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I: Cool. Okay, so that's recording. So, then [REDACTED], the only things...so when we spoke last time you talked about the products and your donations, so those are the points that I wanted to pick up on again. So, you talked about what you do normally, what a good period does in terms of products and where you get your donations from. Then what you've had to do in the COVID situation. So, could you talk me through that again please?

R: Sure, so pre-COVID what we would do is we had two ways of accessing products basically. The first one was that people sent pads in, so they sent pads to our storage facility, pads that they'd collected, pads that they'd bought. They may have done...like people did a lot of events where they would do like a pad collection instead of tickets, that kind of thing. So, they would all arrive at our storage and we brought in quite a good few thousands pounds worth every few months basically. So, quite a lot of products. Then we would also raise money and then buy products as well, so buy them in bulk.

Then obviously when COVID happened, we couldn't do the first sort of way of working anymore, partly because we couldn't guarantee that the products had been cleaned and sanitised and also this was before...I mean now I think we would have been like that's fine, we just need them in the storage for a week, to quarantine them. But we didn't really know that at the time. But also, that the whole process was basically carried out by volunteers. They would be managed by the operations coordinator, but they would be in storage, unwrapping boxes of pads, logging them, sorting them, packing them into bags and then either taking them to centres themselves or leaving them for drop off, for pick up, all of that. We couldn't bring the volunteers into the storage anymore because obviously there's no way of isolating doing that.

So, we had to change all of that quite quickly and within about two weeks we had our new system set up. So, how we did it or how we continued to do it is we reached out to most of the...or to all of the places that we worked with and said these are the options, we can send to you in bulk. So, we worked with the sort of online store eShow who basically do bulk products. Then we also worked with a load of the small organisers, small companies like [Freda 03:09] and [Flow 03:10], for example, and we said to all of the centres that we work with, we can basically send them to you, or however often you want them, how many you need and that worked really, really well actually. I think it got better for a lot of the centres because it meant that they didn't have pads and want to come and pick the stuff up, they didn't have to do all the organising around who was going to do that.

I mean slightly more difficult I think because if a woman's just overwhelmed anyway. But that sort of became a bit more efficient. We also created a take what you need locker. So, we also had this huge locker full of products that...I mean they're not going to expire, I mean tampons expire but they don't expire that quickly, but we thought why don't we make it possible for people to just come by and pick up what they need and also just sort of have a look around and be able to see other stuff. So, in our storage in

Alexandra Palace, we sort of opened up one of the lockers...I mean you had to go in and get the code and everything, like you couldn't just walk in, but it was basically you say you're going, we give you the code and you just go in and take what you need basically. That was with a sort of an entire range of products, everything from panty liners to pants basically.

So, there was that and people had been using that quite steadily. Most people who were based in North London really. Then the other thing that we decided to do which isn't something we've done before, is individual referrals. Some people now who've started to hear about us, just through wherever they hear, wherever they've heard about BGP, who don't belong to a centre for example, so somebody that doesn't use a food bank maybe or someone that's shielding, can contact us and they'll either do like an email or a quick call basically and we send them individual packs of products from another sort of online shop which they've agreed to work with.

Then we also...there's a, through Islington Refugee Centre we also do a referral...we have fundings to do referrals through that, so we have funding to help with a certain amount of people get their period products. But that's basically how it works now, and we'll probably continue to work in this way for the foreseeable future. It is more efficient actually in many ways. But obviously it doesn't have the sort of nice aspect of having volunteers involved but there's sort of not much we can do about that at this stage. So, yeah that's where we are.

I: So, you've had an increase in take up then haven't you?

R: Yeah. About six times the amount we've given out. So, I think it was in the autumn we had a look at the figures, and we saw that there was six times the amount that we'd given out previously, in previous months. So, a huge, huge increase.

I: Have you seen...so you talked about people like shielding and the individual referrals, have you got new groups of people that wouldn't necessarily have accessed you before?

