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- R: Okay, no, that sounds good.
- I: Okay, so the audio recorder is on. So, first of all then, [REDACTED], so you're Angus Council, is that right?
- R: Yeah, the strategic policy and planning manager within Angus Council and I have responsibility for the Community Planning Partnership.
- I: Right. Can you tell me a bit more about what that involves?
- R: Yeah, sure. The Community Planning Partnership is the local response to improving and enhancing service delivery across the area. So, it brings together partners from the public sector, private sector and our third sector to increase efficiency in the services that we provide. So, the Period Poverty was one of them. Another one that we're working on just now is to reduce child poverty and what we do is we create a joint action plan so that we're not all duplicating the same thing, so that we have a focused vision for achieving our various priorities. So, reducing child poverty is one. Improving mental health and wellbeing is another and it's the Period Poverty fits under that one. And we've got improving accessibility and connectivity as well, which isn't just about digital, it's about access to everyday services that people need. So, it's quite a wide remit and our vision is massive, it's to make Angus a great place to live, work and visit but it's...
- I: It sounds like you're on the right track.
- R: Yeah, it's the best way to take these things forward because we've all got big budgets but actually if we pool them together, we can achieve a lot more. So, that's the underlying principle of community planning.
- I: So, how does the Period Poverty bit of that work then?
- R: So, back in 2018 Scottish Government announced that they were going to start putting a bill through to make period products available to everybody. And as part of that COSLA, which is our umbrella organisation oversees and monitors, Government had said that they were going to oversee a programme of funding to come down to local authorities and community planning partnerships to make period products and the education associated with that more accessible. And it was based on local data, so it was all evidence based on the amount of women we had or the amount of people of menstrual age, you know, all those type of things to make sure that we got a fair chunk of the cake, if you like. And in Angus that translated to about £56,000 a year for the community provision of period products. So, ours was one slice of it. Money also went to the schools to make products free in schools and the colleges also got a chunk of money to make products accessible to their students. So, it all fitted together really nicely.

- I: So, those pots of money for schools and colleges were separate to the £56k?
- R: Yeah. So, schools got about 65 at the start and I'm not sure how much the college got but, yeah, in total across the whole area it was a significant amount of money to tackle this particular element of poverty.
- I: So, how...so you helping to kind of work out where that money should go and how it should be accessed or are you less kind of...?
- R: Yeah. So, what we did was...everything that we do in community planning and within our community section is from the bottom up, so we make sure that anything we're doing is not only evidence based but there's community engagement with that. So, we held some creative conversations with community reps from across the area to see the different types of things that they thought would be useful to get products out there. So, that ranged from making products free in a whole host of different locations, whether its leisure or cultural. We started to put products in all the council premises. All the partners had taken products as well just to really ensure that there was a consistent coverage of products across the whole of Angus and you were never really that far away from some. If you needed just pop into a museum, or anything like that, you could get access. And one of the places where we noticed the highest turnover of products was in our theatres actually.
- I: Oh really? That's interesting.
- R: Yeah. So, people going into the theatres and in the libraries were taking the products there. So, that was perfect, you know, that's exactly what we wanted.
- I: So, okay, this is kind of leading into the what your kind of normal provision looks like then kind of pre-COVID. So...
- R: So, we had the...we had about 150 locations across Angus all distributing the products and we put out a variety of products, so three different types of pads, three different types of tampons, and then later on we started adding cups to that and some washable pads so people could take those away with them.

And we also added them to male toilets as well and disabled toilets so that if it was a single parent, they could still pick up products as well. We just had to slightly promote it in a different way because what we found was when we put stuff in the men's toilets, they were...they kept taking them out thinking they should have been in the women's toilets. So, it's one of those things you were like...we kept walking past them in the office and I was like, why are these out here? And people were like, oh they were in the men's toilets. And I was like, aha. So, after taking them back in about 17 times we changed the comms around it and we did different posters.

So, in the men's toilet instead of, we've got your period covered, which was the slogan we were all using, it was, support for your family.

And within the boxes of products we put like the brown paper sandwich bags so that if it was a single father and he needed products for somebody in the household could put them in the wee brown bag so it just looked like he had their lunch, you know, to remove the stigma because we were doing an awful lot of work then around opening up the conversation. We got badges made, and stuff like that.

And it was really interesting even in our office alone because when you mentioned the word 'period' you could just see some of the people flinching and now it just wouldn't be like that if I was in the office. But we'd got to a really good place where it was like, oh here's [REDACTED] talking about periods again. And I was totally fine with that because at least people weren't cringing and running away from me. It was just, this is something that shouldn't be a taboo subject, I shouldn't have to ram a tampon up my sleeve if I've got my period. You know that kind of thing?

I: Yeah.

R: So, we did an awful lot of work around that and in schools as well around school boys as well as school girls getting joint education around it because that's where we'll get rid of that stigma, bringing the younger ones up not thinking it's a big deal.

