Irish Girl Guides press release

Girl Guide Ailís Strikes Gold!

- **Ailís Ward of Kinsale Senior Branch receives her Gold Gaisce Award -**

5 December 2019: A Kinsale Girl Guide Leader was one of 77 inspirational young people to be honoured by President Michael D Higgins at a Gaisce Gold ceremony held in Dublin Castle yesterday [4 December 2019].

Ailís Ward, who is aged 22, started working towards the award in 2015. A member of Irish Girl Guides (IGG) from the age of five, Ailís decided, as part of her community involvement, to become a Leader with Kinsale Ladybirds (Ladybirds is the branch of IGG for five to seven year olds).

Ailís, who says she has enjoyed every minute of her time with IGG since age five, was delighted to spend the past three years lending a hand with Kinsale Ladybirds. "I helped the girls complete the enrolment challenges and then the Discover, Grow and Fly challenges over three years," she said.

"We did games, outdoor activities, art and crafts. We also did trips to the cottage and worked on a number of badges, including Fire Safety, Bird Watcher and First Aid. By the end of their time in Ladybirds, the girls left the group as confident team-players."

For her physical activity, she took up swimming and, for her adventure walk, she hiked 80 kilometres over four days with Kilbrittain Venture Group. "I enjoyed this as I had to plan and budget for the walk," she said. "I found the swimming difficult, though, as I suffer from dyspraxia."

Ailís, who is studying Applied Bioscience in Cork, having recently completed a pharmacy technician's course at Letterkenny Institute of Technology, chose for her personal skill to work on her creative writing and functional writing. "I struggled with the physical writing as there is a lot expected in an English exam," she said. "My high was staying calm during the exam."

The highlight of her Gaisce work, however, was helping sick people visiting Lourdes, ensuring their stay was an enjoyable one.

Ailís said that she wanted to do the Gold Gaisce because she enjoyed helping people, especially as she had a disability herself (autism and dyspraxia). "Things do not come easy to me," she said. "I wanted to give back to people because the Irish Girl Guides have very much included and encouraged me within Guiding. I have been on overseas trips to international Guide events in France and the Netherlands.

"I have reached for the stars regardless of my background and disability and I hope this inspires other people to do the Gold Gaisce too."

The Gaisce Gold Ceremony was MC'd by the inspirational Sinéad Burke - teacher, writer, broadcaster, fashion-admirer, advocate for disability and former Honorary Ambassador of IGG.

Since his first inauguration in 2011, President Higgins has been a strong supporter of the Gaisce programme. As part of his focus on active citizenship and the promotion of a more inclusive society, the President has paid tribute to Gaisce Awardees for their community work and their support for civil society groups. The Gaisce Award scheme is a direct challenge from the President to all young people to dream big and realise their potential.

Speaking about the Gaisce Gold ceremony Yvonne McKenna, Chief Executive of Gaisce – The President's Award, said, "I heartily congratulate this year's Gold Awardees who have shown incredible fortitude in achieving their Gaisce Gold Award. Achieving a Gaisce Award is a marker of each Awardee's determination to realise their ambitions. I hope that in the challenging times which life can often present, they are encouraged by the memory of this moment where all their endeavours were recognised and celebrated. There is a lot more in each of us than one might think."

Irish Girl Guides welcomes new youth members from age 5-30 and volunteer Leaders from age 18+. No previous Guiding experience is necessary. Find out more on www.irishgirlguides.ie or tel: 01 6683898.

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Irish Girl Guides has around 11,000 members. Guiding started in Ireland in 1911 and operates throughout the 26 counties with 1,600 volunteer leaders providing an informal educational programme of fun and challenging activities that foster confidence and leadership skills in girls and young women, enabling them to develop to their full potential and to become responsible citizens. Girls from age 5+ can choose to earn a wide range of badges, including Aviation, Community Action, Cultural Diversity, Disability Awareness, Drug Awareness, Online Surfer, Science Investigator, STEM, Engineering and Global Traveller.