

# Transcribed by: 1st Class Secretarial Services

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- I: Right, yeah, that's going. Okay, so it's kind of split into three sections but most people kind of flow through it in the order anyway, so it's like pre-COVID, first lockdown, current situation.
- R: Okay.
- I: But first of all, so can you just remind me again, City to Sea, what area do you cover?
- R: Okay, so we're a plastic pollution campaigning organisation and I manage our Plastic-Free Periods Campaign. And then as part of that we have a project called Rethink Periods which is a teacher training programme for schools, so we've trained about 750 schools in the last year across England to deliver updated holistic period education.
- I: And what part...is it in the south, what part of the UK is it that you cover?
- R: It's all across England.
- I: Right. Great, and what's your role within that then, so you said that you do the Plastic-Free Periods Campaign.
- R: Yeah, so I manage the campaign, but then within the schools project which is kind of under the same umbrella but quite different because it's unbiased and, yeah, we don't have any product partnerships or anything through the schools project. So under that, my role would be teacher trainer.
- I: Right. And do you...?
- R: I work on the materials and delivering the training.
- I: Right, okay. So, okay then, what does a typical provision look like for you guys then, pre-COVID, what would you do?
- R: For the Rethink Period Programme, we were going into schools and then we would deliver training in a school, but it would be one school would offer up a space for the training, but then lots of different schools in that area would come to that school as a kind of hub for the training. And then I deliver the training with everybody and we would pass around lots of different products and talk about those and people could ask questions and share thoughts around that. All of that only actually started in – I think it was the September before COVID, so last September.
- I: Okay. Have you got any...is that primary and secondary or just secondary?
- R: It's primary and secondary, yeah, and it's teachers and school nurses.

- I: Have you got any idea of how many schools you've delivered the training to or what's a typical...so you said that people from different schools would come to a session in this hub. What would be like a typical amount of representatives that you would get?
- R: So in the face-to-face training, it was probably between 10 and 20, and in total we've delivered to I think it's something like 734 schools.
- I: Wow. And that's across England?
- R: Yeah.
- I: Okay, so did you just say something about in person?
- R: Yeah, that was all in person training.
- I: Okay, so I'm guessing you're doing some kind of online stuff now then.
- R: Yeah, exactly, so we've now moved it to an online training, so it's – well, during lockdown, the sessions moved from being twilight sessions to actually doing them more during work hours, because obviously the teachers weren't in school the whole time, or most teachers weren't anyway. They were about an hour and a half, the sessions, and they were divided into two, and in the second half of the session, I would go through all the products but obviously I'd have to do it on the screen this time so people couldn't pass things around. But to get around that, we ended up posting them all their product demonstration boxes [after the 04:57] session, and then about two weeks after the initial training session, so to allow time to receive the box and have a look through it, we would then run an optional Q&A. So if anybody had looked through the products and been like, hmm, I don't really remember or understand how this is meant to work, then they could join that Q&A and ask any questions then.
- I: How – okay, so pre-COVID, how were people signing up, are schools nominating people or are people volunteering, so you said it was teachers and school nurses, so is it people with this in their remit that have to go on it?
- R: Yeah, so it's mostly PSHE teachers, that's who we advertise it to. And it's a real mixture actually, so we did quite a lot of outreach through local network...like PSHE networks or PSHE events that were happening. And that kind of led to quite a good uptake. Then there were also quite a lot of people who I guess had heard through word of mouth or maybe on social media and they got in touch with us, filled in a form online and then that registered them onto the trainings.
- I: So have you noticed any kind of change in location of people that are signing up to do it, when did it move online, do you know?
- R: It moved online I think in maybe the end of February or the start of March.

