

# Transcribed by: 1st Class Secretarial Services

---

<b>File Name(s)</b>	58391_DS700026
<b>Total Recording Length</b>	33 minutes
<b>Number of Participants</b>	2
<b>Final Word Count</b>	5,118
<b>Total Number of Pages</b>	14
<b>Date Completed</b>	04 January 2021

- I: So, we'll talk for as long as you want to talk for really. And the way that it's been working, is it kind of naturally goes through the three stages of what was it like, you know, kind of normal provision, and then what happened during lockdown, what's happening now, and then, is there anything in the future, that you think might affect stuff.
- R: Okay. So, if I talk you through our journey with it, and then if any questions come out of that just pop them in and I'll answer them, is that alright?
- I: Yeah, that's great.
- R: Yeah? Okay, so it must have been about two years ago, I established a local partnership with [Wings 00:00:51] Cymru, which is a local charity in Bridgend, and I met with [REDACTED], the CEO of Wings Cymru, and she's been fantastic. So, they agreed that they would provide us with all disposable sanitary products, and they run a programme called Wings Ambassadors, so if you're a Wings Ambassador it means that you have access to those sanitary products. So, if any of the students walked past somebody with a Wings badge, they would be able to ask them for sanitary products, and they would give them to them with no further questions.
- I: Oh, right, that's good.
- R: Sorry?
- I: I say, that sounds really good.
- R: Yeah, so we got curriculum staff and business support staff, all across the organisation, to volunteer to be Wings Ambassadors, and once they shared their interest, we gave them all their own pack of sanitary products, so if any student saw somebody with this badge, they could just go up and say, oh, could I have sanitary products, and they would just be given them.
- So that started our journey really. And there was a lot of work that went into promoting the Wings Ambassadors, making sure the students knew what they were and why they were there. And we've utilised our social media pages, learning experience social media pages, so you can actually look at those yourself, 'cause they're open pages.
- I: Oh yeah, great, I will have a look.
- R: We've got them on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.
- I: Is that under, just Bridgend College?
- R: If you go onto Facebook and put learner experience, our page should come up.

- I: Ah, okay. Yeah, I will do that.
- R: So, we've done lots of promotion on there. The students generally follow us on Instagram, the parents and staff follow us on Facebook, and the other colleges then follow us on there generally.
- I: Yeah, there's a definite age, isn't there? An age difference between the social media platforms?
- R: Yeah, between the demographics.
- I: Yeah.
- R: And who's kind of following. So, that was our first space, and that was really positive, and the feedback was really, really positive, although there was a handful, it was like one or two staff, that came to me saying, it's great that you've made sanitary products available, but what about the environment, what about the sustainable options? And I said, well at the moment, we're at a phase where we've established this partnership, and this is what they're providing. But, if we access any funding, then that would be the next phase of it.

So, the following academic year then, we were provided with £40,000 from Welsh Government to address period poverty. So, lots of our neighbouring colleges, they were flooding the colleges with disposable products, which is what we had already done. So we were at a stage by then, to actually be a lot more innovative with the money, because we'd already flooded the college, and everyone knew who the Wings Ambassadors were. We had plenty of stock, all that was set up. So, with the government funding, we approached [Silly Panda 00:04:21] which is another local organisation, and she creates her own eco-friendly pads, including the wash bags. She provides the [organicups 00:04:33]. So I met with Becca and I introduced her to Wings Cymru, and we developed a three way partnership, so that it was something that we could build on. And we purchased 500 washbags that were complete with three reusable sanitary pads, they were different sizes, one organicup, a pack of [biscuits 00:05:00], a stain remover bar, a bar of soap and a drying strap and an organicup. So, it was a starter pack for people, you know, it wouldn't be enough pads to cover your entire cycle, but it was a started pack, and if you were to use the organicup you actually wouldn't need many of the pads actually.

So, that's what we decided with [REDACTED], that we would purchase those. And then [REDACTED] the Student Engagement Lead within the team, set up a GRL group, a GRL society, so that is actually a female empowerment society, and she linked in with students who were doing their Welsh Baccalaureate and their project was focused on sustainable sanitary products. So, there was a group of about six of them, of varying ages, between 16, and I think the older two were near their 30s, and they were

our focus group in terms of trialling the products to see how they got on with them, and to provide feedback about what the products were like. They told us what kind of colour they wanted everything, because it was decided, there was a very large debate over what colour the washbags should be, because we actually wanted it gender neutral, to accommodate trans students who maybe not be identifying as female, but would still experience periods.