R: Yeah. Like at the beginning of the lockdown we got quite a lot of messages from NHS workers who found they were not able to find products in the supermarket and then obviously if you go to just the corner shop that's way more expensive. Nurses who were not able to get out of the hospital for however long and then all the shops are closed as well. We're not strictly poverty related, but also I think that an element of that does come into it. Because I think if you have money and wealth then there's always a way to access something, if that makes sense.

I: Yeah.

R: We were finding that people were not able to do that.

- I: Yes, it's the access issue isn't it.
- R: Sorry?
- I: It's the access isn't it more than the money.
- R: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, if you don't have a never-ending supply of cash then things just become a bit more difficult to access, but you're not strictly living in poverty. Then we also have just...we have had many more just individuals including students who have come to us and said they're struggling. A lot of students...I sort of read something in [inaudible 07:53] today and this sort of feeds into what we're seeing is that students are not having jobs anymore, that they could have had in non-pandemic times, in hospital or retail and are really struggling with cash. So, we've had some requests for products from them. Then yeah like I said, just individuals.
- We had quite a few people at the beginning of lockdown...I haven't seen the emails sent, so I don't know if you wanted to do like an extra interview with [redacted] o's our Operations Assistant, I can definitely set that up with you. But more people who were just saying they'd lost their jobs, they just can't afford this stuff anymore. All people who were already living in poverty and have just heard of us basically. So, it's basically gone far beyond asylum seekers and refugee centres now.
- I: Have you been getting...so I know you still cover London predominantly don't you, but do you get requests from other parts of the country as well?
- R: Yeah, so I mean the good thing about changing the way that we work to sending stuff out via eShow has meant that we can reach different parts of the country. So, we're now sort of working all over the country with different centres because we can get products to them in a way that we couldn't before. Or in a way that we hadn't before. Maybe not couldn't, but in a way that we hadn't before.
- I: Because I think I spotted...do you work with Brushstrokes up here in [Collingwell 09:24]?
- R: Yes we do, and we do an education programme with them I think as well.
- I: Oh, do you? Yeah, they're just down the road from where I live.
- R: Oh, brill.
- I: Yeah. I know one of their volunteers is a friend of a friend, so yes.
- R: Oh, funny.
- I: We've given them donations and furniture and stuff. So, yeah I spotted it on the survey that I sent out. I was like oh Brushstrokes, I know them.

- R: Yeah, I think they're quite involved actually because I think there's only a few people doing education programmes though. They must be quite good if they're doing that as well.
- I: Yeah. That was nice to see. Okay, so can you tell me then about the donation side of things. So, you talked about how you would normally get pads donated. Obviously then that became a bit more problematic. So, have you switched now to just getting money donations? Or are you still taking pads? Or how has that changed?
- R: Yeah, we're not taking pads, but they still come. I don't know where they're coming from. I think they're probably coming from people who have donated to us in the past and maybe don't get our emails or don't have social media and so aren't seeing the messaging about not sending products. But it has reduced a lot and we are specifically saying to people, look please don't send us pads anymore because we can't physically do anything with them. Even our sort of take what you need locker, most of that is the stuff that's coming from companies, because then it's just...it's neat, it's in boxes, it's easy for people to take, rather than having to look and sort it. But yeah we basically...we ask for money now and that just goes on not only just the admin but just the pads as well, in the way that it wasn't before.
- I: How about your fundraising stuff that you do, because you normally do quite a lot of events don't you?
- R: Well people do events for us normally. We don't run that many just because of capacity. But people had been running a lot of events which really made a difference to our income, which obviously stopped. However, there have been other ways that people have picked up their ways of donating. So, there's been some birthday fundraisers on Facebook which is really useful. Then other things, people doing sponsored things but inside. Then a few companies donating their CSR cash or whatever. But yeah we've really sort of missed out on not having people just do events for us. That would normally be really popular around March obviously which just stopped last year and then again this year is going to be difficult. So, we are relying more on corporate I guess donations, maybe not corporate but company, small company donations, people's birthday fundraisers and just people doing standing orders as well.
- I: Yeah, the Facebook donations thing is interesting.
- R: Yeah. I think a lot of people sort of see that...have seen in lockdown that they have what they need and so...I don't know, maybe we just don't want anymore stuff and so it's really nice to see them sort of using their day of celebration as something to help us out. It's really nice.
- I: Yeah. So, I don't think I've got any other questions. The only other point that I wanted to pick up with you was that you said that the main barrier for you was that you still don't know who you don't know about in terms of

reach. Can you just expand on that a bit more in terms of the impact? Well, I guess you don't know what the impact of that is because you don't know who the people are.

