

Game Changing Collaboration;

powering youth-led action for Period Dignity in schools





The Game Changer Grant

In 2022 Modibodi launched its first Game Changer Grant a purpose-driven program created to foster talent, inspire innovation and champion long-term social and environmental change. This first ever grant was awarded to Irise International UK for their Every Period Counts campaign to support young activists and their agenda for Period Equality in the UK.

Every Period Counts Campaign

The campaign was built to rally behind youth activists to address period dignity in the UK, a matter of great importance to them. Period poverty and shame had been an issue of national importance for many years however were worsening due to the cost-of-living crisis. More young people were experiencing anxiety and indignity each month and missing school classes. Giving youth a voice and a platform to address those in power was a catalyst to the success of the program.

Irise hosted the Empower Period ‘Summit’¹, bringing together young activists and their allies from across the UK to discuss their next big campaign for Period Equality.

Young people were frustrated that despite policy commitments to improve period support in UK schools the reality on the ground only seemed to be getting worse-

“The only pads available in school toilets were the massive night ones, and you can’t play sport or be that comfortable in them.”

“My school had to take the box with pads in away because they thought people were stealing them.”

¹ A write-up and short video from the event is available here: <https://www.irise.org.uk/2022/12/the-empower-period-summit/>



Some of the young people and their allies at the Empower Period 'Summit'

We hosted a hybrid co-production workshop and follow-up activities via our online 'Our Voice Heard' space to co-design the campaign with 60 young people, including members of Irise's Empower Period network and young campaigners from 10 other groups and organisations across the UK.

Irise's Empower Period Committee, made up of 5 young people from our network, provided accountability and oversight for the campaign. They met twice to scrutinise plans and were reimbursed for their time².



Young people at the Every Period Counts co-production workshop with their period stories

² Meet the committee members here: <https://www.irise.org.uk/2023/03/meet-the-empower-period-committee/>

We provided small grant funding to support to three groups, led by young campaigners, to act as campaign hubs:

- The [Love Your Period](#) Campaign- a youth-led campaign in Wales led by two sisters under the age of 25. Co-founder Molly recently became the youngest ever winner of the Womenspire 2023 Rising Star Award and Love your Period were also named Rights and Social Action Project of the year in the Child Friendly Cardiff Awards.
- [Cysters](#)- an organisation championing intersectional and inclusive menstrual and reproductive health, working with LGBTQI+ young people and young people from ethnic minority communities. Their founder, Neelam Heera-Shergill, was named as one of Birmingham's 30 under 30 for her work.
- [Sex Ed Matters](#)- set up by end the tampon tax campaigner, Laura Coryton, who was recently nominated for One Young World's Campaigner of the year award.

Irise convinced 17 other UK charities, including Girl Guiding and Plan International UK, to back the Every Period Counts campaign. Four campaign partners provided funding to commission new data to reveal the scale of the challenges young people were facing in school.

Our nationally representative survey with 1007 girls aged between 13-18 found that despite, national policies and budgets in place to support periods in schools, **over a third of girls across the UK were still unable to get period products in school** when they needed them and were missing out on class as a result- an estimated 3.5 million days of school every year. 61% have had issues accessing a toilet during lessons when on their period.

Young people also collected over 600 stories of their peers' period related challenges. Stories included the frustrations of struggling to access a tampon in school whilst condoms were freely available and of having to track down free period products hidden in the back of the caretaker's locked cupboard when they were caught short during class.

A selection of stories shared by young people during the campaign:

"I'd use one of my socks from that day over night and then go to school the next day using the second sock from the day before. I didn't really have a choice because I couldn't get pads and toilet paper wouldn't hold but my socks absorbed and I wasn't creating any more washing. The [free period product] scheme was out 4 years and I'd never heard of it."

"It pisses me off soooo much how it's easier to get a condom than a tampon. Even in schools with the C Card scheme. Like come on. It's because men are affected that's why it's easier. If men had periods then products would be available and free and there would be no shame. Nothing annoys me more. I can walk in and get a condom in a minute if I wanted, but to get a tampon I need to go into reception, ask the receptionist to radio the caretaker, who takes ages to come and take me to a locked cupboard hidden away. The whole process can take up to half an hour and I am missing education."