So, we went with the green colour for the washbag, and that included the patterns on the pads. Some of them are feminine, but there's a whole host of them that are very gender neutral. And then they decided on what needed to go in the bag. How to promote it, so they wanted talks to be delivered to groups across the college, but they didn't want to exclude the male students. And they certainly wanted to promote these sanitary packs in male toilets as well, because what they were saying was, they really want their boyfriends and partners to understand what they're using and how they need to use them, and how important they are. So, we responded to that, and then we did a whole campaign then, to launch the sanitary products so lots of people became familiar with them. But, prior to that, we invited Becca in to deliver talks to numerous groups about the eco-friendly alternative, and how beneficial it would be for them, not in terms of just the environment, but for their bodies as well, and how to use these products. So, the take up we had from that was fantastic, and they all put their names down, but then we went into lockdown. So, we didn't have the packs delivered at that point, we had to wait until June or July, so it was the very end of the academic year, when we actually received them.

So, during lockdown, what we did, was keep pushing out on our social media, if anyone needs sanitary products, please let us know in Wellbeing. So, everybody that came forward, requesting sanitary products, me and Nicole actually drove round and hand delivered them and just put plastic bags of sanitary packs on doorsteps, knocked on the door and left. And then we'd email saying we'd left them on the doorstep at this time. And that was really good, and quite a number of students utilised that service, some on a number of occasions, which was really positive.

I: Do you have an idea of how many? Do you know how many people use your products in school anyway, do you keep tabs on it, or do you just...?

R: We keep tabs on who picks up a pack. So, I will be able...I've got the...let me just pull it up on my spreadsheet. So, we've given out, well over now, 100 eco-friendly packs.

I: Is that still during lockdown, so when you got them?

R: Well, it's since we got back.

I: Since coming back?

R: So it's this academic year, we've given out, I think it's closer to 200 now, actually. 'Cause what we did, was everybody who attended talks before lockdown, we had a list of who wanted one. So, when we returned into college, we posted them all out, 'cause some of them weren't students anymore.

I: Yeah, of course, yeah.

R: But when the initiative started, they were students, they did have the talk and they wanted them. So, we posted them all out to them, and then this year now, we've made them readily available. So, they're just, either tutors or students actually, come up and collect them. But, what we encourage is that they will have a talk before they use the products, because they need to understand how to use them, you know? It's very different to a disposable product.

I: It sure is.

R: And everyone in the Wellbeing Team, actually use the sustainable products, so we're able to answer all questions about it.

I: Oh, that's great. Yeah.

R: Like, we're not promoting something that we've no idea about. We all use them.

I: Have you done any sessions with any of the other teaching staff, so they'd be able to do the same kind of thing?

R: We haven't actually, with other staff. It's something that we could consider. The reason why we've kind of just held it ourselves, is because we do use them, and I think it is more authentic if you're using them, to promote them. And it's about that conversation then, really, of do you want to deliver these talks, you actually use them.

And the way it's been over the last, like this academic year, it's been very, very difficult, and tutors have got an awful lot on, so normally we would automatically link in with curriculum staff, and the key people to do this with actually, would be the Wings Ambassadors, so as like an extension of support, that would be the next thing really, is training the Wings Ambassadors to deliver the talks about the packs. But, as it stands at the moment, a tutor puts a request into the Wellbeing email, and then Nic responds, so either myself, [REDACTED], will deliver the talk. And between the four or five of us, we are able to cover the...requests. I can't think of the word I was looking for, sorry.

I: I know what you mean.

R: Let me see if I can find how many packs we gave out over lockdown.

- I: And you were promoting that purely through social media, or did you email people as well?
- R: Yeah, social media, but we also emailed all the tutors as well, just to say, please let your students know that we can provide sanitary products, and we've got quite a number of societies now, so we've put it as a message in all the Google classrooms, remember we can provide sanitary products if you need them. So, you know, all the avenues that were available to us, we accessed them to be able to share it.
- I'm just going to count these students a minute...so 13 students we gave out to over lockdown.
- I: Is that reflective of your normal take up of things, or...?
- R: It's actually a lot more.
- I: Oh, really?
- R: Yeah, it's actually more, because we...I suppose actually, we wouldn't really know, through the Wings Ambassadors, 'cause there's so many different places they can access them normally, we wouldn't really have tabs on it. But, I wouldn't say we had people coming in regularly for sanitary products, but the fact that we've promoted it, and said we can deliver them if you want to, they have taken us up on it.
- I: And have they asked more than once, or has it been like a one off?
- R: Yeah, so a couple of them have asked more than once.
- I: Yeah, that's interesting. So, that's kind of what you were doing during lockdown?
- R: That's what we were doing during lockdown, and then since we've come back, the disposal sanitary products have got no fanfare, so they can access them, they can have them, but they're just in a bog standard kind of paper bag, that we give out, whereas the reusable sanitary products, they're a lot prettier, we promote them a lot more. So it's available...  
[interruption, son comes into room 00:14:15 – 00:14:55]
- I: So you're pushing the reusables, yeah?
- R: Yeah, so we do do a lot more fanfare around the sanitary products, because we're almost breaking down barriers around the ickiness that some people feel around it. And some people it doesn't suit, you know, they don't want to deal with an organicup that's full of menstrual blood. They don't want to see it all on a pad, and then have to wash it. So, for some people, it really isn't for them. But, we just try and talk very openly and honestly, and what we have found really good is, like now that they've

