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I: Thank you both of you. This is the first double interview that I've done for this, so thanks so much for your time. And as I said, hopefully my internet connection will hold out. It can take up to an hour, obviously because there are the two of you and I want to give both of you the opportunity to say whatever it is you want to talk about. I've got some questions and then really it's kind of a natural pre-March last year, gosh a year already, and then the timeline through the pandemic, to what you're doing now. I see that it was your one year birthday yesterday, is that right?

R1: Yes, we're not sure exactly what day, so we're just celebrating it for a week.

I: Okay. Are you based in Scotland?

R1: Yes, we're based in Perth and we serve all of Perth and Kinross.

I: Is that where you're based, Scotland?

R1: Yes, in Perth.

I: Why can't I hear you?

R1: [REDACTED], can you hear me?

R2: I can hear you, yes.

I: I can hear you now.

R1: Those seem to be the magic words. We're based in Perth and we serve all of Perth and Kinross.

I: I don't know if you heard I was asking about your location. So it's Scotland, isn't it, that you're based?

R1: Yes, it's Perth and we serve all of Perth and Kinross. You can't hear me again, can you?

I: No. Put your cameras back on. It seemed to go wrong when you turned your cameras off. Okay, try again.

R1: Yes, we're based in Perth and we serve all of Perth and Kinross.

I: Perth and Kinross, I got the last bit of that. We might need to switch this to a different platform. I don't know why it's being so awkward. Can you two hear each other when you speak?

R2: Yes.

I: Is there a delay or anything?

R1: No.

I: So, it's my internet provider.

R1: Oh goodness.

I: Right, let's try this one. Okay, tell me about your project. I'm not going to ask about Scotland again.

R1: Well, the project is in Scotland, in Perth. The project as it currently stands started almost exactly a year ago. There was lots of stuff that went before that, but at the moment it's delivering period products to people at home essentially. We have a team of volunteers. We take orders from folk who would like either reusable or single-use products and we deliver to them at home.

So, we have three ways of engaging with the service: there's a collection point outside our premises in Perth city centre, so that's just single-use products and people can just come and pick stuff up and take it away with them, and that's there 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We have our home delivery service for one-off orders, so people can text or email or send us a message on social media and ask for anything in our range of products. So, that's right across the spectrum from liners, disposable liners, right through to period pants. And then we have a subscription service, so for the range of single-use products people can sign up to have them delivered once a month and so they know they're going to be coming month on month.

So, I go in each week and pack up all the deliveries that we've got, get in touch with our volunteers and they drive them out across all of Perth and Kinross. There are some places that we still post to. Perth and Kinross is vast and there are so many areas that it would be an entire working day to drive up and back. As much as it would be a lovely drive it wouldn't be the best use of everyone's time or travel expenses.

I: You said that you set this up a year ago more or less, was that something that you were planning on doing anyway or was it because of COVID?

R1: No. I realise I'm talking a lot, [REDACTED] joined us six months.

R2: I'm hearing this and learning.

R1: [REDACTED], my manager and I, work in the third sector interface, which is the department that started the Tampon Taxi, and they're a community planning partner locally, so I don't know what that's like down south, to be totally honest; I don't know what the equivalents are. But as a member of the community planning partnership we were involved in setting up the Scottish pilot scheme to put period free products in Perth and Kinross. So, we were one of the many, many third sector organisations that took products at our premises for people to access, to come in and pick up. We were a collection point.

So, when the first lockdown was looking like it was going to happen we talked about how can we make products accessible. And when it was announced that the schools were going to close we actually arranged like a pick and mix: we had a big set of plastic drawers full of every colour of tampon you can think of and all these pads, and put it in an area of the building that people could come in and out without coming into contact with anyone. We just said, we know the schools are closing, a lot of people get their products from there, come and pick them up this week while we're still open. And the demand we saw was so much bigger than what we had expected. And a lot of women on the older end of the spectrum that we really didn't anticipate would come in for that, because they were worried that the services they normally access were closing.