"At school, I asked a male teacher to go to the toilet as I thought, I was starting my period. He denied me the right to go to the toilet unless I explained why I should go during a lesson. I refused as I shouldn't have had to explain myself as to why in front of everybody. I told my teacher aside why I needed to go to the toilet and he replied with, "You should know when your period is coming."

The Every Period Counts Campaign called upon:

- Schools and local councils in England and Wales to enrol in the free Schools Period Product Schemes and to take simple steps to ensure access is shame free.
- MPs in England and Wales were called upon by young activists to make the free period product schemes mandatory for all schools and colleges to make period products available for free to all young people, not just those living in poverty, which only increases the stigma.

What we achieved

- Irise enabled over **600 young people and 17 charities** to take action, creating the Every Period Counts campaign.
- Youth collected stories of their challenges and paraded (with a crowd of over 200 young people) through Westminster on Global Menstrual Health Day 2023 to deliver their stories and call to action straight to 10 Downing Street. The UK government's Women's Health ambassador Professor Dame Lesley Regan met with young people at the parade and listened to their stories.
- The media around the campaign reached an estimated **719 million people**, including coverage on the BBC, sparking conversations across the country and leading to local action to improve support for periods in schools.
- Government Ministers responded promptly, and The Department for Education organised 3 Roundtables for schools and young people from across the country, including Every Period Counts partner organisations and young campaigners. The Department for Education made significant improvements to the guidance for the Period Product scheme for England³. Changes included:
 - A stronger expectation that all eligible institutions will and should use the scheme unless they are accessing and providing free products in another way. This includes a section on Equality and adjusting for the needs of trans and non-binary young people, young people with disabilities and cultural and religious beliefs.
 - Greater emphasis on the need to offer products in primary schools.
 - An expectation that schools will consult young people and guidance on how to involve young people in choosing which period products the school orders, including considering cultural preferences and the views of young people with disabilities and of trans or non-binary young people.
 - Detailed guidance to help schools make products accessible, including real life examples, based on feedback from the roundtables.
 - Guidance and practical examples of how to reduce stigma surrounding the scheme
 - Removal of any phrases that might make schools use the scheme cautiously or perceive it as being targeted at children experiencing poverty, as well as language which makes periods seem negative such as 'sanitary products' or 'menstrual hygiene products.' The document now also includes language guidance for schools.
- The Department of Education plans to host roundtables with young people and schools every term to continue to improve their support. They have also launched a review into the Relationships, Sex and Education curriculum, including period education, which will conclude in

³ View the full guidance here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/period-products-in-schools-and-colleges/period-product-scheme-for-schools-and-colleges-in-england>

2024. Feedback from the Every Period Counts stakeholders was shared with the UK government's Women's Health ambassador, Lesley Regan, who is chairing this process.

- The Welsh government has organised an event to discuss the campaign and explore further action.
- Other positive actions resulting from the campaign include:
 - PHS, the supplier of the free period product scheme in England, repeated their 2019 research. They found that girls still miss more school or college days due to periods than any other reason- the proportion missing schools had gone up slightly to 54% from 52% in 2019 despite the introduction of free period product schemes. PHS have launched a podcast to increase education and awareness around periods and help get free period products out of cupboards and into the hands of young people who need them.
 - Every Period Counts partner, In Kind Direct worked with Irise to commission an in-depth piece of research exploring period equality and its drivers across the UK with the aim of producing a broad set of policy recommendations.
 - Sheffield City Council is creating a Period Equality Charter with input from Every Period Counts campaigners to create a powerful model of what could be done at the local level across the UK. Sheffield Deputy Lor Mayor, Jayne Dunn, attended the Period Parade in Westminster and met with Sheffield based youth and their parents to discuss their concerns.
- The campaign will continue to drive impact as young campaigners continue to support each other's work via Irise hosted virtual spaces and will come together to create and promote a model toilet policy for schools in 2024.

Impact for young people

An online survey completed by 20 young people who took part in the campaign found that:

- 82% feel less anxious about their period and feel they have more knowledge about their own period and body
- 88% feel more able to talk about periods without feeling ashamed
- 52% are more able to participate in work and school during their period
- 58% say their mental health and wellbeing has improved
- 81% have increased their confidence and ability to lead
- 82% feel more positively about their future

"Irise supported me as a young person to continue doing what I love in a positive space as a young, disabled person. The team are always amazing and the space is safe for all."

