

PRESS RELEASE

To: editors

Date: 4 December 2007

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Minister Opens 'One-Stop Shop' for Rehabilitation

Edinburgh's Community Links Centre, the only one of its kind in the country and an initiative chosen as a Centre of Excellence by the Lothian and Borders Community Justice Authority, is being officially opened today, December 4, by Fergus Ewing MSP, Minister for Community Safety.

The Centre, which is managed by Sacro, the leading community justice organisation, and funded by the Scottish Government, through the city of Edinburgh Council, provides valuable support services to enable ex-prisoners reintegrate into their communities.

Based at 25 Nicholson Square, the Community Links Centre houses a range of statutory and voluntary agencies working in partnership, offering best practice under one roof. These agencies provide guidance and support in addressing offending; family issues; health; substance use; accommodation; benefits, employment and training; literacy and numeracy skills; and legal advice. A list of agencies currently present in the building is attached.

Fergus Ewing, MSP, Minister for Community Safety, said, "It's a tremendous honour to launch the pathfinder Community Links Centre, the first of its kind and a one-stop shop that will provide the continuity and support that so many short term prisoners require at the crucial point of release.

"A smooth transition from prison to the community provides offenders with the opportunity to rebuild their lives and avoid further offending. Effective support mechanisms in the community are vital in order for that transition to prove successful.

"Currently too many prisoners are caught in the "revolving door" of short-term prison sentences. We are determined to break that cycle of criminality but while we will make every effort to reduce crime, we will never completely eliminate it. Therefore we must support prisoners and offer them a positive alternative - a positive path out of repeat offending.

"This facility is a perfect example of what is required in terms of providing the support of a wide range of agencies who will work with ex-prisoners to help them put their lives back together again."

"I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the very valuable work by Sacro and the other voluntary sector organisations who in partnership with the statutory agencies are delivering this and other services to offenders and their families."

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Susan Matheson, Chief Executive, Sacro said,

“We are delighted that the Minister, Fergus Ewing is officially opening the Centre today and, by doing so, demonstrating the Government’s support for the work being done here.

“To make Scotland safer, it is crucial that we provide sustainable, effective services to aid rehabilitation and reduce re-offending. It has been well evidenced that the most significant factors in reducing re-offending are ensuring people have accommodation on release from prison, are registered with a GP and get help with drug and alcohol misuse, debt management, building family networks and education and employment. Often vulnerable ex-prisons need professional support with these. Providing this under one roof here at the Community Links Centre will greatly enhance successful reintegration back into the community.

“Partnership working is critical to the success of this project and the staff of all agencies here are dedicated to pulling together to really turn people’s lives around”.

Councillor Paul Edie, Convenor for Health and Social Care at the City of Edinburgh Council said, “The Community Links Centre is a great example of partnership working between different organisations and I am sure it will go far to provide a seamless service to those that use it. This Centre builds on the excellent service provided by our criminal justice teams across the city.”

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For further information please call Lisa Stewart on 0131 624 7295 or 0131 624 7270.

Partnership agencies currently present at CLC include:

Spectrum (Employment);
Progress to Work- Apex (Employability issues relating to drug misuse);
Housing Options Team (Sustaining tenancies, accessing emergency accommodation)
PATH - NHS (meeting health needs of prison leavers, consultants to staff within CLC, assisting users in GP registration);
NHS – Edinburgh Homelessness Practice (Cowgate Clinic)
Streetwork Lawyers (homelessness lawyer, legal advice pertaining to accommodation issues);
South Bridge Literacy and Innumeracy Project (assistance with form-filling etc)

Sacro Services based in the Community Links Centre:

Alcohol Education Probation Service
Supervised Bail Service
Supported Accommodation Service
Edinburgh and Midlothian Arrest Referral Service
Throughcare/Throughcare Addictions Service
Edinburgh and Midlothian ‘Another Way’ Street Sex Workers Service



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