I: Yeah, definitely, and if it's normal...

R: So, yeah, that was them.

I: ...to see a pad or a tampon then it becomes less of a, you know, thing to giggle about and it takes the kind of weird fascination away from it as well, doesn't it?

R: Yeah, absolutely, and we saw that. Like a lot of people said to us when we got started, oh you can't put these things in men's toilets or in the unisex toilets at school because the kids will take them out the packets and put them everywhere.

I: And play with them, yeah.

R: That's not happened. I mean there was one incident in one of the schools and some of them had taken the tampons and tied them to the Christmas tree but I thought that was quite clever.

I: Yeah, that's different to...

R: [Voices overlap 00:08:23].

I: ...yeah, that's totally different.

R: So, yeah, it was they were available in over 150 locations. And what we were also doing was the support groups that were operating throughout Angus, we made sure that a lot of them had products. So, one of the big things we tried to do was break down the cultural barrier. So, we have some Syrian refugee families in the area and we took products along to one of their support groups and they were like, you know, in our culture it's not really okay to talk about this stuff and, you know, if we couldn't afford products, we couldn't ever say that. So, it was really good for them that the products were free at the support group. And all their health workers had a stock of them as well because they're probably our most frontline way of getting products to people. In the same way that you had the condom network we just kind of piggybacked on that and offered up period products as well.

And then alongside that we made sure that our key support organisations like Women's Aid, our housing services whenever they were giving people starter packs for a new house, or something like that, there was a stock of products within them too.

So, really trying to target where we knew there were pockets of poverty was really important to us. And I think just before COVID we were doing really, really well. We'd got...you know, there weren't many places you went into that didn't have products and we were really starting to ramp up the implementation of products in businesses and we were just about to launch Free Period Angus on 14 March when of course we got lockdown.

I: Oh yeah. Yeah, we were just about to launch something like menstrual learning briefings that we'd done with Plan International on 13 March and we got stopped.

R: Oh, good timing, eh?

I: Yeah.

R: We did a digital launch and it's been fine; it's just maybe not been as high profile as what we thought. But I think through COVID we've been able to increase our profile more than we ever thought we could.

I: Okay, so that...okay, that comes on to the next section then. So, what sorts of things have you had to change and how has your...you know, the provision of products in all of these different places and the access points...

R: Definitely...

I: ...yeah, how has like COVID affected all of that type of provision?

R: ...overnight we lost all of our locations. So, we went from 150 down to eight and that was one in each main town that we've got in Angus, sort of

our bigger settlements. And we moved the provision to essential shops and I thought that there would be a bit of pushback on that because they sell period products themselves but actually they really welcomed it because they were like, well, you know, if people are in poverty and they can't afford that, you know, we're more than happy to act as a point of contact. So, that was really good and they've continued to be a good champion for us.

We kind of hit it in three stages. We were one of the first partners with Hey Girls to offer three months of products sent out direct to your door and we had an absolutely incredible response. Within the first couple of weeks 780 people signed up for that.

I: Wow, bloody hell.

R: And we had some really good testimonials, like people phoning us saying, you know, I've got three daughters, I just couldn't have managed without this or it would have just...you know, we would have just been using toilet roll, or whatever. So, that was really good.

We also did...there are phone referrals. So, you could phone our third sector interface, Voluntary Action Angus, if you needed products and they would deliver them to the door.

I: Right. And where did those products come from? Is this with Hey Girls still?

R: No, this was through Tayside Contracts who we were doing the products with in the locations. So, what we needed was something that was a bit quicker than...because at the time Hey Girls were quite overwhelmed with orders. So, to get from the person signing up to them getting the products it was maybe two weeks. So, if they needed them more immediately, they could just phone this number and somebody would take three months' worth of products to them, so that was fine because we had a massive amount of products in Voluntary Action Angus' premises. So, it was handy, they could just take them down.

Other things that we did to help people with lockdown, we sent out make your own pad kits and that was really funky. We had online videos showing you how to make them and we sent everything that you needed to make your own pad out because we had been running workshops before but of course because people couldn't go to locations, we thought we could...they could just send it out. And we really did give them everything they needed from, you know, the pins to secure all the fabrics in place, the needle and thread, the poppers. And we got some really good pictures back from people that said, not only is this a really useful thing but I was able to bond with my daughter through making this with her, or, you know, things like that.

So, it kept people busy throughout lockdown as well. And that was...we only had 70 packs available and they were free and they went within the first three hours. So, it was like, oh. So, we started to just put out more. We got another 30 from...it was a local social enterprise we were working with; we got another 30 and they went quite quickly as well. And it's kind of tapered off a wee bit with people going back to work and not being in as much lockdown but we'll see over Christmas, maybe we could do something, festive pad making or something like that. But we were just...really we were just trying to think of new and interesting ways to get pads to people's homes and that was just another one for people who'd maybe not tried washable pads. So, that was really useful too.