So, between that and we'd been pondering it for a while, and [REDACTED] and I went for lunch actually and went into the chemist. And [REDACTED] didn't work for us yet but she had posted on social media that the shelves were empty in the supermarkets. So, we went for a nosey and found that she was absolutely right, there was nothing on the shelves, people had been panic buying, and so [REDACTED] and I essentially scribbled up an idea about what if we keep doing this, how can we keep doing this, what if we deliver to people at home. And it seemed like a very simple idea at the time. And now it rules our entire lives, doesn't it, [REDACTED]

R2: Yeah, just a bit.

I: So, you had your collection points. I'm going to ask about that bit first. You had your collection point and you said that people could come and do that pick and mix thing before. What happened with that when you did have to close?

R1: Initially we had to just shut that down, we couldn't offer that. But we were approached in April by one of the local community councils who was setting up give or take boxes they called them for people to leave food for other people to come and get. And they had asked did we want them to build us one that we could have for period products. So, of course we said, absolutely, that sounds like a fab idea. So, they were outside and strapped to a lamppost with a cable tag. They went down it's easy to ask for forgiveness than permission from the council route. We strapped them on the lamppost. So, they did that for us and they painted us this lovely box. It was up from April time until there were floods in Perth in about August and the box was unfortunately destroyed. But in that time it gave out between 3,000 and 4,000 period products to folk in those few months.

So, at the start of this year we bought a bigger box. It's actually one of those, what are they called [REDACTED], a mini greenhouse?

R2: A mini greenhouse, yes.

- R1: Which we have put at the front door of our premises. It's a bit bigger and we now keep that one topped up for folk.
- I: How were you topping it up then during that period from April to August? How were you keeping on top of what needed replacing?
- R1: At that time we were all working from home, and my flatmate is fortunately very, very tolerant, and when we shut down our building I took several runs back and forward from the building and took hundreds and hundreds of period products to my house. So, the room you can see behind me, which now thankfully has some nice bookcases and things, was piled with piles of boxes, and the back of my car was always full of boxes. And then whenever we needed a new order it would get delivered here instead of to the gateway. Thankfully our premises we were able to get access a couple of days a week from the late summer onwards which made a really big difference. And this lockdown, for the sake of my sanity I've been given a key.
- I: Oh good. I was just about to say what's happening with this one then.
- R1: Yes, I have a key because I need to pack up. Because our range has expanded so much, so back then we had one brand of single-use pads in various sizes, the same with tampons, and that was pretty much it I think. Whereas now we have five different types of cup and loads of different types of reusable pads and we've branched out a lot since then, so it's not really feasible to do from my tiny two-bedroom flat in the city centre anymore.
- I: So, the collection points just have the disposable ones and not the reusables?
- R1: Yeah.
- I: And they've not been vandalised or anything bizarre happen to them?
- R1: No, we've not seen anything like that.
- I: That's good.
- R1: We got quite a few comments when it first went up about, oh what if people abuse it and this, that and the other. And actually we've found that people have been really respectful of that and it's been really welcomed by the community.
- I: So, before all of this how did things look in terms of your provision and who you were supporting?
- R1: So, just in terms of our response rather than the whole community plan partnership we had single-use products, the ones I've described, in our bathrooms for people to take away. And it was probably mostly staff to be

honest. The project was pretty new still when we went into lockdown. We had not long developed our marketing materials, put them up so that there were signs everywhere in the gateway so that people knew what they could take. So, it was mostly staff I think and the occasional visitor. And they would be taking a pad if they got caught short in the bathroom, rather than what we envisioned the project to be which was people coming in and taking what they needed for however long they needed it.

I: And do you think that is because you didn't have enough time to embed it properly before everything got locked down?