been in circulation all of this academic year, we are getting students coming back now, saying, oh, I'm trying them, they've changed my life, I haven't had to buy any pads since I've started using them, it's completely comfortable, it was a bit strange getting used to it when I started, but now I'm really, really comfortable with them, and so glad I tried it.

So, when you've got students saying that to students, you start to see a shift in their thought processes, I suppose, and kind of say, okay, I'll give it a try, 'cause we're not saying that, if you've tried them and you don't like them, then you have to keep using them. But we do only make one eco-friendly pack available to each student. So, what we're doing now, we just had a meeting about it recently, is, 'cause we've had the government funding again, [is bolstering 00:16:26] the packs, because there's not enough pads in there, and a lot of students, they don't even wear tampons, let alone trying an organicup which looks a bit scary.

So, we're going to bulk up that, and I've spoken to [REDACTED] in Silly Panda and just explained that, in terms of her products, I want her products in the bags, because they're so high quality, but I'm going to top them up with reusable sanitary pads from other agencies and businesses, because it's only her on her own, she won't let anyone else, so the actual pads, she gets people to cut out for her, but she won't let anyone else sew them. So, you know, she can't keep up with the demand really, so we're going to get a delivery of other sanitary pads just to bulk up the packs, so that they become even more sustainable, because at least then it's not just a started pack, they will actually see them through their cycle.

I: Yeah, that's great. What about period pants, have you...?

R: Do you know, that's something that we're due to purchase, because again, we all speak quite openly to friends and family about the use of reusable products now, and we've had quite a few friends of the team say, oh, the period pants are really, really good. So, we're going to be adding those in, and buying some just to give another alternative option.

I: Yeah, that's brilliant. So, do you think then, this is going to be how you're going to continue then, have the disposable ones available, but have more options with the reusable?

R: Yeah. I think the disposable ones have to be made available, we just don't sing and dance about them like the reusable products. And I think that's fair. They know that they can get them from us, and we give them the option. So, we explain that we do have two types of sanitary pack, and if they choose to go for the sustainable option, then we give them a talk. And then if they come back and say, oh, it was absolutely excellent, it's like, oh, who's your tutor? And we'll link in with the tutor, and deliver the talk to the group, and then we'll get, 'cause it's amazing how much it's starting to snowball, now that people are actually using them, and talking to others about them.



Like we had Newport Council contact us, and say, we're just starting to lead on period dignity, we've had a look to see how active people are on promoting sustainable products, and you're the one that came up when we Googled it.

I: Mmm, famous!

R: So we've had a really good conversation with them in Newport Council, to say what we've done, and shared ideas about how we've managed to reach people and like the conversation around involving parents as well, because for some of our young students, who are 16, 17, they may not do their own washing, so they need to have conversations with whoever they live with, about what these pads are, how you wash them, and all those kinds of things.

So yeah, that was really interesting, and we had a parent just randomly asking, can I have one for my daughter, she attends one of the schools in Bridgend? So, we kind of had to explain, well, no, they are only available for Bridgend College students but here are the links to the providers that we use. So, we kind of do it that way.

I: Yeah. So when you sent the reusable packs out in June and July, did you get any feedback from students at that point, in terms of if it was helping, like because people were in lockdown or anything like that, any feedback on it?

R: Some of them [had 00:20:31] already left by then, so we have got a feedback form, and it's gone out to everybody, but it just depends whether they've actually managed to respond. But, I mean, we have had feedback, and it's extremely positive.

I: And so you've been helping the rest of the council then with their stuff?

R: Newport Council.

I: Yeah, and you've been getting parents asking for packs for other siblings in the family, which is great.

R: They didn't even have a sibling in the college, they just live in Bridgend and they were in one of the local schools.