So, yeah, that was the three main methods. We still had the eight locations. We had the Hey Girls direct to your door. And we had the phone referrals through to Voluntary Action Angus. And, like I say, I mean if...in total up until April we must have been close to 40,000 pads and 30,000 tampons because at my last official count for that year we were about 37,900 for the pads and 27,600 for the tampons. So, that's a lot of period products out there that weren't before and our vision that our communities co-produced with us was to eradicate period poverty in Angus by 2021, which is fast approaching.

So, we did an awful lot of survey work and focus groups to just make sure that wherever we could we would get products to people. And now we've just...well it was about six weeks ago we launched under the sustainable period...it was a part of Environmenstrual Week we launched free cups and cup cups. So, if you wanted to try them you could just sign up for it and I think to date we're sitting at about 550 cups throughout the area.

I: So, have you got any idea of how many people...I guess it's difficult to measure but like a rough idea of how many people have been experiencing period poverty in your area?

R: So, when we put out the survey, we were kind of running in the national average, so one in five women were experiencing period poverty. And when we did our survey, we got about 2,000 responses and it was roughly about 65/68 per cent of people responding had said that they'd experienced it at some point in their life. So, I think we're still in line with the national average. We're probably a little bit better now given the amount of work we've done.

But we're...we've just done a survey with young people as well and we got a lot more responses to that and again it was around that one in five young girls were experiencing period poverty and we'd asked them, you know, had it ever led to you having time off school or feeling embarrassed, and it was such a high percentage. So, we really do need to do more in schools and that's where our focus will move to I would say next year.

And one of the things we were really keen on doing was giving every school child of menstrual age a pack of the washable pads so that, you

know, they could just chuck it in the washing machine with their uniform or, you know, if they were in poverty and didn't have access they could just wash them in the sink or that. And we were really, really keen to do that because Angus is an area...because we're rural the school kids are already really interested in the environment and the climate change, so it was...I think it would be a real good win for us in terms of getting young people engaged and getting rid of these plastic applicator things, you know, they drive me mad. So, I think that would be a big win for us. You know, we were just pricing it up the other day, it's going to be quite expensive but I think it'll be worth it.

I: Oh yeah, definitely, and, you know, because they're...in the longer term it will save money anyway, won't it?

R: Oh absolutely. I mean I wouldn't go back now. Ever since Hey Girls were like, why don't you try these, I just wouldn't go back to the pads now. I just think the washable ones are brilliant.

I: Yeah. They just...they feel completely different as well, don't they, and...yeah.

R: Oh totally. And in my team, it's really funny because I've got a team of five women, all different ages, and we've all tried sort of different things and two of them are now total advocates of the cup, there're two of us that are right into the washable pads, and another that really loves their period pants. So, it's quite good [voices overlap 00:19:01].

I: We're...I'm slowly converting everyone to period pants.

R: Oh yeah, they're brilliant, yeah.

I: We just need to get the tax on them sorted now though, don't we?

R: Oh yeah, definitely. And all that stuff down in Wales about them not letting people buy period products because they were...

I: Oh I know because they weren't essential.

R: ...I mean that...loads of people tagged me into that on Twitter and I was like, oh no.

I: I know. I've got lots of people...like I've been on leave for the last two weeks and I've had a flurry of people from Wales get in touch about being interviewed.

R: Yeah, I can imagine and you were just like...

I: So, yeah.

- R: ...I mean it's just like who made that decision because they're going to get absolute grief for that?
- I: Oh, I know, it's ridiculous.
- R: [Voices overlap 00:19:45].
- I: Absolutely ridiculous.
- R: Yeah, that wouldn't happen here because, yeah, we've got the networks so nobody would go without.
- I: You've also got the buy-in from the essential shops as well, haven't you? So, they obviously realise that they're essential items.
- R: Yeah. And, do you know, it was a range of shops as well. Some were a lot bigger. I was always really keen at that national group...we have a national group and it's sort of our counterparts from across Scotland, and I was like, you know, we really need to be doing more to engage with the big supermarkets because that's where, you know, this could fail or succeed because until they start changing things... And I saw somebody putting something on Twitter today for Morrisons, like shouldn't we stop calling it feminine hygiene now, because, you know above the aisles they've got the signs?
- I: Yeah.
- R: In Morrisons they still call it feminine hygiene. And it was like, yeah, we need that kind of whole system change for this stuff. And that would be a real quick win for a supermarket. So, we'll see, we'll see if they respond to that person that Tweeted them.
- I: Yeah, fingers crossed.
- R: I know.
- I: So, how did you engage with these essential shops then to get them on board? Were they...do they already do stuff for food banks and that anyway?
- R: Well because they were [voices overlap 00:21:12]. It was mainly I just gave them a phone. It was shops that we'd used for some other period...some other poverty work. So, it was a really random thing but National Heritage got in touch with us and said they had 60,000 Easter eggs going spare because they weren't able to have their Easter egg hunt and it was through these shops that we said, we've got all these Easter eggs, can you distribute them to people in the local community? Because they were running things like Snappy Shopper, and that, and it was like, you know, if you're delivering to a family can you take them a few of these eggs, you know, just so that we could distribute them? Schools weren't

too fond of distributing them through the schools because, you know, it's chocolate but the shops that we were engaging with didn't have a problem.