- I: Okay, that's quick.
- R: Yeah, it was a pretty rapid turnaround. And to be honest, I don't actually know if the locations differed. I do know that it ended up actually working better online because it meant people could tune into the trainings from anywhere, they didn't only have one local training that they could join, they had an option of like five upcoming trainings online. So it was much easier for people to join, much more flexible with being able to join from home and having more sessions to choose from.
- I: And do you think that the engagement in the sessions has stayed pretty similar or is it better when you're in person or better online or has it not really made that much difference?
- R: I haven't noticed a huge difference, but I do think having looked at some of the feedback last week, there are some people that would like more opportunity to interact with the other people, which we encourage on the chat and we – yeah, we encourage people to ask questions and share experiences on the chat. But because of time, we don't turn everyone's microphones off and ask if people want to have a chat because it would just, yeah, that could lead to like another half an hour being added on. But yeah, I think some people do miss that sort of peer to peer interaction that they can have with other teachers and school nurses, but generally it's been received really well and people have mentioned that they're impressed at how smoothly it transitioned to being done online.
- I: So were you planning on doing stuff online anyway or was it lockdown stuff chivvied it along or...?
- R: No, we weren't at all, it was totally down to lockdown. But moving forward, we've decided to actually keep them online, it's kind of allowed more people to sign up and it's also meant that we don't have the carbon footprint of having to travel across the country. It also cuts travel cost for us and for the teachers as well, so there's quite a lot of benefit to it having moved online.
- I: And who's...so from City to Sea then, do you prefer...so you've talked about the environmental and cost benefits, but is it better for you as well, so in terms of the people delivering the sessions, or...?
- R: So previously we had four different teacher trainers and they were in different parts of the country. And then we had...towards the end of the project, we only had two teacher trainers doing online stuff, so it was me and then a lady called Libby. I would say probably we prefer the face-to-face part of doing it in person, but I still love doing it online, and it's definitely kind of streamlined...yeah, it obviously takes a lot less time to just set up everything in your office rather than travelling a few hours each way...

- I: Do you think that would be...
- R: ...yeah...
- I: ...like a selling point for if you wanted or needed more trainers as well?
- R: Yeah, I imagine so.
- I: So you had four and then you got down to two, was that kind of not COVID-related?
- R: So one of them had a family emergency and had to kind of just leave the project. The other one had actually really quickly completed her allocated number of sessions and wasn't particularly tech savvy, so the project managers decided to just leave the remainder of the sessions to Libby and I and that was kind of most comfortable for everybody. So I guess in that sense, I guess with regards the new trainer signing up, it would now be preferable to people that are very comfortable with using Zoom and technology and less comfortable for people who aren't.
- I: Yeah. So is there anything more then about the teaching side of things, and then we can start talking about the campaign side of things. Because it sounds like you moved really quickly and it's working well and you're going to carry on, so are there any barriers or negatives in terms of having to move so quickly and get everything going in the new lockdown situation, is there anything that you used to do that you weren't able to or anything else that you had to change?
- R: Let me just have a think.
- I: There doesn't have to be.
- R: Yeah, nothing else is springing to mind.
- I: Has the way that you engage with the schools in terms of recruiting them to come on to the training, did that have to change, so you talked about networks and...?
- R: Yeah, so we obviously couldn't use those networking events anymore, but what happened with it is that after the first couple of months of it running, lots and lots of the sign-ups were just through word of mouth, so that continued. Yeah, we actually didn't really have to keep pushing for sign-ups because of the scope of the project, we knew that we only had a limited number of spots anyway. So the first year of the project is finished now and we're now on a second year but it's slightly different, it's with a different funding source and in a more specific location now.
- I: So do you get annual funding or is this pot of funding over a certain number of years?