R1: I think it's a combination of that and how vocal we've possibly been – that's putting it a bit diplomatically, isn't it Vicky, that's why she's laughing – how shouty we have been about period dignity since then. I think Perth and Kinross is quite a conservative, with a small c area, as well as having a Conservative, with a big C council, and it's not a topic that would be openly spoken about. And I think before we started to see the level of need that we saw in lockdown and the real issues that gave us the passion and have driven us to make it what it is, we did play by the rules a little bit. And we've become much shoutier about it since then and being open and saying the project isn't just for people who would consider themselves in period poverty, and that's not a term that we use, although it's definitely had its uses and has been productive in starting a conversation. The focus for us is on dignity, so actually you don't have to feel the stigma of poverty as well as the period stuff to access the project.

I: In terms of your services then is it mainly for adults or is it for anybody? Do you support schoolkids? I guess you don't necessarily know who's taking the products from the community collection points.

R1: We have a fair idea because we offer teen products. So, as well as the adult pads and liners and all that we have the Lil-Lets teen range, and some of the Hey Girls' team range as well. A lot of girls do still get their products through the school. The schools have put in a really good effort to make sure that's still accessible to people. But we do get orders from younger people as well.

I: I'm going to ask now about the home delivery and your subscription side of things. Who is it that's signed up and has been putting through those sorts of requests? Have you noticed any patterns?

R1: ■■■■■, what do you think?

R2: I think it's hard to tell because we don't really ask for much information from them. We only ask for a name if they want to give it, and an address for delivery. And we offer contactless delivery so we don't necessarily see who's picking them up from the front door, so I think it's really difficult to say.

But I think obviously we've now got a spread, we have four different areas that get subscription deliveries.

R1: It's five now; we have one in Perthshire, how exciting.

R2: Okay five now. So, from that point of view I suppose we're seeing an increase in numbers from all of those areas. But then that's possibly down to word of mouth, but also probably just an awareness of the service that's being offered.

R1: I think there's something we can tell, as you say [REDACTED], in where the orders are coming from. As I said we recently took on quite a lot of volunteers, we have eight volunteers. Until then I was doing a lot of the deliveries, particularly in Perth city, because I didn't have a life. We have about 50 subscribers in Perth city, so you can see from that what areas. And I would say that there's actually a pretty even split between the areas that we would consider kind of middle class and managing versus the areas where you would statistically see more deprivation.

We do see a high number from Tulloch and Letham which is interesting. I'll have to explain that. There's one area in Perth which really would be considered really quite deprived, and then Tulloch and Letham would be just above that. And we actually see more from Tulloch and Letham than from that other area, which I think is interesting because I think it's probably about access to services and access to information rather than about need. And possibly that folk in North Muirton, the other area, are more likely to be accessing services such as the food bank where they get period products as well as the other items that they're asking for.

R2: It might also be down to the digital aspect as well I suppose.

R1: Yes sure.

R2: In terms of that area not having the accessibility to digital either, so that may also contribute.

I: I know you've got quite a bit social media presence; do you do like leaflets and those sorts of things?

R1: [Nods head].

I: Yeah. How would you reach people that don't necessarily have access to the digital side of stuff?

R1: To do that we really work with the existing groups in areas. So, we have printed resources and those go out through key partners like the Food Bank for example, and Welfare Rights. We have little business cards, which are my favourite ones, because they're easy to give to someone and for them to have. And it's keeping that dignity aspect; you're not handing them a big flyer with free period products emblazoned on the front. It's just a wee

business card with our email address, phone number and where people can find us to see what products are available. So, as I say they go out through community groups, local services.

I would hope once lockdown lifts a bit to be able to leave them in more places as well once we're allowed to go a bit further ourselves. And now increasingly through our volunteers as well who are all really passionate actually and really great. I had a phone call yesterday from a community group in the far reaches of Highland Perthshire saying, we've not heard of the service, can you give us more information so we can share it locally. So, we'll make use of that for example.