But, yeah, it was generally a phone call. There were a couple I contacted on Facebook and just said, would you be okay with me bringing along a pop-up feed to put in your shop and just put in a couple of these boxes in front of it and just encouraging people to help themselves? And they all said, yeah. I didn't approach the big supermarkets because it was at the time when they were kind of struggling with the whole only so many people could go in at a time and, you know, that kind of thing. So, it felt a bit easier to deal with the smaller shops.

I: So, what kind of shops were they, like newsagents and...?

R: Yeah, newsagents, there were a couple of newsagents. There were a couple that were diversifying into food distribution for vulnerable people. So, we had a social enterprise in Kirriemuir that usually does low cost fruit and veg, and stuff like that, they offered to be one of our distribution points. And there was...yeah, in Arbroath we...it was mainly just smaller supermarkets. And in Forfar we have a social supermarket as well, so they offered to distribute products, but I think as well because they thought, well that's fine, it might bring more people in, which we weren't bothered about, well that's fine. But, yeah, all of them had to ask for a top up of products at least three/four times. So, they weren't going...because I was giving them about 200 packs of each to keep them going because I thought I don't want to be increasing movement of people too much. So, yeah, that was fine. But now our networks have started to open up a bit more, so gyms, and all that, are starting to open, we're up to about 80 locations again, so that's good.

I: So...okay, so this is now moving on into the next phase, which is the current situation. So...

R: Yeah, so we've not stopped anything that we were doing. So, people can still sign up to get three months' worth of products delivered direct to their door. They can go on our online map and see where they can go and pick up products in person. And they can still phone Voluntary Action Angus if they need products delivered to them. So, if anything this has just increased the amount of options that people have got. And we'll still keep doing the cups for probably another three or four months and see how people are getting...because it's just naturally started to taper off, we're not getting as many referrals for that. But in...from March next year I really want to ramp up the distribution of washable pads.

I: So...

R: Sorry.

I: ...do you...have you noticed then...? So, obviously when all of your normal access points you only had these like eight essential places and then you had the telephone referrals and the other things that you've mentioned kind of instead of and now you're able to run them in tandem now that more places are beginning to open. Is there...like has the telephone referral and that kind of request route started to taper off or is it still really popular?

R: Yeah, we were getting very few telephone referrals now and a reduced number of people asking for the products delivered direct to their door. So, I would say that that's dropped by about 60 per cent since we were able to expand the network again.

But one of the things that we did launch recently, it was only a month ago, was the Period Positive Employer scheme and so far, we've had 19 employers sign up across the area. And that's not just offering products for their customers but also their staff and having that [tier 00:26:01] if they're noticing one of their employees struggling with menstrual wellbeing to signpost them to one of our Red Tent events. So, there're more products in businesses now than ever, in cafés and restaurants. We've got a couple of food distribution points.

So, one of the biggest producers of fruit and veg in the area is now a Period Positive employer and has been distributing to all of their workers. And of course, they've got a high contingent of seasonal workers still operating, so they've been distributing to them too, which is great because that was always one of the ones that we were trying to tap into to give them support because we have a high amount of seasonal workers in Angus for the crops. So, that was really useful to get them on board. And now it's just about, you know, maintaining that and making sure that we're being a bit innovative wherever we can with offering products up.

Health visitors are still distributing them and we've got 12 new social prescribers in Angus within each GP surgery and we've been using them as well.

I: Yeah, so you really are coming at it from every single possible angle, aren't you?

R: Trying to. If you can think of anything else, I'm all ears.

I: Well, no, you've just given me loads of ideas. It's really difficult to find people that are...like I say, we know about people like Hey Girls and people like Bloody Good Period, and those sorts of ones, that are quite well established but it's...then it's finding the smaller people like food banks and like social enterprises, and all of those, and, yeah, like you said, social prescribers, and that, that are involved as well because there're just so many different...

R: Well do you know what else we did as well?