- R: So the first year of the funding, which was the one that started last September, was just for one year, and then the funding that we're using now is over two years, but it's kind of scaled back and spread over two years. So last time I think our target was actually 500 schools but we ended up doing the 700 and something. This time, the target is 500 schools but it's spread over two years instead of one year.
- I: Okay. So you did 750 schools or 700 and whatever in one year.
- R: Yeah, yeah.
- I: Bloody hell. So 500 over two years is going to be super easy then.
- R: Yeah, it should be. Although it's a slightly different challenge because it's very area-specific the next two years, so it will be...we'll have to approach outreach in quite a different way, because there's obviously less schools in that area, so we need a much higher uptake within for those schools.
- I: Is that going to be fairly straightforward do you think or do you think that there's anything related to lockdown and the current way that things are that might have an effect on that?
- R: I think it should be quite straightforward, the only tricky thing at the moment is capacity in schools. I think when we first took the training online, lots of teachers were suddenly they found themselves with much more free time and they were at home, so it was really a convenient time to do extra training. But now schools are back and they're still having to keep adapting to different COVID regulations, they seem more stretched and I think we've seen that with the quite low uptake of the government scheme providing free period products, I think the uptake would be much higher if they weren't having to deal with all these extra things going on.
- I: Yeah, it just seems that every...so my niece has been in and out of quarantine, like the two week social isolation thing, since the schools reopened, I think she's probably done about one week at the school in total over a period of time, it's just ridiculous.
- R: Yeah, it will actually definitely be a challenge, thinking about it, for the teachers to work out a time to deliver this content, because they generally want the full class to be present because it's such a crucial bit of information. So if they've got lots of people in and out and, yeah, that's probably going to affect when they choose to deliver the lessons, they might end up pushing it to the end of the year.
- I: Have you had any feedback from teachers on that sort of thing?
- R: We know that since last September, so the training has ran from last September to this July, out of all of those people, we know that about 60 per cent of them have delivered the content so far, which was higher than

we thought, and some of them probably would have delivered it before lockdown, yeah.

I: Yeah, it's that...I think menstrual health education, because it's meant to be mandatory now as well, isn't it?

R: Yeah, yeah.

I: But we're all worried that it's just going to keep getting pushed back and pushed back.

R: Yeah.

I: Which on one side is understandable but the other it's like everyone's concentrating on mental health and wellbeing and it's like, well, that's part of it, so...

R: Yeah, totally, totally.

I: Yeah, so yeah, we'll see what happens. I've spoken to quite a few people that have links with school and they're all saying very similar things about that, so it's definitely a theme that keeps popping up.

R: Yeah.

I: So how has the campaign side of things been going then?

R: Sorry, just thinking. It's been good, but because it had like a knock-on effect from COVID, all of our team has been down capacity-wise, so we've had to scale some things back a bit. But there have been other opportunities that have come up I guess, so towards the beginning of the first lockdown, we ran like a mini campaign called Quarantine Period which was trying to harness the fact that people were at home and potentially examining some of the things that were previously just normal behaviours to them, to raise awareness of the fact that there are other period options. And like some supermarkets were running really low on the big brand tampons and pads, so for people that were struggling to find them, there was an opportunity to say like, did you know that there are these other things that you can order online and once you've bought them once, you'll have them for, I don't know, five to ten years, you won't have to go to the supermarket and worry if it's running low on stock. So we did a mini campaign around raising awareness of those reusable products which probably wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for lockdown. I mean, we do that more generally in our campaign, but this was a more concerted push during the start of lockdown with extra video content and tips and tricks around finding and using those products. I mean, meeting with manufacturers and retailers and things could obviously continue that they were just online. And in some cases, that was actually easier, because instead of trying to find a day where everyone could travel up to

Manchester or something and it was, yeah, much simpler doing that, I imagine that will continue.

I: Have you been...

R: Yeah...

I: ...because obviously the lockdown situation keeps flagging the inequalities and highlighting that actually period poverty for some people has been worse.

R: Yeah, yeah.

I: And then there's things that pop up every now and then like Wales claiming that period products weren't essential items when they went into their...

R: Yeah.

I: ...lockdown stuff, have you been jumping on those sorts of things as well as part of it or do you have a regular strategy that you would do anyway?

