



PRESS RELEASE

Date: 6th December 2018

LAUNCH OF CO-OPERATION IRELAND OPEN DOORS EX-PRISONERS PROJECT

A new £1.7m regional initiative designed to build relationships between the ex-prisoner/former combatant community and other groups and sectors across the region will be launched in Belfast on Thursday, December 6 at the Farset International Hotel in Belfast at 10am.

Open Doors has been funded through the European Union's PEACE IV Programme, which is managed by the Special EU Programmes Body. The project is being led by Co-operation Ireland, working in partnership with Charter NI, the Ex-Prisoners Interpretative Centre, Teach Na Failte and the Plough Historical and Cultural Group.

Open Doors was developed over a two-year period to build a path towards a normalised society for ex-prisoners. The aims are to encourage members of the ex-prisoner/former combatant community to participate in a range of activities which:

- Promote re-integration with other sections in the community
- Connect with the services established to provide for those impacted by the legacy of conflict
- Take a positive role in the healing of community divisions and the future development of our society

Achieving these goals will be a significant step for peace-building across the region, and will have sustainable benefits across society, both for the ex-prisoner/former combatant community and for those seeking healing for victims and survivors of the conflict.

Victims groups have been consulted during the design process and will continue to be engaged throughout the duration of the programme.



Co-operation Ireland CEO Peter Sheridan said: **“The issue of ex-prisoners has largely been forgotten in the years since the signing of The Agreement but research shows that this community continues to face many barriers regarding integration because of ongoing stigma.**

“Open Doors has been designed to address these issues with the aim of improving relationships between the ex-prisoner/combatant community and wider society.”

Welcoming the official launch of the ‘Open Doors’ project Gina McIntyre, CEO with the Special EU Programmes Body, said: **“This project will address the many complex needs of the ex-prisoner and former ex-combatant community, along with their families, who are highly vulnerable to becoming isolated and excluded. It has been designed to help successfully re-integrate individuals back into society, and will also actively dissuade vulnerable young people from becoming involved in dissident activity. The project is supported under the building positive relations objective of the PEACE IV Programme which provides assistance to a number of marginalised groups affected by the legacy of the conflict.”**

Match-funding for this project has been provided by the Executive Office in Northern Ireland and the Department for Rural and Community Development in Ireland.

- ENDS

Notes to Editors:

The total grant awarded to the project is €1,666, 045.31. Payment of the grant is dependent upon the fulfilment of a number of pre-conditions approved the Peace IV Steering Committee, and subsequently on the fulfilment of the project targets and objectives. Failure to meet these conditions, targets and objectives can result in either a reduction in the grant award or the withdrawal of the entire grant.

Co-operation Ireland is an all-island peace-building charity. Since it was established in 1979 as Co-operation North, we have worked to encourage and promote interaction, dialogue and



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practical collaboration within Northern Ireland and between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.



Special EU Programmes Body
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- The Special EU Programmes Body is a North/South Implementation Body sponsored by the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Ireland.



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- It is responsible for managing two EU Structural Funds Programmes, PEACE IV and INTERREG VA which are designed to enhance cross - border co-operation, promote reconciliation and create a more peaceful and prosperous society.
- The Programmes operate within a clearly defined area including Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and in the case of INTERREG VA, Western Scotland.
- The PEACE IV Programme has a value of €270 million and aims to promote peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland.
- For more information on the SEUPB please visit www.seupb.eu