



## **Department of Social and Family Affairs**

### **Minister Brennan Celebrates Cross Border Advice And Information Initiative**

The Minister For Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan TD, Said Today That An All-Island Strategy For The Provision Of Cross-Border Information Should Be Developed To Continue The Practical Demonstration Of Cross Border Cooperation.

Speaking At A Celebration In Dundalk For The Development Of A Cross Border Advice And Information Project Called *Borderwise*, Minister Brennan Said: "This Project Is A Clear Example Of People And Organisations Both North And South Working Together To Enhance The Lives Of All The People In The Region. From Difficult Times Not So Many Years Ago There Has Been Considerable Progress Both Politically And Economically Which Has Benefited The Border Counties Both North And South. We Would All Recognise That The PEACE Programme And Other Funding Programmes Supports The Progress Made As A Result Of The Good Friday Agreement. There Is No Doubt That They Have Helped Border Communities And Serve As Excellent Examples Of How We Can Work Together To Foster Economic And Social Development Across The Border Region, Thereby Visibly Demonstrating The Benefits Of Co-Operation."

The Minister Said That The North-South Ministerial Council Set Up Under The Good Friday Agreement Is Particularly Interested In Removing Obstacles To Mobility Between The Two Jurisdictions. Among Such Obstacles Can Be The Lack Of Information For People Who Are Moving Across The Border.



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*Borderwise* Is Playing A Valuable Role In Helping To Fill Part Of That Information Void, Minister Brennan Said.

The Minister Said: "In The Area Of Social Welfare We, In The Department Of Social & Family Affairs, Have A Close Relationship With The Social Security Agency. I Know That Most Of The Cross-Border Queries Dealt With By The Three Cross-Border Advice & Information Workers Relate To Social Welfare And Social Security. I Was Particularly Impressed To Hear That These Three Workers Have Dealt With Over 7,000 Queries In The Last Eighteen Months Or So. I Am Sure That The Accredited Training In Information And Advice Work In Both Jurisdictions Undertaken By The Workers Has Helped To Ensure That They Have The Expertise To Deal With Complex Cross Border Queries."

Minister Brennan Said That The Increase In Mobility Of People Across The Border Gives Rise To Additional Information And Advice Needs Due To The Fact That The Services North And South Are In Many Respects Quite Different. "People Who Are Travelling To Work Across The Border Or Are Going To Reside Across The Border Have Many Questions On A Range Of Topics: Taxation, Social Welfare, Employment Rights Etc And It Is Good To See That The Special Staff Employed Under *Borderwise* Can Respond Directly To Customers With Such Information And Advice Needs. The Series Of Booklets Being Prepared On Cross Border Topics Is An Innovative Piece Of Work And Should Prove A Useful Resource To People Who Are Moving From The South To The North And Vice – Versa."

Minister Brennan Also Commented On The Fact That Volunteers Are Being Recruited And Trained To Work In Either Border County Community Information Centres Or Citizens Advice Bureaux: "Volunteering Is An Integral Part Of The Provision Of Many Social Services On Both Sides Of The Border And Such Is The Case In The Information And Advice Sector. Recruiting And Retaining Volunteers Is More Difficult These Days. To See Volunteers Getting Accredited Training In Information And Advice Work Is So Important As It Benefits Both The Volunteers In Their Work And Indirectly Of Course Benefits Their Customers. In Addition Such Accredited Training Can Be Of Value As Regards The Career Development Of People Entering Or Returning To The Workforce."



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The Minister Also Said: "Many Of Those Involved In The Provision Of Information And Advice, Particularly From The Border Counties, Are Undertaking Training On Mutual Respect And Identity Issues, Conflict Resolution And Peace And Reconciliation. It Is Great To See People On The Ground From Both Sides Of The Border Coming Together To Talk About The Work They Do, To Share Experience And To See How They Can Better Serve Their Customers And Contribute To Peace Building On This Island."

Minister Brennan Concluded: "As Regards The Future I Would Like To See That We Could Work Towards Developing An All-Island Strategy For The Provision Of Cross-Border Information. Interested Parties In This Process Would Be The Two Governments, The North South Ministerial Council And Of Course Citizens Advice And Comhairle. One Of The Matters Which It Could Consider Would Be How Such Initiatives As The *Borderwise* Project Could Be Integrated Into The Overall Provision Of Cross-Border Information Provision Throughout The Island Of Ireland."

Press Release Ends: