of achieving full academic accreditation for their entire volunteer force throughout Ireland."

Simon Week is supported by EBS Building Society. Speaking about EBS's involvement, Aidan Power, Head of Marketing at EBS, said: "EBS is delighted to be a part of the first ever Simon Week and we are looking forward to the week ahead. EBS has partnered with the Simon Communities of Ireland for four years 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."

Mary Davis, Chair of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship and Special Olympics Ireland, will launch the Certificate in Dublin Institute of Technology, Aungier Street, Dublin 2 at 11am tomorrow. A photographic showcase of different volunteers in Simon Communities will be displayed at the launch.

Full details of the programme of events and activities for **Simon Week** are available on www.simon.ie