

Girl Guides shoot for the stars with new Space programme

- Girls from age 5+ will undertake Space challenges designed in partnership with the European Space Education Resource Office (ESERO) Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland, Blackrock Castle Observatory and award-winning space communicator Dr Niamh Shaw -

Thursday 7 October 2020: Irish Girl Guides is shooting for the stars with its innovative new Space programme that will launch this weekend on International Day of the Girl (Sunday October 11).

Members of the public are invited to join the online launch, which promises to be an extravaganza of rockets, explosions and stars.

The half-hour event, which will include appearances from award-winning space communicator, Dr Niamh Shaw, and astrophysicist and European Space Agency scientist Dr Kate Isaak, will kick off on the [Irish Girl Guides \(IGG\) YouTube channel](#) at 7pm. Dr Shaw and Dr Isaak are both former Girl Guides.

Dr Shaw, who was IGG's Honorary Ambassador 2019-2020, said that, on accepting the role, she had been keen to add a Space badge to IGG's already wide-ranging programme of activities and challenges for girls and young women. "Being the Irish Girl Guides Ambassador was such a privilege," she said. "I got the opportunity to meet with youth members and volunteers and find out about them as well as to chat about Space, dreaming big and all the technology and science required to explore and protect our planet Earth.

"I set myself a goal to establish a Space badge packed with space-themed activities about our planet and our place in Space. Working with Frances McCarthy at CIT Blackrock Castle Observatory (who is also an IGG Leader) and adapting the science, technology engineering & maths (STEM) activities included in the ESERO Ireland archive, we achieved just that!

"It's a fantastic end to a terrific year with Irish Girl Guides," she continued, "And I'm so proud that, through this collaboration of women involved in Space, we made it happen. That's what Space Week and International Day of the Girl is all about too!"

Speaking ahead of the launch, **IGG Chief Commissioner Amanda O'Sullivan**, said IGG was thrilled to partner with ESERO Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland and Blackrock Castle Observatory in order to create the exciting new programme. "Irish Girl Guides is a progressive organisation that encourages girls to pursue subjects and careers that might traditionally be considered to be for boys and men," she said. "The Space badge, which will be awarded to all girls who complete age-appropriate STEM activities on a Space theme, will complement other badges we have introduced in recent years to encourage girls to explore areas they might not otherwise have considered, including Engineering, Aviation and STEM."

Frances McCarthy, Education and Outreach Officer at CIT Blackrock Castle Observatory and an IGG volunteer Leader in Cork, played a key role in compiling the Space programme with Dr Shaw. She said, "The Space programme includes a range of activities that are guaranteed to appeal to children of all ages. These include rocket-building, stargazing, solar system walks and looking for the International Space Station in the night sky. Older girls will also learn about Irish women working in the Space sector and will be challenged to make a model moon base out of recycled materials. We

hope that, by doing these activities, girls will not only be enthused about Space but might consider a career in STEM.”

Stephanie O’Neill, Manager of ESERO Ireland, said: “ESERO Ireland is delighted to support the Irish Girl Guides’ Space Badge through the Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) Discover Funding Programme. SFI and ESERO promote science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) and projects like this help girls to develop scientific skills, like problem-solving, teamwork and creativity, using a range of fun space-themed activities, which have been devised for Ladybirds, Brownies and Guides.”

The space-themed activities for children and young people will be available from this weekend for anyone to download from the Irish Girl Guides website www.irishgirlguidesi.ie - and ESERO Ireland website – www.esero.ie.

Irish Girl Guides welcomes new youth members from age 5-30 and volunteer Leaders from age 18+. No previous Guiding experience is necessary and training and ongoing support is provided. To find out more, see www.irishgirlguides.ie or tel: 01 6683898.

ENDS

Contact:

Fiona Murdoch, Communications Officer, Irish Girl Guides

Email: communications@irishgirlguides.ie

Tel: 085 8570565

Notes for editors:

Irish Girl Guides has around 11,000 members and operates throughout the 26 counties with 1,500 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, Climate Action, Community Action, Cultural Diversity, Disability Awareness, Drug Awareness, Engineering, Europe, Responsible Consumerism, Science Investigator, STEM and Global Traveller. Ladybirds is the branch for 5-7 year olds, Brownies 7-10 year olds, Guides 10-14 year olds and Senior Branch 14-30 year olds.

ESERO Ireland is an education project of the European Space Agency (ESA) co-funded by ESA and Science Foundation Ireland in active fields of education and space. ESERO uses space-related context and the genuine fascination felt by young people for space to engage them in STEM subjects. The ESERO objectives are to use Space as a context to enhance the literacy and competence of young people in STEM subjects, to motivate and enable young Europeans to pursue a career in the STEM field, in the space domain in particular, and to increase young people’s awareness of the importance of space research, exploration and applications in modern society and economy.

Dr Kate Isaak is a British astrophysicist and Project Scientist for the European Space Agency (ESA) Characterising Exoplanet Satellite mission (CHEOPS). CHEOPS is a satellite/science mission that launched earlier this year and measures precisely the sizes of small exoplanets, specifically planets that are known to orbit bright, nearby stars other than our own. She is based at ESTEC, the European Space Research and Technology Centre in the Netherlands.

Award-winning science communicator, writer, performer, engineer and scientist, **Dr Niamh Shaw** is a passionate advocate of sustainability and women in science. Inspired by the 'Earthrise' picture taken on Christmas Eve 1968 by the Apollo 8 astronauts orbiting the moon, Niamh wants to use the perspective of space to consider smarter and more sustainable alternatives for all Earth citizens.

On a mission to be writer-in-residence at the International Space Station, she has spoken at prominent events including Áras an Uachtaráin on International Women's Day 2019, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin, on St Brigid's Day 2020, WIRED Live UK, TEDxUCD and New Scientist (UK) and has appeared on 'The Late Late Show' and 'The Tommy Tiernan Show'. She presented Space and Earth-themed content for younger viewers on RTÉ's 'Home School Hub' to support parents home-schooling during the pandemic. A recent graduate of practical science communication at Cambridge University, Niamh was awarded 'Outstanding Contributions to STEM Communications' by Science Foundation Ireland in 2018. Her first book 'Dream Big - an Irishwoman's Space Odyssey' from Mercier Press was published in March 2020 and launches virtually on 8 October 2020 hosted by Hodges Figgis bookstore as part of Space Week. She writes regularly for BBC's 'Sky at Night' magazine and contributes science segments on national radio.

Twitter & Instagram: @dr_niamh_shaw

Website: www.niamhshaw.ie