R: Yeah, so because we work with centres rather than individuals which is firstly just far easier for us to get things out to people but is also I think more beneficial to people who are using the services because these are places that are already accessing basically. There's not a whole other thing they have to do to get period products. This is places they're getting food, this is places they're getting clothing, or other sort of support. So, one of the things is, which is something that we're trying to sort of work out this year, is we don't really have accurate demographics of the people that we're working with. Aside from knowing these are people who are asylum seekers, these people are refugees, they're people who are living in poverty. So, there's that issue.

But in terms of our monitoring and evaluation, others seem to be quite...relatively comfortable with that. So, that's quite good. But we also just...we're not even touching the sides with the amount of people that need our services. The problem with period poverty, calling it that is that it is so very secret for the people that are experiencing it. So, it's all very well as, being very shouty around the charity industry and that kind of thing, but actually for the people who are experiencing it, it's not as easy as just knowing where to go. Like people just don't know we exist a lot of the time. Or the other charities. So, we kind of don't know where these people are that we're not reaching.

I mean we also just don't...we just don't have the funds to get to everybody, which I wish we did, but we don't. We don't know how many undocumented people there are as well, especially working with asylum seekers. There are people who have then been...had their claim rejected but can't go back to the country they've come from because of danger, so they may still be in the UK, they may not have a way of accessing anything. We certainly don't know how to access them. So, yeah it's really tricky that we don't quite know the numbers of how many people are experiencing poverty, let alone period poverty, really in the UK.

I: Yes. The dual stigma that there is around not only is it poverty, but it's also to do with menstruation and that's very shrouded and still quite secretive.

R: Exactly. That's why we've always been so keen to be...well not even keen, adamant that that's where we work with centres. Because if someone has worked up the courage to go to a foodbank, it should just then be really easy to get her period products. Like that's where they should be. It shouldn't be an ask for someone to have to do that double effort. They should just be with all the other essentials. That's why we've always been really adamant that working with centres is our priority and referrals are the sort of second...that that's the way we'll reach people if...an individual referral, if they can't get to a centre.

- I: Yeah, again it's coming back down to that, they just need to be viewed as essential items and then it wouldn't be a problem.
- R: Exactly.
- I: Well, it would but not as much of a problem and in the same sort of way. If they're just there anyway. Yeah.
- R: Yeah, exactly.
- I: What do you think about...this is going a bit off track, about...so Scotland and Wales refer to it now as period dignity. So, they're scrapped period poverty.
- R: I mean I don't like the term period poverty in itself anyway, because I think there is the lack of recognition therefore sometimes that it's a symptom of poverty. It's not something that exists in itself. I know that there are...
- I: You use menstrual records though don't you? Do you prefer menstrual records?
- R: We use menstrual [inaudible 17:52] period equity. I have always really hated the use of dignity within the period.
- I: I know, I don't like it either.
- R: I think quite often you say the same.
- I: Yes.
- R: Yeah, I think it's colonialist. I think it's imperialist. I think it's patronising.
- I: Yeah, it's awful.
- R: I think we don't get to tell people who has dignity and who doesn't have dignity. I think this is something far, far bigger than just periods, but I think it's something I'll probably explore, I don't know when. I mean I would love to do like a PhD on dignity, the use of dignity in the charity sector or something. I think it's a really patronising way of talking about something so integral to so many of us. I think what we're essentially saying is some of us have dignity and some of us don't. That is a really sort of grotty way of talking about it and it's almost always white women who talk about dignity and therefore women of colour or black women who are being told they don't have dignity. Which I think again that's the colonialism of it.
- I: Yeah, because it's noise...
- R: Also, dignity doesn't relate, doesn't necessarily relate to cleanliness.
- I: No, not at all.

