

## **Miss International Ireland gives thumbs up to body confidence campaign**

### **- Galway supermodel lends her support to Girl Guides' *Free Being Me* programme -**

Miss International Ireland, Katherine Gannon, has given her thumbs up to the Girl Guides' *Free Being Me* body confidence campaign, which is empowering young people across Ireland to speak out and challenge body image myths.

Gannon, a 25-year-old model from Galway, believes that health and happiness should always come first. Speaking to members of Irish Girl Guides (IGG) in Lucan earlier this week, Gannon said: "If you don't have health and you don't have happiness, you don't have anything."

Gannon, who is an accounts manager by day, is on a mission to tell girls and women that "there is nothing wrong with you just the way you are". She said: "My message to girls and young women is to never go down a road that is unhealthy. If you're not healthy and happy doing something, then there's no point in doing it."

This message ties in with the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts/Dove *Free Being Me* programme that IGG and the Catholic Guides of Ireland have been promoting the past three years.

*Free Being Me* gives girls an insight into airbrushing and teaches them that the images they see of women in the media have more often than not been digitally altered. This boosts their self-esteem and helps them to accept their natural body shape and to use their bodies for what they enjoy – whether that is sport, dance, music etc.

Until she did a reality TV show, *Fashion Hero*, in the autumn, Gannon did not go anywhere without wearing make-up. Since the show, however, which saw her "stripped" of make-up at one point, she has happily gone without make-up for much of the time.

Initially she found it traumatic to have to remove her fake tan and make-up, but in the end she found it "freeing" when she was told she looked just as beautiful without. It has given her the confidence to go without and she no longer wears any make-up to work.

When Gannon came across *Free Being Me* on the internet and how it portrays "such a great image of women and gives girls something to look up to", she got in touch with IGG to say she would like to give her backing to the campaign. She liked the fact that *Free Being Me* was "a healthy message, a positive message that promotes positive thinking".

Gannon, who got her first taste of modelling at the age of 13 and whose titles have included World Supermodel Ireland and Miss Galaxy Ireland, is these days more interested in pageantry and promoting causes she believes in than modelling for modelling's sake.

She enjoyed learning more about *Free Being Me* from Griffeen Valley Brownies (age 7-10) and Guides (age 10-14) in Lucan who have completed the programme. When they told her that one of the things they had learned was how to take compliments, she said we should definitely compliment each other more.

Emily-Ruth Brennan (age 14) said she had learned that it was OK to be herself. “You don’t have to be perfect for anyone,” she said. “You don’t need to go starving yourself or go to extreme lengths to look perfect. You don’t have to have a flat stomach and super skinny thighs. You’re fine just being yourself.”

Alana McDonnell (13) said she had learned that everyone was insecure and that you shouldn’t have to change anything about yourself. “*Free Being Me* gave me more confidence and I know that it helped lots of other girls in the Guide unit too,” she said.

Ellie-Rose Cawley (13) said she believed *Free Being Me* was especially helpful for teenagers who use social media because “they see lots of pictures of beautiful people and they feel pressured to look like them .... You shouldn’t worry about how you look; as long as what is in the inside is nice, that is what matters.”

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**Notes for editors:**

**Free Being Me** - The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) and Dove believe that every girl and young woman should be given the opportunity to fulfil her potential. Body confidence is an important building block of self-esteem. A young woman with high self-esteem believes in herself and her abilities, and feels empowered to make her own choices in life, make her voice heard and make a difference to her local and global community. *Free Being Me* is an innovative and non-formal education cutting-edge programme for 7-14 year olds. It is based on the latest research into how to increase young people’s body confidence through fun, non-formal educational activities.

All girls who take part in the *Free Being Me* activities and carry out the Take Action project earn a *Free Being Me* badge – the first body confidence badge of its kind. For further information see [www.freebeingme.com](http://www.freebeingme.com).

**World-leading research base** - WAGGGS has worked closely with world-leading experts in body confidence education to ensure that *Free Being Me* has a real and lasting impact on participants’ body confidence. The programme is grounded in over a decade of research and experience of improving girls’ body confidence, from the Body Project Collaborative – a team of researchers and psychologists. Studies by The Body Project and other leading researchers have shown that taking part in activities like those in *Free Being Me* has a lasting impact on girls’ well-being. One study found that three years after taking part in Body Project activities:

60% of girls had significantly improved body confidence

78% of girls feel more confident and capable at school

71% of girls had better relationships with their peers

53% got on better with their families