I: So it sounds like you're quite well set up then, like, going forward, and you're just going to expand on what you're doing?

R: Yeah, we're definitely established, and we're running the GRL group, well a society, I've got to remember to call it a society, we're running the GRL Society again this year, and it's always mentioned in there, and we give students an opportunity to share their own views on the eco-friendly products really, and how we can continue to engage students in trying something new, basically, for the good of them, and for the good of the



environment, because it's amazing how different your period is, when you're actually using a reusable product. It's actually quite mind-blowing, so yeah, the more young ladies we can get to consider them and use them, the better.

I: Do you incorporate it into, like RSE or anything like that yet?

R: We don't have...

I: Oh, you wouldn't have it until you're in college, yeah.

R: [inaudible 00:22:19] We've got tutorial programmes.

I: Of course, you're at college aren't you?

R: [But there's an awful lot... 00:22:22] so we don't at the moment. It's something that we could move towards, it's just that the tutorial programme is always a bit tricky in FE colleges, if I'm honest, 'cause we've got an online e-learning kind of tutorial programme, that is already set up, that students access, and then they have the tutorial sessions with the tutor. The only way that would work really is through the tutor, and doing the talks around using sustainable products, which is what we're doing.

I: Sorry, that was my [bad 00:22:57] I completely forgot that you were a college, and not a secondary school.

R: No, that's okay.

I: Yeah, so it works completely differently.

R: Yeah, it does, yeah.

I: So, those sorts of things are done by the tutorials, and the tutors get in touch with you, and then you speak to the groups?

R: Yes.

I: Yeah, okay, right-o.

Right. Great. So, in terms of going into lockdown, 'cause have you been, well, we're all in lockdown at the moment, again, aren't we?

R: It feels like it.

I: And I know Wales has had, like stop starts, and these circuit breakers, and those sorts of things as well. So, has any of that had an impact on what you've been able to do?

- R: It has, in terms of we were due to have, in March, we were due to have, instead of Women's History Month, we tag-lined it, Women's [Herstory 00:23:55] Month. And that was going to be the huge launch of the sanitary products, the reusable sanitary products, that everyone could pick up on that day, and then get lots more people in to the talk, so that we could get more out. We were hoping to hand loads more packs than we were actually able to. So, that affected it, and it delayed the delivery of the actual packs, because [REDACTED] has got her own business, but she's also, she actually had a baby during lockdown as well, so there were lots of different reasons as to why there was a bit of a delay on getting the products. So it definitely had an impact. But, like I say, what we did, before we actually went on lockdown, was put all the disposable products that we had, in all the reception and student services areas, so every time students came in, they could take a pack of sanitary products with them, just to make sure they had as much of a stock as they could have, over lockdown, and then we pushed out, saying, if anybody needs any, please let us know, and we'll deliver them.
- I: Okay, yeah. Yeah, I think a lot of people suddenly thought, oh, we need to make these as visible as possible, so people can take them before?
- R: Yeah, absolutely, and that was the only way we could do it, 'cause we couldn't go around all the different course areas, and there are Wings Ambassadors all across the college anyway, that were being encouraged to hand out their stock. So yeah, we didn't have any left, put it that way, by the time we came back, we've just had another deliver from Wings come here now, to make sure that we've got them all available.
- I: Oh really, so you ran out of them?
- R: Yeah, yeah, we gave them all out.
- I: That's good as well.
- R: Yeah, I can't stand having stuff that we don't, you know, you acquire things for students, and then you don't get them out, I don't understand that. The other thing that we've stocked up on is spare knickers and tights and leggings and things, because we have had instances where people have either been caught short, or they have actually had an accident, so we've stocked up on a few things like that as well.
- I: And how do you let people know that those are available, is that through the Wings Ambassadors as well?
- R: Through the Wings Ambassadors, but we've got a drop in every single day in the Wellbeing Hubs, so...
- I: Ah, so that's another way that people can access stuff?