"Irise has helped me a lot to be more confident in myself and my period. As part of Love Your Period it's also been amazing for me to learn so much from the period parade speeches and social media posts. I myself have suffered from period poverty so I'm so glad I got to be part of the Every Period Counts campaign."

"I think volunteering with Irise has been pivotal to my personal development but also my career and advocacy."

"Irise helped me see the truth around periods and it has helped me break out of my shell after covid. It's given me many opportunities that have helped me with school and outside too."

"Was banging slay- Pls can we do London again thx."

An innovative partnership

The Modibodi and Irise collaboration was an innovative partnership that combined experience and knowledge into a compelling campaign.

Modibodi shared knowledge in creative campaign creation, building a social media following and gaining media attention, alongside a financial grant. Irise drew on grass root experience to collaborate with other NGOs, connect with government and build out a youth network.

“Social impact is Irise’s purpose and the beating heart of the Modibodi grant and it’s when we come together across sectors and break down traditional silos that we truly change the world.

I can say that this has been one of the best partnerships we have had. Modibodi’s dedication to achieve meaningful change for youth and their ability to support us and challenge us, helped build a successful youth led campaign.’

Emily Wilson, CEO Irise International



PERIOD CAMPAIGN Research by Irise International has found that more than 40% of girls struggle to access period products at school

METRO.co.uk

Girls denied toilet breaks and given detention for taking too long in loo on periods
"We were in the toilet because she was on her period, but she didn't care. She just gave us lunchtime detention," pupil says
The Independent | May 26

148,675,312 lessons are missed every year due to period shame in schools
"During my year 10 English language exam, I leaked on my exam chair and went 2 hours sitting and not saying a word."
Metro | May 26



BIG READ
"It's easier to get a condom than a pad": Lacking period products, a third of girls miss school
Girls reveal problems accessing toilets during lessons when menstruating, leading to many skipping school because of a combination of shame and a lack of access to period products
Inews.co.uk | May 26

BIG READ
Schoolgirl fighting period stigma in Asian community insists they are not to be ashamed of
15-year-old Sabiha Ali is tackling the stigma surrounding periods in many Asian households, as well as becoming a 'period champion' at school to help friends access period products
Inews.co.uk | Jun 4

'If you need period products, the caretaker escorts you to a locked cupboard – no wonder girls miss school'

As figures reveal 148,675,512 lessons are missed every year due to period shame and lack of access to products, one teenager tells i the difficulties some girls encounter



Alyssa Gully, 18, is a young activist working with charities to campaign about period poverty and shame-free access to period products in all schools. (Photo: supplied)



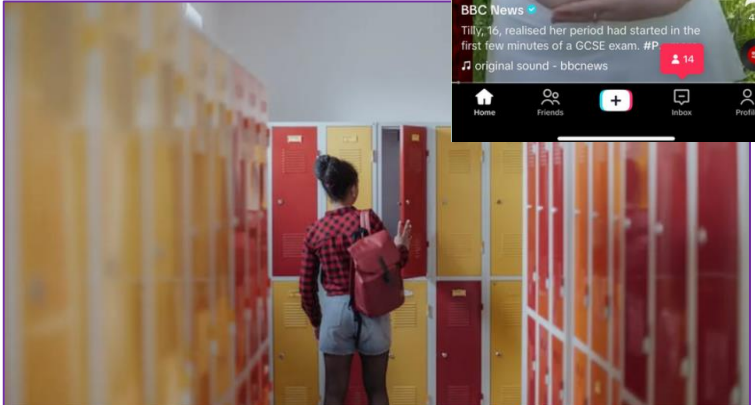
BBC NEWS
'No pads at school, so my period leaked on exam chair'
Some pupils are struggling to access period products in schools, data shared with BBC News suggests.
BBC News | May 25



'No pads at school, so I bled on exam chair'
Tilly, 16, realised her period had started in the first few minutes of a GCSE exam. #P
original sound - bbcnews
23.2K likes, 319 comments, 1915 shares, 479 reposts



Period poverty: How the cost of living is impacting women | 5 News
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More Than Three Million Days Of School Missed Because Of Period Shame
A third of young girls are missing school due to a lack of care or access to period products, over 3 million days missed every year.
Grazia | May 26