- I: ...options.
- R: I remember in a lot of the communities they turned their phone boxes into like mini food hubs.
- I: Yes, I've seen that with little libraries, and things, as well.
- R: Yeah. Well in some of our most deprived communities...I live in Arbroath and we've got the highest level of deprivation in Arbroath and there were three or four phone boxes around Arbroath that had food, clothes and I was going round them and putting products in them and I would maybe give it a week and then I would go and check and I did it maybe five or six times, every time all the products were gone. And if it was...like one of the days I went in the morning, dropped off loads of stuff, and then I went back later in the day because I was actually interested in what food was being picked up, because I was also leading on the food hubs, and, yeah, I was surprised at how many had gone. So, that was another like way in that we did just to try and get products into the most deprived parts of Angus because that's where we need to get them.
- I: Yeah, definitely. Okay, so thinking...what...can I just check, what's your lockdown situation at the moment?
- R: We're in Tier 2 of the Scottish Government five tier system. So, it's relatively okay in Angus. We've got quite low numbers but we still can't have like people in your house, and stuff like that.
- I: Yeah, because England's gone back into...well a revised version of lockdown.
- R: Well obviously today it's all been about the vaccine, which, yeah, we'll see but...
- I: Yeah, I'm not holding my breath.
- R: ...I'll let other people try that before I go for it.
- I: Yeah, any vaccine that's taken less than a year to develop I'm a bit like, hmm.
- R: Well that's it, I don't want to grow like a third ear or something.
- I: Exactly. Very sketchy, it just sounds very sketchy.
- R: Yeah, exactly.
- I: So, yeah, so what I'm also having to do as part of this is gauge where...because we've all got different...although we're the same country

like overall being part of the United Kingdom each country has then got its own lockdown systems and tiers and...

R: Yeah, it's complex, isn't it?

I: Yeah. So, I'm trying to track and monitor the situations in the different areas and it's quite tricky.

R: Yeah, absolutely. I was trying to get my head round the new lockdown in London and it was only until Friday I was having like a Zoom quiz with my friends down in London and I was like, right tell me, what's happening? And it's like basically like lockdown but the kids are still at school.

I: Yeah, pretty much, yeah.

R: So, I was like, does that make sense?

I: Kids are at school; the university is still open.

R: Yeah, and one of the funny things was obviously they've closed the non-essential shops. So, my friend's a gardener and she was like, I went out and I bought a million plants, and all this, and then they said that garden centres were essential. And I'm like, oh, right, okay, so you've got loads of plants then? She was like, yeah.

I: It's weird because it's like the things that you think wouldn't be open are and some of the things that you think would be essential are not and it's just a farce quite frankly.

R: Well it sounds complicated.

I: It is.

R: It always sounds complicated.

I: Well it's complicated because it's not clear.

R: Yeah, absolutely.

I: Well that's what you get with a Tory government, but there you go.

R: Well, no. I mean the whole world's going to hell. Between that and Brexit I'm really busy.

I: I know, but at least Trump's gone so that's something.

R: Well this is it, that's been very interesting, hasn't it?

I: Yes. So, hopefully...

- R: We'll see what happens with that.
- I: ...hopefully the blinkers will come off the rest of the world now and we'll get some kind of, you know, compassion and sense coming through again but...
- R: Yeah, I hope so.
- I: ...anyway, enough about that. So, in terms of like the future then, so if we're thinking about how...like future pandemics or just this one not going away any time soon do you feel like you're in a pretty good situation in terms of keeping things going and being able to continue to support people?
- R: Yeah, our relationship with Hey Girls has been really, really useful, and with Tayside Contracts who distribute the products to the other locations. So, we'll just keep offering the three months products direct to your door because that's fine within our budget and we'll just keep looking at new sustainable ways of supporting people.

Like the Red Tent events that we've started to have, they've been really, really useful as a sounding board for me to kind of drop ideas in. So, the Red Tent events are kind of based on that Indian kind of thinking around back in the old days when women had their periods, they all went into this red tent, they were kind of banished to the red tent, and then once their period was over, they could come out again. But actually, what happened in the red tent was they had a great time because they were able to talk about things and support each other. And that's what our Red Tent events are about, it's supporting women through their menstrual health because we didn't have menopause cafés in Angus. So, we thought, well this would tie into both because, yeah, menopause is an issue but we've got quite a strong support group in Angus looking at endometriosis. So, that menstrual challenges like that are part of this. And I was absolutely shocked when one of the girls was like, it takes on average seven years to get diagnosed with endometriosis.

- I: Yeah, it does, if not longer.
- R: I'm like, seven years, that's incredible. So, through this network we're able to push that along and we get a lot of doctors dipping in and out just listening to what the women are saying...
- I: Oh, that's great, yeah.
- R: ...because they only get ten minutes appointment with somebody and if a woman wants to go and speak about the menopause that's probably going to take longer than ten minutes. So, it's kind of a cross-referral thing. They refer people to us and we'll say, no, it's probably really time for you to go and see your doctor. And we arm them with the information that they might need if it's a menstrual issue, or something like that. So,

we've been using that to kind of say, do you think if we offered cups that would be a good thing, or do you think if we did something specific around the LGBT community that would be something that would be well received? So, that's been a real good sounding board to make sure that we stay on track and relevant to local people.

