

PRESS RELEASE

Date: 20th September 2018

THE HOUSING EXECUTIVE AND VERBAL CELEBRATE €1.3M PEACE IV FUNDING TO TRANSFORM THE LIVES OF OVER 1,500 HOUSING EXECUTIVE TENANTS IN NEW 'LISTEN SHARE CHANGE' PROJECT

A new Northern Ireland wide project, Listen Share Change that will transform the lives of over 1500 people is being launched today, Thursday 20 September 2018, at Crumlin Road Gaol, Belfast. The project is being launched by the Housing Executive and Verbal (the largest literary led, creative arts organisation on the island of Ireland), supported through €1.3m of EU funding under the PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU programmes Body (SEUPB).

The Housing Executive is the largest social landlord in the UK, with over 86,000 properties. As an organisation they are committed to listening to the views and options of tenants, residents and leaseholders.

Listen, Share, Change uses the Reading Rooms model of transportive storytelling to inspire meaningful conversations and in turn address the needs of Housing Executive tenants across Northern Ireland. By engaging participants in reading and discussion around purposefully selected literary works, they will be encouraged to explore and reflect on issues relevant to their own lives such as diversity, heritage and conflict.

The Housing Executive and Verbal led project aims to build positive relations between people from different communities and backgrounds. 52 communities will be engaged during the project with a view to developing 26 cross-community partnerships. It will provide OCN Level 2 training in Facilitation Skills for Shared Reading for over 120 volunteers, who will then become Neighbourhood Champions further implementing the Reading Rooms model at a local level beyond the project term. In addition 104 Future Youth Leaders who will promote active citizenship and engagement.

Listen Share Change will operate across Northern Ireland from now until September 2021. It will equip participants with skills enabling them to become active decision makers and part of



the process in addressing our vision of developing a society in which housing has a role in creating a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous and fair society. As part of the programme, which is open to Housing Executive areas across Northern Ireland, participants will be offered the opportunity to meet new people and participate in shared reading experiences. It is hoped that long-term, through working with people from different communities, cultural, and religious backgrounds Listen, Share, Change will make a positive impact on the ways in which our different communities perceive and interact with each other.

Speaking at the launch Gina McIntyre, CEO of the Special EU Programmes Body said: **“Community relations in this region bear the legacy of decades of mistrust and division, which projects such as this, funded from the EU’s PEACE IV Programme seek to address. Through the simple, yet highly effective, medium of reading it will encourage participants to challenge many of the prejudices or misconceptions they may have about race and religion. In doing so they will be able to share what they have learnt with their families, friends and even the larger community they live within.”**

Welcoming the funding from PEACE IV, Jennifer Hawthorne, the Housing Executive’s Belfast Regional Manager, added: **“This is an exciting new partnership for Housing Executive working with our friends at Verbal, made possible through funding from the EU PEACE IV Programme. Listen Share Change is focused on engaging with, and making a meaningful impact in the lives of our tenants. We put our communities at the heart of everything we do working with them to support, and make a tangible difference to the lives of people across Northern Ireland. This funding will allow us to make a positive difference to our communities.”**

Focusing on the aims of the programme, James Kerr, Director for Verbal, said: **“We are delighted to be partnering with the Housing Executive on this exciting programme, which we know will bring so much to the lives of the participants. Listen Share Change aims to promote positive relations characterised by a respect that we hope will enable a celebration of cultural diversity. Working together across Northern Ireland, we will be supporting people to live, learn, and socialise together, free from many of the daily pressures they face around prejudice, hate and intolerance.**



This funding allows us to work together under the banner of the Listen Share Change project to create real impact for participants and we are very excited about the potential it offers.”

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

Referrals for the Listen Share Change rolling programme are welcomed from agencies and organisations working with young people and can be made by contacting The Project co-coordinator Louise Moore lsc@theverbal.co

Or via the project leaders at the Housing Executive: Gareth Doran, (South Antrim, East, Causeway & West), Gareth.doran@NIHE.GOV.UK

Gus Moore (**Belfast** North, South, West, East, Lisburn & Castlereagh),
Gus.moore@NIHE.GOV.UK

Sean Brennan (**South** Mid Ulster, South, South West, South Down, North Down & Ards)
Sean.brennan@NIHE.GOV.UK

- **ENDS**

For media information contact:

Michelle Canning E: Michelle.Canning@nihe.gov.uk P: 02895 982786 or

Esther Haller Clarke E: esther@hallerclarke.com P: 07830 513296

Notes to Editors:

1. Jennifer Hawthorne, the Housing Executive's Regional Manager, and James Kerr, CEO, Verbal, are available for interview. Please contact Michelle Canning 02895 982786 or Esther Haller Clarke, 07830 513296 to arrange.

2. Media opportunities at the launch are available from 11.30am-12.45pm.



3. Photographs will be issued to picture desks on the afternoon of 21 September by XXXXXX Photography.

4. Who is the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)

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. 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 address the economic and social problems which result from the existence of borders. For more information on the SEUPB please visit www.seupb.eu

What partners are involved?

The Housing Executive is working alongside Verbal www.theverbal.co to deliver the Listen Share Change project.

How long will participants be involved in the project?

Participants in the 'Listen Share Change project will commit to taking part in a 36 week programme, of 1.5 hours of activity per week (Total of 54 hours per participant) Applications and referrals will be admitted on a rolling basis.

Where is the Listen Share Change project being offered?

The project will operate across, South Antrim, East, Causeway & West, Belfast, Lisburn, Castlereagh, Mid Ulster, South, South West, South Down, North Down & Ards

What is the Reading Rooms?

Reading Rooms was launched in 2013 by Verbal as part of Derry-Londonderry's City of Culture programme. Trained and accredited volunteers, guide participants through a short story and a poem, reading the literature to them, and encouraging conversations about the characters, plots, themes, and how these things may relate to aspects of their own lives.



Through the high-quality literature selected by in-house literary experts, groups share their own experiences and thoughts. Reading Rooms offers a safe space for such conversations to happen. Stories are annotated with regular talking points developed by the Verbal in-house psychology team using low-impact cognitive behavioural therapy methods to measure improvements in key areas such as empathy, resilience, and mental wellbeing.

For more information on the programme please contact;

Louise Moore lsc@theverbal.co