- R: I realise that's a human right. That's how they talk about it. But like...sorry not cleanliness I should say, as in not having products. That isn't where someone finds their dignity necessarily. So, yeah I think it's a really problematic term. Personally, I don't think there is much point in sort of battling inwards. I think it's a really imperfect movement. I think the term period poverty is imperfect in itself and I think there are bigger battles to fight. I think we've done enough on language for now and I'll continue to talk about it if someone asks me about it, but it's not a battle that I'm willing to spend energy over when we could be going much further outwards, while trying to get the movement perfect, if that makes sense.
- I: Yeah, totally. I just find it interesting that every now and then someone attempts to kind of revamp it in a way that sounds a bit more palatable.
- R: Well, there's a new one as well. I got an email the other day that there's an American one they're calling menstrual freedom.
- I: Oh, for god's sake.
- R: Because they don't think mental equity cuts it. I'm like, okay fine, but like...
- I: I've heard...the one that I really dislike is someone is trying to push menstrual vitality.
- R: What?
- I: It's like, oh fuck off, just fuck off.
- R: Menstrual vitality. That sounds like a health drink. Yeah, I just think like let's work with what we've got. I don't like the term period poverty, but people realise what it is, know what it is when they hear it and therefore...
- I: Yes, exactly.
- R: ...let's make use of it and go with it. Then menstrual equity I think is better, or period equity and I think a lot of people are taking that on. Even period equality I'm fine with, but yeah dignity, no thank you. That's a banned word in PQP.
- I: Yeah, it's the use of the language in it is always very interesting.
- R: I think it says a lot about the person doing the work, which sort of...that's enough for me basically. Where's your antiracism work, if that's a phrase that you think is suitable. Or are you doing enough, that's what I would want to know. But yeah, I am lucky enough to be surrounded by this world for the past four years, so I've realised that I have the time to think about this stuff in a way that maybe other people don't. So, I think...yeah.

I: Yes. I think as well it depends on your environment, where you're based as well doesn't it. So, we're very much cultural places that we live and what we work in. These kind of bizarre attempts to change phrasing seem to come from places that aren't diverse at all. So, it's like...yeah. Then they get the kudos and the recognition as they would because it's all like you say, white feminists which get...

R: Yeah. Oh, [REDACTED] have you read the book White Feminism?

I: No, it's on my list.

R: Oh, you must.

I: Yes, it's on my list.

R: Yeah honestly it's one of the best books I've read in maybe a decade. It's so good, I think you'll love it.

I: Oh, it will make me angry. I'm trying to reduce my reading of things that make me angry.

R: I don't think it will. A lot of it has felt to me like...not vindication, validation.

I: Yeah. Oh, that's good. I like those sorts of books.

R: Yeah, so it might not feel...it might not make you angry. I mean it might make you a bit angry, so maybe yeah if you're not doing angry books at the moment then don't. But a lot of it is validation where you're like oh shit, this is what I've been thinking but haven't known how to talk about.

I: Yeah. Oh, that's interesting.

R: Also, just stuff that you're like, woh, I did not know that.

I: Yeah. I might give it a crack then. Give it another couple of months of decompressing with Jonathan Van Ness's biography.

R: Oh, I love JVN.

I: Yeah, his book's great, because you just read it in like the way that he speaks, so it's like he's with you.

R: Yeah.

I: Even though he's [inaudible 24:03] pretty awful stuff, but yeah.

R: Yeah I must get it. But yeah, that's what I think about dignity.

I: Yes, good. Me too. [REDACTED] would have a lot of stuff to say about that as well in terms of white saviour complex and everything.

R: Oh, yeah. If she ever wants to talk to me more about that stuff I want to hear her thoughts basically.

I: Yeah. Well, her PhD was on that, so.

R: Was it?

I: Yeah.

R: Can she send it to me? Will you ask her?

I: Yeah, I will.

R: I would love that. There's so much white saviourism in this movement. But we know that.

I: Yes, we do. Right, thank you so much for your time again.

R: Oh, it's a pleasure.

End of transcript