So, they're monthly just now and the next one we've got a couple of doctors coming to talk about HRT and PMS, so that'll be fun. And there's a woman there that always wants to talk about sex, so that's also fun. And I give an update on where we are with the period poverty stuff and usually just drop in a few ideas to say, this is what we're thinking about moving to next, or, we're wanting to do some animations, do you think this would work? And one of the people we've partnered with is a social enterprise called Angus Creative Minds and they've been making us a 6 foot tampon to use as a prop, do you know like the one that they've got at the Vagina Museum down in London?

I: Yes, I know exactly the one that you mean, yeah, the glittery one.

R: Yeah, and...but everyone has an anime face, so really big eyes, big eyelashes. Oh, and we've got...they're making us another one and it looks kind of like Peter...Jessica Rabbit but it's a pad. So, it's just...these are just props that we're going to use in schools, in colleges, in the area to get people talking about it. So, I'm quite excited. We should get them next month.

I: So, have you...do you think that you've experienced any significant barriers or have you...do you feel like you've been able to kind of carry on with like hiccups more than massive problems?

R: I would say there've not been too many barriers because this was an area that not many people were involved in. So, they just...the Community Planning Partnership had just said to me, just do it. And I'll take a paper to them once a quarter and say, this is what we've achieved, this is where we are and this is what I want to do now. And they'll just go, yeah, that's fine. I won't tell you the make up of men to women at that but you can imagine, they're just like, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

I: It's quite helpful in some ways, isn't it?

R: So, I think...yeah. Well this is it, it's like, I want to talk about periods, and they're like, whatever you want.

I: Just do it, yeah.

R: So, that's been really helpful. And through our Facebook page, Free Period Angus, we've been able to engage with a lot of people and if we have experienced an issue people have just contacted us through that and we've just got in touch with them instantly. Like when we first put out the call for the cups everyone that signed up for them got two cups and it

was the duplication thing. So, we kind of used that as an opportunity to say, yeah, we know we sent you two cups, so why don't you give one to one of your friends or family so they can try it, to try and cover our issue.

It was...it's just one of those things, it's a place where people can instantly message and it's usually me that replies just so that we're constantly communicating with the people that need us. And we've had a few messages through it, people really, really struggling with poverty saying, please can you help me? And it's not just been about period poverty but because they've approached us through that we've then been able to signpost them to the support that they could get from Welfare Rights or health, or whatever it is they need. So, they might have walked through the door thinking, oh I'm going to get some help with period poverty, but they've got a lot more than that as well.

I: Yeah. And does that work vice versa presumably as well?

R: Yeah, absolutely. And our Welfare Rights team are brilliant and we did a joint leaflet, which of course is no use now but just before lockdown, and on one side it's got all the information people need about benefits they could claim and on the other side there's information about period poverty. So, yeah, we were putting them in every food box that was going out during lockdown and just making sure that if people were really struggling, they knew where to go and we got a lot more people signing up for it through that, so that was good.

I: So, this is...these are like very leading questions which I probably shouldn't ask as a researcher but do you think that you would have been able to do any of this if you didn't have that central funding from the Government?

R: We probably wouldn't have been able to distribute as much. I'm pretty sure we wouldn't have been able to do the Hey Girls partnership because their products are quite expensive. So, what we would have done was something quite similar to My Bloody Period, you know how they put a call out for products?

I: Yeah.

R: Because that was going to be the first thing I did and when they said, oh, no, there's funding attached, I said, well that's fine. But, yeah, I'd always looked at their model of putting a call out, they'll get stuff in and then we can distribute it out. But we were quite lucky we didn't have to do that, although when we've been giving products out to people, whether it be lockdown or not, what we've tended to find is once they've got themselves out of poverty, or whatever, they've asked if they can donate back. So, we've just told them to give stuff to the food banks to cover it off that way. But our food banks do distribute products not on the scale that we do and they send...since we've been on the scene, they don't get very many asks for that now so they've scaled it back. So, that's been quite good.

