**Department of Rural and Community Development**

**Press Statement**

Wednesday, 6 March 2019

**Minister Ring urges people to say THE BIG HELLO! to their neighbours this May Bank Holiday**

**Event aims to strengthen community ties and tackle social isolation**

Michael Ring TD, Minister for Rural and Community Development, is today (Wednesday) urging people to reach out to their neighbours as part of The Big Hello!, the first National Community Weekend which takes place this May Bank Holiday Weekend (4-6 May).

“The Big Hello” supports communities to host events in their local area in order to strengthen community ties and help tackle the problem of social isolation.

Minister Ring said: “I am challenging everyone to reach out and say The Big Hello! to their neighbours by organising an event, or attending one in their local community. Events could range from a communal cup of tea or a picnic to a sports day or a local history event. The community decides!

“In order to support these events I have allocated €10,000 to each of the 31 Local Authorities and asked them to allocate funding to The Big Hello! events in their areas. The target is for at least 1,000 local events to be held throughout Ireland.”

Funding for events is available to residents’ committees and community and voluntary groups through their Local Authorities. Further details can be found on [www.drcd.gov.ie/bighello](file:///C:\Users\corleyr\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary%20Internet%20Files\Content.Outlook\L9X0G2N4\www.drcd.gov.ie\bighello), and on The Big Hello! Facebook page.

Minister Ring continued: “In a world where people are spending less time in their communities and more time at work, it is important to find new ways to connect people and focus on the importance of neighbours. In our busy lives we rarely make time for each other outside of our network of family, friends and social media contacts.

“Sadly, many people living among us are experiencing social isolation and loneliness. I firmly believe that this initiative can help people to connect or re-connect with their neighbours and communities.”

The event is being organised by the Minister’s Department in partnership with representatives of Public Participation Networks, Local Community Development Companies, Volunteer Ireland, Young Social Innovators, Macra na Feirme, Street Feast, An tOireachtas and Change X.

Minister Ring said: “I’m delighted to have the active support of a working group from across the community and voluntary sector whose input has been crucial to the design of the event. Their support and extensive community networks will be extremely valuable in promoting The Big Hello! throughout Ireland.”

It is intended to have at least one Irish language event in each Local Authority area.

**ENDS**

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**Photo desks**

Pictures of launch will be distributed by Marc O’ Sullivan Photography

**Note for Editors:**

National Community Day is an initiative of the Department of Rural and Community Development in conjunction with stakeholders.

€10,000 has been allocated by Minister Ring to each Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)/Local Authority area to support local events.

**Who can apply?**

Applications are welcome from community and voluntary groups, organisations and residents’ committees within each local authority area.

**Who can’t apply?**

Applications from individuals, commercial organisations and for-profit organisations, national organisations or applications from community organisations based outside the relevant county.

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