

PRESS RELEASE

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Shankill Women's Centre works small wonders - Wilson

Finance Minister Sammy Wilson today visited a new childcare project in West Belfast.

Based within the Lower Shankill and Lower Falls area, the 'Small Wonders II' project, developed by the Shankill Women's Centre, will transform St. Luke's Church Hall on Northumberland Street, into a high quality childcare and education facility, for use on a cross-community basis.

The project has been awarded just over £700,000 of funding from the EU's PEACE III Programme, and is managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

Following his tour of St Luke's Church Hall, Mr Wilson said: **"The EU PEACE III Programme aims to contribute towards a shared society. By providing a neutral base for childcare and educational services, it is hoped that this project will encourage and support residents of the Shankill and Falls areas to build cross-community relations."**

Commenting on the project Betty Carlisle MBE, Manager of the Shankill Women's Centre, said: "We would consider this project to be iconic in nature as it is the first shared space initiative located next to the peace line on Northumberland Street. It will help to regenerate a previously derelict area as well as create new employment opportunities for local residents, on both sides of the community.

"The project will feature a peace-themed outdoor play area and will help reduce sectarianism and racism through the delivery of cultural diversity as well as peace and reconciliation training programmes," she continued.

The facility will offer a wide-range of educational training to give women access to the skills, qualifications and self-confidence needed to gain long-term employment.

Howard Keery, Director of the Joint Technical Secretariat with the SEUPB, said: "This project will help to deliver upon one of the main themes of the EU's PEACE III Programme, the creation of shared public spaces. In creating a neutral environment where women can interact on a cross-community basis, whilst improving their employment prospects, it has the potential to become a flagship for meaningful community reconciliation as well as economic development in the local area."

Notes to editors:

The Shankill Women's Centre *Small Wonders II* project has been awarded £700,740 under Theme 2.1, *Creating Shared Public Spaces*, of the EU PEACE III Programme.

The 2007-13 EU PEACE III Programme will deliver €333 million to projects with a focus on peace and reconciliation throughout Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland.

Further details on the PEACE III Programme may be obtained from the Programme Managing Authority, the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) – www.seupb.eu.

The project has been developed by the Shankill Women's Centre, a community focused organisation set up in 1978 to provide educational courses and childcare services for local women.

The current project will build upon the success of the initial 'Small Wonders' initiative, which refurbished a derelict building off the Shankill Road to create a modern childcare and education facility, that has been in use since November 2008.

Designed as a social economy business, it is expected that the 'Small Wonders II' project will become self-sustainable within two to three years of operation.