**Press Release**

Tuesday 15th April 2014

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**New Community Tourism Initiative to Reach Out to Family and Friends Living Abroad**

**Kilkenny County Council,** inpartnership with Fáilte Ireland and IPB Insurance,is delighted to launch a new **Community Tourism Initiative for the Diaspora** which seeks to build on the legacy of The Gathering 2013*.* The Minister of State for Tourism and Sport Michael Ring TD officially launched the initiative which is being administered by the 34 Local Authorities. This initiative will provide an annual fund of €1m nationally over the next three years to support up to 700 local community-based events and festivals each year around the country**.**Kilkenny County Council will provide €30,000 over the next three years for this purpose.

Commenting on the initiative, **County Manager Joe Crockett** said *“Every year we support many festivals and engage with citizens to support them in community events.  We want to support communities, foster a sense of pride and encourage visitors to the city and county - community engagement was, without doubt, the single most critical success factor in the success of the Gathering in Kilkenny and this initiative presents an opportunity to get creative and reach out to our Diaspora once more”.*

The Year of the Gathering in Kilkenny featured a vibrant and diverse range of more than 70 events throughout city and county, resulting in over 5,000 extra overseas visitors in 2013 and everyone who organised an event was a fantastic ambassador for Ireland. Dozens of get-togethers were organised and the groundwork was done by families, friends and clubs issuing personalised invitations to people to return to Kilkenny to celebrate. Events such as The Harper Family Gathering exemplified the truly global nature of the Gathering and attracted 81 overseas relations from 11 countries. Kilkenny TradFest was created which welcomed people from all over the world back home for a celebration of the best of traditional Irish music and was awarded the accolade of ‘Best Gathering Festival’ by the Irish Hotels Federation.

The Community Diaspora Tourism Initiative is a direct response to the successes of The Gathering where 5,000 communities mobilised to harness their Diaspora links for the benefit of local and community tourism.

At the launch, Director Paul Keeley of Fáilte Ireland emphasised *“This initiative will inject a new energy into communities, making people think about how they can promote their localities through new and recurring events and how they can attract visitors”.*

The amount awarded will be based on the number of overseas visitors attending events. The minimum offered is €500 and the maximum €3,000. **Kilkenny County Council** is currently inviting applications from local community events until the closing date of 9th May. For guidelines and application form, please see [www.kilkennycoco.ie](http://www.kilkennycoco.ie)

**ENDS**

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**Note for Editor**

The Gathering

## The Gathering was a year-long tourism initiative which succeeded in mobilising communities all around Ireland to invite diaspora and friends to attend with, ultimately, over **5,000** special Gathering events taking place right across the country.

## It is estimated that the project delivered at least 250,000 to 275,000 extra tourists in 2013 that would not have visited Ireland but for The Gathering.

## During The Gathering, a total of circa 1,150 local and community events were funded under a special Community Fund allocated across the various Local Authority areas. This Community Events Fund was an important part of the Gathering programme with very positive results. While the individual amounts provided were quite small, it made an important contribution to many of the events to supplement the very substantial voluntary and community efforts on the ground.

## **Social Impact of The Gathering**

## Independent research conducted found that The Gathering had a significant social and positive impact for those communities which engaged with the initiative. Key findings included:

## The Gathering encouraged the development of events that otherwise would not have been organized.

## It enhanced skills, capabilities and organizational structures of many existing events.

## 96% of event organisers believed their event to be a success.

## The Gathering encouraged self-reliance and capacity building among many communities and encouraged them to focus on tourism.

## 53% of respondents said that the Gathering has helped ‘create a vision for their area that wasn’t there before’

## 47% of community respondents think there will be a long term positive impact

## 73% of community respondents believed that the Gathering made the community more aware of the importance of tourism.

## Only 8% of event organizers were from the tourism sector.

## The Gathering ‘gave ordinary people a platform to do extraordinary things’.

## The Gathering resulted in a ‘pride of place’ and ‘self-belief’.

## There was a strong family emphasis to the Gathering: ‘it was families who really benefited... it brought them together’