- R: Yes. And I think it helps, because we're all very open, like, we've got three men in the team, and they all speak openly about, well we've got two Engagement Leads, one is male, one is female, but the male Student Engagement Lead has given talks about how you use the products as well, with no kind of embarrassment or stigma around it, which is really, really helpful.
- I: Oh, that's brilliant.
- R: And he kind of owns it, and says, I know I haven't got personal experience, but I am able to tell you how to use products, if you're happy for me to?
- And they actually quite like him delivering it.
- I: Oh, that's great.
- R: I wouldn't say they prefer it to a woman, but they definitely like it that he gives the talk.
- I: Yeah, and is he quite confident in doing it, and answering questions and stuff as well?
- R: Yeah, very confident.
- I: Oh, that's really good.
- R: Yeah. To be honest, all the male members of the team, yeah, they don't get fazed by things like that. I think that's part of being in a wellbeing team you kind of can't get phased by personal stuff.
- I: Yeah. Have you had feedback from the boys, so I know you were saying that you've put things in the boys' toilets, have you had any feedback from any of them on what they thought about it, or if anyone's taken them and given them to their girlfriend or their sister, or taken them home?
- R: Not really, no, we haven't had [feedback 00:28:02] no, we have had comments when they'd attended the talks. And they start off kind of saying, oh, I don't know why I'm here, I shouldn't need to be in here, to being quite interested. Because it is interesting. It is quite an interesting subject. So, you can see the tide turn in terms of them sat there thinking, oh, this is nothing to do with me, and then slowly engaging and participating in the talk, which is really good.
- I: Yeah, that is good.
- R: Yeah.
- I: Do they go from being a bit giggly and standoffish to...

R: Yeah, very standoffish.

I: Yeah.

R: Why am I here? Why am I looking at these things?

I: Yeah, they're still like that at university, when you start talking about it.

R: Oh, wonderfully, they are.

But, you know, my sister in law uses eco-friendly products, and my brother, he couldn't stand me breast-feeding when my two were little, but he's got to a point now, where he could stand a conversation between me and his wife talking about sanitary products, and he was absolutely fine. So, I think men have just got to be exposed to it.

I: Yeah exactly, it's demystifying it all, isn't it, and just making it kind of just not very interesting?

R: Yeah, they [talk about the stigma around 00:29:18] mental health, but there really is a stigma around periods...

I: Yeah, there is.

R: ...and being able to talk openly about them.

I: Yeah, definitely.

R: So, it has been interesting, and we're getting more and more students that are coming up to Wellbeing and asking for products, and then think, oh, what's that? Because there's like a Pride flag on the wall. Oh, I didn't realise you supported LGBT? Yes, we've got an LGBTQ+ Pride Society, would you like to be part of it? Oh, yes please, I'd love to...and it starts the conversation, so they know, you know, we've worked really, really hard to move the Wellbeing Team, from kind of like a crisis driven reactive service, to something that's very preventative, proactive and engaging. And I think, you can just feel that when they're coming for something specific, and then opening up the conversation into different aspects of wellbeing, and it's really enjoyable.

I: Yeah, oh, that's great. Yeah, that's the perk of the job isn't it, is when that sort of thing happens.

R: Yeah, absolutely.

I: That's brilliant.

Right, I don't think I've got anything else to ask you, and it sounds like you're in a pretty good position at the moment. Is the funding that you got from the government, is that for this academic year?

R: It was for last academic year, and this academic year.

I: Yeah, I lose track, with all the different pots of money.

R: No, I know, I know, [it's difficult to keep track of 00:30:49].

I: 'Cause I know, is it in Wales where schools, colleges, have specific money for period poverty, but then the councils also have it as well?

R: Yeah, that's right.

I: Yeah. 'Cause Wales is that way...

R: [inaudible 00:31:04] what we were doing as well, and established a similar partnership to us actually.

I: Yeah, that's great. It's nice to see that people are, that it's becoming integrated.

R: No, it's really good, yeah.

I: And then there's just crappy old England, which is just a shambles.

R: Oh dear.

I: But there you go.

R: I know, and then there's Scotland, who have made them free for everybody.

I: I know, I know, so it's like we've got the three degrees, and then there's poor old Northern Ireland, where everyone forgets about them.

R: No one talks about anything.

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

R: No problem.

I: And again, thank you so much for the rearranging, I'm sorry about having to do that.

R: Not a problem at all. If you need anything more from me, just give me a shout, okay?

I: Yeah, I will do. That would be great. I might come to you about Phase Two, 'cause it might be really good to speak to some of your students.

R: Yeah, we've got quite a few, we've got testimonials written, but you could speak to students as well, and go to our GRL group.

I: And your ambassadors, and, the GRL Society, that would be great to speak to.

R: Yeah, the ambassadors, yeah, that's fine.

I: Yeah, okay, fantastic. Right, I will let you get on with your day, I'll let you go and talk to your poor son, and give him some attention.

R: [Oh, a tricky one, alright, thank you 00:32:25].

I: Alright, thanks a lot [REDACTED]

R: Right, thank you. You take care of yourself.

I: You too, okay, bye-bye.

R: Right, bye now.

**End of transcript**