

# The Sunday Times



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# Fashion sees red



Kanetia Griffiths



Buna-Tuaty Poelina



Hannah Collard



Katina Coffin



## Wendy Caccetta

THE search is on – across WA's remote, red-dirt Kimberley – for another Samantha Harris.

Perth-based fashion designer, environmental campaigner and one-time political candidate Liz Davenport this week became patron of a Kimberley group using the catwalk to encourage indigenous girls to dream big. While for Harris, a Vogue cover model, and WA's Emily Cattermole the catwalk is a platform for couture, in the North-West it's become one for building confidence.



Liz Davenport

Kimberley Girls was the idea of former Perth model Kira Fong, who modelled in Asia and Europe and heads the indigenous Goolarri Media centre in Broome.

"The first time on a catwalk was quite frightening," said Kanetia Griffiths, 20, of Kununurra. "But then you feel the beat and the vibe. It gives you confidence. Before, I was the shyest girl, hiding behind my mum's leg and peeping out. Now, oh my gosh, it's really built me up. Shame is off of my list. It's rubbed out. I've replaced it with pride."

In the seven years since Fong began the group, she has watched it blossom from a simple catwalk competition into a force for change. "I saw it as a two-fold thing," she said. "My background is modelling and I was also looking at these girls who are so unsure and so insecure and I thought it might help them to find themselves."

Successes to date have included having a model on the runway at Perth Fashion Festival and at the G'Day USA celebrations in Los Angeles.

Girls aged 16 to 25 from as far away as Fitzroy Crossing, Roebourne and Halls Creek are now involved in the group. They are taught life skills and sent back into their communities where they pass them on to others. While it still encompasses fashion, beauty and deportment, it also covers public speaking, problem solving and even training in how to speak to the media.

Davenport arrived in Broome on Thursday with fashion photographer Damien Smith and suitcases of her clothes and shoes. A group of the girls put on a runway show at the centre for about 60 guests and yesterday went out on a photo shoot.

Marlikka Perdrisat

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