R: So since I think middle of last year, we've been...or maybe it was the start of last year actually, we lobbied the government to make sure that they provided eco-friendly options in what they were offering to schools, which they do now. So we quite often talk about the uptake of that scheme and encouraging schools to make sure that they are tackling period inequality within the school and supporting their students, and that's kind of our link to talking about it I would say. And then we do also cover it in our Rethink Periods [inaudible 22:34] as well, so that's something we talk to teachers quite a lot about, is inequality when it comes to accessing period products and period education. We obviously like celebrate news like Scotland offering free products. Yeah, I would say it's definitely been easier this year to talk about the period inequality and get people on board with decisions because I would say [inaudible 23:06] it wasn't a problem that we faced in the UK, whereas now it's just like undeniable.

I: So do you think that's partly because of the pandemic and the lockdown and the fact that it's exacerbated pretty much all inequalities in society?

R: Yeah, I think so. I think like Plan's research has been really useful in bringing the facts into this. And I think it's part of the general...or this wider movement where periods are just being spoken about more now, whether it's in relation to period inequality or the environmental credentials or around taboos, it's just talked about much more widely in the news now. And the fact that it's coincided with this time when it has become much harder to access products, yeah, I think it's really shone a light on that.



- I: Have you had any...so in the sessions with the teachers, sorry, going back to the teachers again, do they give examples of students that have talked to them about problems or that they think might struggle to access products, do they talk about those sorts of things in the sessions?
- R: They don't give examples, but we do have questions around kind of...
- I: Kind of like scenario things?
- R: They more ask about, how can we talk about this full range of period products when we know that our students might not be able to afford them, or it's likely that they can't afford them. So we have a lot of conversation around making sure that people are unbiased when presenting the products and that they're presenting the pros and cons of all the different types. Yeah, I would say their worry is more around that, around accidentally implying that some products are better than others and then students being like, well, that's great, but what am I meant to do about that.
- I: Yeah. So no one's fed back anything about situations like when the schools were closed or anything like that and people having problems accessing products?
- R: No, they haven't, they haven't specifically fed that back. We've had some schools coming back to us and saying that the phs government scheme hasn't been able to provide enough products for what they need. I think out of...we did a survey recently and about 100 of the teachers and school nurses filled it in and something like 52 per cent of the teachers had ordered products and then 14 per cent had ordered products but they said that the credit wasn't enough for them.
- I: Wow, because it's based on a weird like calculation, isn't it, in terms of...
- R: Yeah. Yeah.
- I: ...yeah, how many products they'll give you, yeah, that's interesting to know.
- R: Mm, yeah, and we've fed it all back to phs that they've got lots of information from teachers now which will hopefully help them get it out to more people.
- I: Yeah, because I know the evaluation of the scheme got put on hold.
- R: Mm, I think it's due quite soon though from what they've said.
- I: Yeah. We'll see, because I applied to run that project, so yeah.
- R: Mmm, you applied for the like contract for it which is what phs got?

I: No, for the...

R: Or for a role?

I: ...evaluation, for BCU to do...

R: Ohh, I see.

I: ...the evaluation of the product scheme, yeah, that all got put on...it was like at the beginning of the tendering process for that and it got put on hold as soon as lockdown happened. So yeah, it's good to know that people are still feeding back the information about...

R: Yeah, yeah.

I: ...the scheme...

R: To be honest, I haven't been particularly kind of – well, the people I've spoken to at phs are lovely, but I asked them, what have you done to reach out to teachers, like have you got a marketing strategy...

I: Yeah, they've done nothing.

R: ...and they seemed a bit flippant about it which is why I decided to do this survey and find out where the teachers find all their information and who do they look to and where do they hear about the scheme if they heard about it. Yeah.

I: Yeah, no, that's great that you've done that because it has been...the whole thing for England has just been a – lots of swear words.

R: Yeah, I agree.

I: Very bad, very, very, very bad.

R: Yeah. And Scotland is really showing us up which is great.

I: I know. And I've been talking to people in Wales as well and it's like the way that Wales are doing it for products within schools, it's like, what the hell are England doing, seriously, just what on earth, yeah.

R: What's the difference there then, how are they...?