I: With your volunteers, you say that you've now got eight, but it sounds like right at the beginning it was just you, [REDACTED]?

R1: Until February it was really just us.

I: So, how did that impact on you?

R1:

[REDACTED]

I should say there are two other members of staff who aren't here with us today who did from time to time make deliveries, but yes I did most of it it's fair to say. Neither of them wanted to do any deliveries outside of Perth, which is totally fair.

I have to say it's not been easy. My full time job is actually team leader for a minority communities hub, and Tampon Taxi was an add-on from the start. So, between all the admin stuff that that requires and then doing the deliveries as well I didn't have evenings or weekends really until we took on the volunteers. It was a bit of an intervention that we should take on volunteers so that I could watch a film, read a book.

I: Have some sanity.

R1: I think it's true across the third sector though through the pandemic, we've all been in crisis mode for quite a long time; I don't think I'm unique in that.

I: No, certainly the majority of the projects that I've spoken to are volunteer or third sector based and yeah, everyone has said really similar things to what you've just said and how, if they did have volunteers, that was impacted as well because their availability suddenly dropped or they had to shield or they were ill or a lot of them work in the health sector so obviously their jobs became massive. So, yeah it's really a theme, which is why I asked you about it.

R1: We did reach a point I think where it was taking its toll on my mental health in terms of anxiety and stress and the pressure of all of that, which is why I think it was important to reach out a bit. And actually we found so many

willing people that really wanted to be part of it, so it's been a really positive experience.

I: And how have you managed having volunteers now when there is social distancing and lockdown restrictions and those sorts of things? How have you managed to train them up and get them up and running so they can support you?

R1: It's not been too hard because I think in some ways we were fortunate in taking them on so late into lockdown because people know the deal now. All of them had inductions with me where I talked about how it's completely contactless delivery, they leave something on the doorstep and knock and then just back in the car, and make sure they give plenty of distance. When we agree to an order with a new person who hasn't asked for something before we usually just send them a wee message saying, just give it a couple of minutes before you answer the door to give us or our volunteers time to step away. And they're all provided with gloves. They've got fabric masks, but if they don't we've got a big supply that they can take from as well.

And in terms of collecting from me they come to the front door of our building and I come out with a mask on and pass over all the bits for them to take away. It's pretty straightforward I think because, as I say, people have been doing it already for quite a long time. Whereas I think if we were at this stage in kind of April last year it would have been a bit of a headache to get all that ironed out.

I: And where do you get your products from? How are they delivered?

R1: We have a range of suppliers. We're donations partner with Hey Girls, so they provide us with products monthly and they deliver them to our premises. They just let me know when they're going to be delivered so I can be there to open up. We get some of our reusables from FareShare in Dundee. So, again we just send them a message actually when we're running low of the things that they send us, and they ping us over some more.

And then our single-use products some of them come from the pilot scheme that I mentioned, so the Scottish government cash that comes to the local council. They have a procurement arrangement with Tayside contracts through the local procurement specialist, so we just pop in orders again to them when things are low.

And we did get some funding in – goodness, time blends into one – summer, autumn last year from the National Lottery Community Fund. We got about £10,000 from them that we used to invest in some of the more expensive reusables in particular so that we could test demand for them. And we're looking at another funding now that we've got the evidence for them. People love period pants.