- I: And then my next leading question is presumably the Community Planning Partnership is part...so it's part of Angus Council, right, is that right?
- R: Well the statutory responsibility sits with Angus Council and other statutory partners. So, I wouldn't say it's a council thing, it's a partnership thing.
- I: Yeah, okay. So, the fact that that partnership exists if that wasn't there would it have been as easy to, what's the word, mobilise and to put these extra things in place?
- R: Probably we would have sat with our third sector interface, Voluntary Action Angus, who are already doing loads of different things. So, it could have been delivered, it's just it would have been an additional thing they would have had to do on top of their already massive workload. So, the fact we were able to do this as a partnership worked really well.
- I: Yeah, okay, I'll stop asking those sorts of questions now.
- R: No, no, that's fine.
- I: It's just what...because what I need to work out is what's the kind of difference between what you've been doing and what, you know, like a solely voluntary sector organisation has been doing and it does come down to money.
- R: It does, yeah, and actually one of the really interesting things that we can't promote is...we give out products through our Women's Aid network and obviously domestic abuse through lockdown shot right up and one of the things that we do in partnership with Women's Aid is we put helpline numbers hidden on the barcode of our products that we give them so that if a woman's in crisis or experiencing domestic abuse she's got our small packet of tampons in her bag and all the helpline numbers are hidden in the barcode.
- I: Wow, that's amazing.
- R: So, that's been something that we've been really keen on sharing across Scotland. And when we told COSLA they were like, oh we'll promote that. I was like, you can't promote it.
- I: No, don't promote...don't tell people.
- R: No, you can't do that. And I heard somebody talking about it on something quite high profile and I was like, you can't say that because then people know that that's where the helpline numbers are. So...but so far we've kept it relatively low key here, so that's been good.

I: So, in terms of like...so just picking up on that then because obviously that's a really good and really important thing to be able to do but do you want that included in this research?

R: Probably not, no. That's a, for your information so that you know.

I: Yeah, no problem. Like, yeah, as I said, it's like...it's an amazing idea in terms of best practice and supporting the women but, yeah, the ramifications of people finding out about it are just too [inaudible 00:43:43].

R: Well this is it; it was...yeah, it was a big win for us because it gave people...because they used to put them on tissues and I was like, well somebody's really unlikely to pick up a packet of tampons. So, I think that was probably a better place to put those numbers but, yeah, it's not something we can promote, although through our national network we...like I have spoken with my colleagues in Aberdeenshire, and things like that, because they were keen to do it. So, we just kind of kept it under the radar but we were able to share it.

I: Yeah, okay, yes, I'll make sure that we don't include it, which is a shame but yeah, totally understand why. Okay, so then the final question then for you, Shelley, is there anything else that you think is really important to highlight about just period poverty in general or more specifically with it during the pandemic that we've not already talked about?

R: Well one of the things that we did alongside this work on 18 October last year we launched a period poverty and menopause policy within the council, and we were the first local authority in Scotland and we've since shared it with anybody that would like it, and that was about making and raising awareness with employers the impact of menopause and period poverty on their employees.

So, that was a really positive move and that's essentially what our Period Positive Employer work is based on because through the Red Tent events we heard this heartbreaking story from a lady who said, you know I lost my job because I was menopausal. And she says, my employer just didn't understand why some days I had a bit of a cloudy head or some days I wasn't able to work, you know? And that policy has paved the way for a bit more of that whole #bekind thinking and it's opened up the conversation more for women in the workplace. Like so many people now that that policy's been launched will say, oh I'm having a menopause day, I just need to, you know, take a bit of time out. And whereas before people would just kind of go, yeah, whatever, now it's a lot more, oh no, okay, no, that's fine, you know, just go and take a bit of time out and come back when you can. So, we're keen to spread that message further.

And we're about to launch a policy similar for our elected members. We have quite a few female elected members and they don't seem to get the same rights as council staff. So, we're going to do that and just keep

generally trying to improve the levels of education around menstrual wellbeing because there's a bit of a gap in the schools and if we can get it right in the schools then generationally it'll be a lot better.

So, we work really closely with a college who have started to use their trainee nurses as period poverty champions and menstrual health champions...

I: That's a great idea.

R: ...because I think that would...if I was training to be a nurse I would think that would be a great placement, going into schools talking about menstrual health. So, they've started to use those students a lot more and then it's like win-win for everybody. It gives them an opportunity to test their teaching, and things, and it also gives us that bank of people that we can put in wherever we need it but...

I: Yeah, that's a really good idea because BCU we have...we train nurses as well.

R: Perfect.

I: So, yeah, that's really...I shall mention that when I find the right person to mention it to because we're trying to find ways...

R: Absolutely. We're really keen to do it as well because, like we were saying earlier, they've been holding sessions with a mixed group of people, so they've been like getting out loads of different test tubes with all different coloured liquids and saying to the young guys, right, put the tampon in there and see how quickly it absorbs. And they were absolutely blown away. They were like, I didn't know a tampon did that.

I: It's like when you say...

R: So, [voices overlap 00:48:09]...

I: ...when you get them to fill up a condom.

R: ...that discussion and so that, you know, they're more compassionate young men as well. So, yeah, because some of the feedback we had from it is definitely not for recording but we were like, wow. We say, what's your favourite part about when your partner's on her period? And some of the responses were not what I was expecting.

I: That's good though.

R: Yeah, they were talking, I was like, wow.

I: Yeah, that's all part of the stigma and the shame, isn't it, those parts of periods?

