

Marginalised communities will be hardest hit in economic downturn warns Northside Partnership

Tuesday 2nd December 2008: Almost 17,000 people have participated in Northside Partnership supported initiatives aimed at encouraging social inclusion across the Partnership's North Dublin catchment area since 2000. Participants include long term unemployed, early school leavers, members of the traveller community, older people, homeless, ex-prisoners and ex-offenders, disabled, recovering drug addicts and men and women parenting alone.

According to a six year review of its activities entitled '*Taking Stock*', the Northside Partnership, working in conjunction with local employers, the community and social and employment organisations has assisted 5,118 people into employment, 6,700 in education and training while a further 5,000 have participated in employment schemes run by the Partnership. In addition the Partnership has helped 1,684 people in the last six years set up their own businesses in the Northside area. The majority of participants were long term unemployed and at risk, if not already, of social exclusion due to personal circumstances.

A key focus of the work of the Northside Partnership Employment development strategy is responding to the training needs of clients relevant to the employment market. A crucial factor in the implementation of this strategy is links with local employers such as Cadbury and Tesco. For the opening of its Clarehall store, Tesco agreed to employ a minimum of 100 local long term unemployed people. An intensive pre-employment training programme, developed in conjunction with FÁS, Mandate and Tesco, resulted in 57 people being offered employment contracts. Of the total 300 people employed, 171 were from the Partnership's catchment area and many were recruited through the Partnership's Local Employment Service Network.

Cadbury has worked with the Northside Partnership on a number of employment initiatives including providing resources to help establish Speedpak, a limited company with charitable status based in Coolock which specialises in providing contact packaging services and storage solutions to industry. Speedpak aims to provide real work experience for the long term unemployed in a commercial environment thus making it easier to place long term unemployed people in employment when they have had recent work experience and relevant training behind them.

Commenting Anne Sawbridge, Managing Director of Cadbury Ireland said that Cadbury Ireland has had a long, very worthwhile relationship with the Northside Partnership since the Partnership was established.

"For Cadbury Ireland, community investment means getting involved, volunteering, contributing and really being part of the community. Examples of our work with the Partnership include applying our knowledge of employment to the establishment of Speedpak, to more recent activity developing our people through the Lifelong Learning Programme. We got involved because we wanted to help address the challenge of social inclusion in our local area - what's good for the community is good for our business.

Our activity with the Northside Partnership keeps us in touch with consumers, helps our people be more adaptable and responsive, gives us new perspectives and skills, and helps us work in more creative ways. Cadbury are pleased to host this launch event and we would encourage all employers to do what they can in these tougher times to help support their local communities"

Another initiative the Labour-market Inclusion Programme (LIP), is an integral part of the Partnership's social inclusion and employment strategy aimed at reintegrating recovering drug users into society and into employment. Supported by funding from Dormant Accounts and piloted in the Partnership's designated catchment area and 92 individuals have participated in this programme with 55 to date making active progress through employment and education schemes.

Acknowledging that the Celtic Tiger had created significant opportunities Willie Hamilton, Chairman of the Northside Partnership said "We certainly saw positive benefits accumulate and which we hope will continue to have an ongoing impact in the communities in which we operate. However in tandem with the benefits, social exclusion became much more apparent as disparities between those with jobs and those without were more visible in the community and more pronounced. In that context our role evolved from simply assisting long term unemployed finding employment to assisting the socially excluded re-enter society in a way that prepared them to deal with every day living.

It's not always feasible to go directly from living on life's margins to employment. Many of our clients were far removed from being able to grasp the benefits of the economy as they lacked the skill sets and confidence to make them employable in the first instance. It is easy to forget that there are those who were and are paying the price, for historical and social reasons, of bad infrastructural planning, poor education supports, lack or absence of appropriate parenting and the opportunity to develop social skills. For some this resulted in a level of social exclusion whereby they could not participate in what would be considered normal day-to-day living such as getting up in the morning, getting out to work or indeed getting their children out to school or putting a meal on the table and unfortunately the entire downward spiral being repeated through the next generation. At the Northside Partnership we met those challenges head on and we are reasonably satisfied with the progress over that period.

Going forward we are concerned that history will repeat itself with those most marginalised becoming those most impacted by the new economic circumstances. These are not the people with bank borrowings and hefty mortgages, these are people who are simply trying to get by and make something of themselves and they deserve a chance".

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About the Northside Partnership

The Northside Partnership is a local development company operating under the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDISP). The Partnership was established in 1991 to tackle the significant unemployment problem that existed in north Dublin. Since its establishment, it has taken on the roles in the areas of Community, Enterprise and Employment Development, as well as Education and has focussed its activities on specific target groups and communities who are marginalised in society.

The mission of the Northside Partnership is to be driving force in meeting the challenge of social inclusion in its designated area. It proposes to meet this challenge by using a partnership of the community, social partners, statutory and public representative sectors to provide services, influence structures and change policies so that all local people are included in a self-sustaining community that integrates work and economic activity with personal, social and economic needs.