- I: I do.
- R1: They're brilliant. They're an absolute revelation.
- I: So, you've not had any problems with the supply of products getting to you necessarily?
- R1: No. I think there were some delays at the very beginning of lockdown I think because we asked for such a big supply quite suddenly, that it took quite a long time. I think that order took several months and came in in several different shipments over those months to arrive. But since things kind of calmed down towards the end of the summer we haven't had problems.
- I: Good. So, it's the reusable ones that you include in the home delivery service, is that right, but not in the subscription?
- R1: No, because by their nature you shouldn't need them every month.
- I: Are people actively requesting them or is it something that you include and then see how they get on with? How have you promoted the reusable side of stuff?
- R1: As you will have seen through our social media we have a full product guide of everything that we offer. That is entirely electronic, but we promote that to everyone and anyone who will listen so that folk have the opportunity to sit down and look through it in their own time and then let us know what they need. But we are on hand, we get quite a lot of questions about the different products around sizing and that kind of thing. And some people will just want to send you a message and say, I want this, and then they never want to talk to you or look at you or hear from you again, they just want it delivered. Whereas some people who are messaging you end up actually having quite a long conversation with them about various things.
- I can't speak for both of us, [REDACTED], but I think we get quite good at reading the cues of whether someone wants to have a chat or not. And where they do I'll be quite open about, well I use this, for example. One lady got in touch saying, my daughter has a really heavy flow and she's looking to try reusable pads and what would you recommend, and so we had a really long conversation and I told her all sorts of intimate information about my life, and that was fine because she was open to that. But as I say some people will just go, no thank you.
- I: Yeah, because with reusables with some items like a cup there's almost like an element of explanation and demonstration and training that needs to go with them to work out how to use them.
- That's really interesting that people are being really open and you're having conversations about suitability of products and things like heavy flow and that.

- R1: They're very open on behalf of their daughters, much more than on behalf of themselves.
- I: Have you noticed any themes that have come out of those sorts of conversations or are they quite broad and they can be about anything?
- R1: [REDACTED], you take a lot of the orders, what would you say?
- R2: I don't feel I've had that many questions. One of the things that I would recommend people is if they do have younger daughters is the Hey Girls' first period kit. I think that would have been really useful for me when I was younger. I'm guessing it probably wasn't available at that point because Hey Girls weren't established.
- I just think that you can tell, like [REDACTED] saying, if people want to chat then they will do, but if they don't that's fine too. I have someone who knows me out with work who was messaging and going, oh is the Vicky from blah, blah, and I'm like yeah. And then they started talking to me about their doctor and their doctor's appointments, and I'm like okay. So, yeah it's a learning curve I think. But I think because we're all so open about talking about periods I think people feel comfortable talking to us about them.
- R1: Yeah. I think people don't have questions about the single-use products.
- R2: No.
- R1: They know them, they've seen them. It tends to be whenever we get something new in we'll get some questions about it. I had a really funny conversation, we have a new receptionist who just started last week, and she was spending a day in the building the same day as me last week and she had never heard of period pants, and I was like come with me.
- I: To the treasure chest.
- R1: I brought her upstairs into my favourite room in our whole building which is our storeroom, which is lined with link plastic drawers full of every size, shape and colour of period product, and was like here, look at these. And she was like, oh my goodness, how did I not know about these. And I was like, I've achieved my mission for today; I have converted someone else to the world of period pants.
- R2: I laugh because you did that to me when I first started. I think someone else was I the room and you were like, do you want to come and see the period products. I was like yeah. It was like, who knew that was so exciting.
- R1: Honestly every new start. I joke a lot and I'm the period lady, I talk about periods all the time which my mother finds hilarious because I used to be in utter denial that I even had a period as a teenager, I was that child. But when we get a new start we like to immediately set the tone that this is a place where we do talk about periods and get on the train or get off.