I: It seems to be that each council has got their own pot of money...

R: Ah, yeah, okay.

I: And they're running it that way, and it's just like, well, I don't understand why, why haven't they done that here...

- R: Yeah, yeah, it would have just been so much easier...
- I: ...instead of this stupid optional signing in...
- R: ...communicate with the individual schools.
- I: Yeah, exactly, yeah, but yeah, anyway. Anyway, right, so I think we've covered quite a lot in terms of the before situation and the beginning of lockdown and what you're doing now. Have you got...so my final question then is just do you have any other thoughts or comments or things that you think is important to highlight about period inequality particularly during the pandemic situation? Doesn't have to be anything.
- R: No, I can't...the only thing that's coming to mind is more general, which so we did more of a focus on health this year in our campaigning and that just highlighted to me even more that people who can't afford products that don't contain plastic and chemicals and all these potentially nasty ingredients, yeah, they're really bearing the brunt of it on their own bodies as well as the environmental impact. I guess there's also been...I would say because of the pandemic which I think played quite a large role in the whole Black Lives Matter Movement gaining a lot of momentum again, there seems to be more awareness around the other intersecting issues that tie up with period inequality, so matters around race and economic background and things like that.
- I: Yeah, definitely. Yeah, it's been a year of just everyone going, oh, I didn't realise that was still a thing.
- R: Yeah, yeah.
- I: And it's just like, really? Okay.
- R: I guess something else actually that has...it's sort of been there since the beginning of our campaigning but it feels more polarised this year, is peoples' opinions on the language that we use around periods, particularly in relation to talking about people with periods instead of women and girls. And again I don't know if it's the pandemic that kind of like incubated lots of frustration or encouraged people to be more vocal online because they didn't have other outlets or whatever, but yeah, that feels a lot more polarised at the moment. And we still have a lot of support for the way that we've chosen to talk about things, but...
- I: Yeah, because you've done a campaign, like part of your campaign is around that as well, isn't it, about the language, did I see that...?
- R: Yeah, yeah, that's kind of woven through all of our content, our campaign and the schools project. Yeah, it feels like at the start of our campaign we had a bit of backlash and then that quietened down a lot and then towards the middle of this year we've started to get more backlash around it again, I think it tied in with the J. K. Rowling...

I: Yeah, definitely.

R: ...comments as well, yeah, it's hard to pinpoint it's the pandemic or wider goings on...

I: Yeah, pandemic or person. Yeah. Is there anything else that you want to add...?

R: No, I don't think so...

I: I think your point about the intersections of inequality is, yeah, definitely something that keeps coming through from people that I've talked to.

R: Yeah.

I: And it's something that we were all very much aware of before, but I think as you said, it's just become so...it's just kind of constant, isn't it, at the moment, that it's...

R: Yeah.

I: ...getting harder for people to bury their heads in the sand about it, which hopefully that's a good thing that will come out of this.

R: Yeah, it's like this veil has been lifted and suddenly we have to actually look at things properly for what they are.

I: Yeah, yeah, definitely.

R: It's really interesting.

I: Right, so if you don't have anything else that you want to say, I mean, if you do think of anything after we've finished talking or whatever, just drop me an email...

R: Okay. Would it be interesting at all for you to see the results of our latest survey...

I: Yeah, that would be...

R: ...we've got a little...

I: ...if you don't mind sharing it, that would be really, really...

R: ...PDFs, yeah, okay.

I: ...yeah, that would be great.

R: I'll send that over to you.

- I: Yeah, and if I spot some figures or anything and think, oh, that would be useful to include in the report, then I'll come back to you and check that it's alright to do that and I'll make sure that you're cited and recognised as you should do.
- R: Okay, great, thank you.
- I: Okay, so I think that's everything in that case, as I said...
- R: Cool.
- I: ...as I said, just if you do think of anything else, just drop me a line. I'm going to turn the recorder off and then I'll just carry on for a few more minutes.

**End of transcript**