- R: Yeah.
- I: Like probably the most.
- R: But, no, they seem to care as much as what we as women think they do and I think there's something in that for us to explore later as well because certainly from my generation...I think probably two generations below me they won't care about it at all but I still...like when my dad says to me, oh what have you been doing today, I'm like, oh I've been working on my Period Positive stuff, he still goes, oh, don't talk about periods. You know, still in that phase.
- I: Yeah, it is...it's...
- R: Whereas like I said, my husband, if we had a daughter and she said, oh, you know, I'm on my period, I'm pretty sure he wouldn't do that.
- I: Yeah, it is really interesting with the different generations.
- R: Yeah, absolutely. So, I'm really interested to see how a lot of this stuff and getting the young girls, and that, to make their own pads, and all that kind of stuff, translates through into their own children. So, yeah, it's been...this is one of my favourite pieces of work. When I've had a really hard day I don't consider this work, this is what I do to relax.
- I: It does become...it becomes your whole life, doesn't it, as soon as you start getting involved in...I think particularly if you have periods as well yourself, yeah, it becomes...yeah, I'm like the...I'm known as like the period lady at work even though...and everyone comes to me and asks me questions about all sorts of things and it's like, I'm a health researcher, I'm not a doctor. But they're like, yeah, but you know more than the doctors do. And it's like, oh, yeah, fair enough.
- R: Yeah. That's what we've noticed at the Red Tent events, we've seen a lot of women who have battled with their GPs, and things, to get to where they are and get a lot of value in sharing that experience with other women who are at the start of that journey.
- I: Yep, and any kind of hints and tips, yeah, definitely.
- R: Yeah, it's been a really, really good support network. We're sitting at about 29 women now, so that's really good in terms of the women that need that additional support. So, we'll just keep building that because it's sometimes some will drop off and we'll get more. So, it'll depend on what the topic is as well. So, like this next one will be very much focused on HRT so you'll maybe not get some of the younger ones. Whereas I'm like, I want to know what's going to hit me, so I'll just go to them all.
- I: Yeah, I think the raising awareness of menopause in young people is something that definitely needs to happen because I'm just clueless. It's

like, is this a menopause symptom, is it not a menopause symptom, what?

R: Yeah, exactly.

I: Yeah, we get told nothing.

R: Yeah, and the amount of women that come to our group that are not much older than me, maybe...so I'm 38 so they're like early 40s, and they've started to go...they're going through an early menopause and they're like, my doctor's just like, oh, you know, you just need to exercise more. And one of the stories that we got from one of the women, she'd gone to the doctor because she was getting palpitations and it was classic menopausal symptoms and the first thing the doctor said was, have you been taking cocaine? And the woman was like, no...

I: I wish.

R: ...I've not been taking cocaine and I've got palpitations. But the fact that that was the first place that that doctor went.

I: I know, or it just gets fobbed off as stress. It's like, oh stress and anxiety. And it's like, yeah, okay.

R: Yeah, it's dangerous, it's really, really dangerous. I'm glad we've got this space for women to chat and just say, this is happening to me, what do you think? You know, it's really good.

I: It is really important, yeah. Right, anyway, we're starting to go off topic on menopause, which is very important but not unfortunately part of my project yet.

R: No problem.

I: So, I've asked you everything that I need to. Is there anything that you wanted to ask or add?

R: No, just if there's anything specific that you need any more detail on or if you need any links to any of the bits and pieces, we've been doing just let me know and I can send them on.

I: Yeah, that would be great. I'll...once I get the transcription back from this I'll get back to you if there's anything that would be great to get some extra details on.

R: Perfect, that'll be brilliant.

I: Yeah. Right, fantastic. Well thank you so much, [REDACTED] that's been brilliant and the work that you're doing, and everything, is just amazing. I'm always...I love doing this type of work because I get to hear about all

these brilliant things that everyone's doing and I get to tell everyone about the brilliant things.

R: Yeah, absolutely, it's brilliant. Across Scotland there're so many doing so many good things.

I: I know.

R: Oh, it's really good.

I: Yeah. So, it's nice to talk to people about positive things that they're doing and then, as I said, I get to collate it all and tell everyone about how amazing everyone is. So, it's nice.

R: Yeah, well it's a good job.

I: It's the good bit of research.

R: Absolutely.

I: So, yeah, so again thank you so much for your time.

R: No bother.

I: And I will be in touch. I'm hoping to do some like dissemination type stuff as the project goes along anyway so I'll let people that have taken part know and do some like kind of workshop-y chat type things as we go along anyway. So, I will keep you in the loop.

R: Yeah, perfect, that'll be brilliant. And if there's anything that I think you might find interesting I'll just ping it on to you.

I: Yeah, fantastic.

R: Okay, well thanks very much. Enjoy the rest of your Monday.

I: Yes, you too, have a good week.

R: Cheers. Bye.

I: Okay, thanks, [REDACTED], bye bye.

End of transcript