- I: There's no place for feeling embarrassed, is there?
- R1: No, not if you work for the Tampon Taxi.
- I: I'm the period lady at work because all my research is to do with periods and menstrual health and everything. I get all sorts of questions and people wanting me to recommend things to them and stuff, and it's also like I'm not a doctor.
- R1: I'm also not remotely adventurous myself, I don't like the cup, I'm all for it for other people if it's right for them, and I'll talk them through the different types and things but I'm a play it safe person. And so when people ask me about the cup I'm like google it.
- I: Yeah, there are videos, there's all sorts of stuff.
- R1: We do a range of the Intimina ones which are really good and their website is great, it has diagrams and videos and everything you could possibly need. So, it's much safer to direct them onto that than for us to try and sort of make it up.
- I: So, in a way you're doing menstrual health education as part of what you're doing as well if you're having these discussions about using the different product options.
- R1: Informally yes. Our most recent – and I say most recent because it is very, very recent, as in this week – endeavour is a wee pilot scheme with one of the local schools who got in touch and asked if they could borrow some reusable products to show their class as part of their health and social, not called health and social care – what's it called?
- R2: PSE.
- R1: PSE, they change it all the time; it was just called sex education when we were at school. Personal and social education they call it now.
- R2: Yes.
- R1: As part of those classes they wanted to show them a range of reusables, so we're developing a kit that can be loaned out to schools for six weeks at a time with the reusable products so that they can show their classes, which we're hoping will be quite successful.
- I: So, that will be in supporting the education rather than delivering it yourselves?
- R1: Yeah, we're all about making use of the existing assets. We're not experts by any stretch of the imagination so we wouldn't want to pretend that we were.

I: Now that we're looking at coming out of some kind of lockdown again, and just thinking about how you were really new when you set everything up and then we went into lockdown a year ago, do you think that you're going to keep things as they are or have you got plans for when we can have more actual contact with people? Or have you even thought that far ahead yet because it might not happen unfortunately?

R1: I think it's both. We have some big conversations to have, but in terms of the period products free provision bill that's now been passed in Scotland, we have some conversations coming up with our local authority about what that's going to look like in our own local area. I think to be totally frank we would hope to be a commissioned service in the delivery of that bill going forward, which is much more formal and boring than the current approach. But we would hope that the local authority would see value in how much local people have appreciated the way that we are doing it, and would resource us to continue doing that. But if not I think we would probably be looking to identify funding from elsewhere.

We will be looking to make products accessible through our building again. I would hope now that we would be recognised locally as somewhere that people can come and pick things up. I think it's done good things for our reputation in that regard, so I hope we can pick that back up where we left off and build on that as well.

■■■■ our fairness and dignity person so she'll be taking forward a lot of that, if I can ever let go of the reins, which as you can tell by this conversation is unlikely. I'm trying so hard.

I: With the introduction of the bill now then those conversations are only just starting now in terms of how that's going to look moving forward. Is that really going to be driven by the councils then?

R1: Yes, so there's a duty in the bill for local authorities to provide the products essentially. It's more legalese than that but that's the crux of it.

I: So, are you having to wait for them to contact you or are you hammering on the door saying, hey?

R1: We have already reached out and we've set up an initial meeting in a few weeks' time to chat that through. And they have from a distance been very supportive of what we've done. And I think there probably is acknowledgement that we've saved the local authority from having to do something similar. In a lot of other areas in Scotland it is the local authority who have taken on the delivering of products and such, so taking on the logistics of that on their behalf. I think there is some acknowledgment that we will have a role in whatever comes next. But I do think there will be an element of fighting our corner, as always in the third sector, to get the recognition and resources that we would need to keep doing that.

I: I don't think I've got anything else that I wanted to ask. It's really interesting doing these. I've been doing them since the summer. We've been in and out of lockdown quite a few times now and people were either really well established before or, like yourselves, kind of just on the cusp and then everything happened, so it's been really interesting to hear about what you've been doing and how you've had to go straight into the pandemic world really. So, thank you so much for your time.

Is there anything else that you wanted to highlight or bring to attention just in terms of period poverty or period dignity generally and future support? You've mentioned the bill and the implications that that's going to have; is there anything else you can think of or that you wanted to highlight?

R1: I think you've heard more than enough from me. [REDACTED] have you?

R2: [REDACTED] has already heard this several times, but menstrual health being more part of education at school I think is really important, particularly in relation to diagnosis times four, menstrual health related conditions so endo, PCOS, PMDD. And for me given that England have now got it on the curriculum and nowhere else in the UK does for me that's one of the key things that I think is going to help going forward.

I: I thought that Scotland already had it?

R2: No.

I: Really?

R2: There's a petition but it hasn't had as much interest as the England one did.

I: That's interesting.

R2: I'm actually reading Amika George's book just now and some of those things I'm reading I'm like, I need to take a note of that. I've come to realise it's not a book to read before bed because my brain is buzzing with ideas of like, ooh I could go and do this.

Unfortunately it's not on the curriculum here as yet, and for me having gone through it myself it's really important for it to be included so people have an awareness. It takes a long time to be diagnosed and that's not really good enough in my opinion.

I: It's really important, especially if you are doing so much around products and there's all of these products and it's really opening up conversations, the education side of it really needs to be there as well. And not just for young people, people my age and that are still clueless because we had no menstrual health education whatsoever other than a picture in biology.

That's really interesting; I didn't realise that was a gap in terms of Scotland.

- R2: Yes. If you read the APPG report on endometriosis that came out last October the recommendations from that are that the other UK nations follow suit. So, it might be worth a look at.
- I: Yeah, I'm very familiar with that, but I never noticed it was phrased in that kind of way, so I'll go back and have a look at that. So, are there campaigns and stuff then? You talked about the petition.
- R2: Yes. Wales I think there was something changed last week but I can't remember what it was. I think Wales have gone to their government a few times and been rejected. But I think there was a positive step forward last week, which is good because it's awareness month. But Scotland's one, as far as I'm aware, isn't really going anywhere. It's the Aberdeen support group leader who's the face of that. But I can share the link with you on Twitter if that would be helpful.
- I: Yes it would, thank you. We all thought Scotland were way ahead with everything.
- R1: It's a strange sort of blip in the general direction of movement in Scotland. And there do seem to be it's individual teachers who are interested in it and who do take it forward, but the emphasis is then very much on, well who was your teacher. And if you're [REDACTED] and I and have a serious condition well my teacher didn't have any interest in that so it took over ten years to get a diagnosis.
- I: That's an unfortunately common situation.
- R1: It is common. No one mentioned endometriosis or polycystic ovaries when I was at school. The first I heard what they were was when I was sat down and told, we think you have one of these two, do you fancy going for a scan. I didn't fancy it but I did it.
- I: I like how it was optional: do you want one or not.
- R1: My doctor was really nice. I had a really, really good doctor, when I finally found the right doctor; that's what it takes.
- R2: It makes the difference having the right doctor. It took 18 years for me to get diagnosed. I hadn't heard the word endometriosis and then I remember phoning and my husband being like yeah, this is what they think it is, and then by the time I got home he'd been on the website because he didn't want me to go on Doctor Google. So, yeah it's just one of those things that it needs more awareness.
- I: Yeah it definitely does. This goes slightly off topic because I do stuff on chronic illness and menstruation in particular. Is that partly why you two are so involved with the period stuff because of your own experiences and health conditions?

R1: It is part of it. It's no secret that [REDACTED] involvement in Endo UK is part of the reason why we wanted her for the job that she's in, and we created the post to be something that [REDACTED] could do. Yeah, it's probably part of the reason why I'm interested in it. I don't suppose I think about it a lot. I know that a lot of people have bad experiences with their periods. I have horrible ones. I would like to be doing more. I think period products are really, really important and access to period products are really, really important, but I do also think they're the tip of the iceberg in terms of that.

For me I was at a Women of the World event a few years ago – [REDACTED] heard this story 800 million times – I shouldn't shake my head, it's lovely, I got an honour last year for my work with the Tampon Taxi and I had to talk to every journalist this side of Kinross. So, I was at this Women of the World event a few years ago and they were talking about the feedback from the year before, and one of the feedbacks that had come in was this lady who'd been in a group talking about menstruation, and she had got in touch with the organisers a few months later to say, I took part in this conversation, it was the first time in my adult life that I've had a real conversation about periods, about my experience, and being told that my experiences didn't line up with other people's. And she went to the doctor and she had cancer. And it saved her life; she would never have known that what she was experiencing wasn't normal because it just wasn't something that her generation ever talked about.

And I think for me ever since then I've made a conscious effort, it's not something that I used to feel comfortable talking about, but I made a conscious effort to create that space because actually we need to be able to have honest conversations because it literally can save people's lives and vastly improve your quality of life as well. [REDACTED] and I both know from just getting the diagnosis, don't get me wrong, it still sucks, but at least there are treatments and options.

R2: Flare up central today. I've had it on this morning. It's sitting on my back.

R1: Yeah, so both of us know that at least there are options. But living with it before that, I spent, as I say, ten years without a diagnosis and going through that. Even my mum, who's very understanding and who I'm very close with, really thinking that I was just overacting my cramps and saying, you can't take a week off school every month, it's ridiculous, and just sending me on my merry way, because other people's experiences just aren't the same. I don't know how she thought I was faking vomiting from pain but never mind.

I: When I've done interviews with schoolgirls a couple of them have talked about fainting and being sick and stuff. You say, oh that's really serious, because they kind of fob it off, oh it's just my period. And it's like, no, that's not normal, that's really serious, please go and speak to your doctor. But they don't want to talk to their doctor about it, they just want to talk to their mums, and their mums are the ones that are like oh don't be silly, it's just your period. It's really problematic.

- R1: I went to my doctor and she put me on the combined pill because she was thinking well if you just don't have a period it won't be an issue, and hadn't checked my notes that I got hormonal migraines. And I ended up going back to see her because I had a migraine and was numb down the entire one side of my body. And she laughed and went, oh I'm glad you came back so we can deal with this, you could have ended up paralysed. I was like, looking back now, I could have had a stroke, there's so much that could have gone wrong, and she just went whoops.
- I: Oh don't get me started on healthcare.
- R1: Our chief executive has been trying to call me so I need to stop going off on tangents.
- I: It's still linked. Menstrual health education is something that has come out of the interviews and things that we've done as well, as it's kind of just disappeared. Even in England where we've had that progress, the fact that schools closed in lessons and online learning and everything, it's just disappeared again unfortunately. So, it was an important point to talk about, even though we did end up going off on all sorts of other things. But it just highlights how important it is. So, anything else that either of you want to add?
- R1: No, nothing from me.
- R2: Actually one thing I just thought of, we're having a quiz on Friday if you would like to join or you would like to share it on social media. We're having a pop-up quiz about periods.
- I: Amazing.
- R2: I've been working on that this morning. If you would like to share that would be gratefully appreciated.
- I: I will share that. I'm going, you two might be going anyway, to menstrual activism that Bloody Good Period have set up, like a meeting kind of chit-chat.
- R1: No, I haven't heard of that.
- I: I'll forward you the invitation. It's at 7 o'clock though so don't feel like you need to. But yeah, I will mention it at that.
- R2: Is it 7 o'clock tonight?
- I: Tomorrow. I will send you the details of that.
- R2: Great, thank you.

R1: Thank you so much. Well, it was really lovely to speak to you.

I: Yes you too. I'm so sorry about the cock-up at the beginning with the stupid themes and the sound.

R1: It's the world we live in. don't worry about it.

I: I loathe Microsoft Teams.

R1: So do we.

I: It's the thing that we have to use so I'm stuck with it. But thank you so much for your time. When I get the transcription back, I'll send it to you both just so you can check and amend or add anything. Thank you so much for your time and have a good day. And [REDACTED] I hope the pain eases and the flare-up settles soon.

R2: Thank you.

I: I have colitis and that's been playing up today so solidarity with flare-ups and hot water bottles. You'll feel better soon and have a good day.

End of transcript