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- I: Okay, so that's on. So the way that this is going to work, I'm kind of doing it in three stages with people but we generally tend to go through the three stages kind of naturally anyway. So there's a bit about the pre-lockdown, kind of what things used to look like, then the beginning so the very first lockdown in March and how we then...how you got on with things and then what the situation is now considering that we're now in the second lockdown so it's kind of like the before, middle and current situation.
- R: Okay.
- I: So you're Freedom4Girls, aren't you? Is it just Leeds that you're based in and that you cover?
- R: Yes, mostly, well, Leeds, the surrounding area and then obviously Kenya and Uganda.
- I: Yes, so this is just about the UK.
- R: UK, yes.
- I: Can you tell me a bit of background about what it is that Freedom4Girls do and the services that you provide in the UK?
- R: Yes, okay, well, Freedom4Girls is a period poverty charity set up four years ago by me. It's there to provide products and education for people who can't access period products for whatever reason, also education and, yes, you know, looking into research and things like that. We also have an ambassador programme as well and also an education programme. We're predominantly...I suppose our main bit of work is providing products for people who need them, for whatever reason.
- I: Is it a specific age group or anybody?
- R: No, anybody. Anybody and anybody but obviously with the government scheme coming in, that's relieved that a little bit but we still get asked about it from schools [02:09] even today, which is ridiculous but anyway.
- I: Yes, and is that the same...
- R: So we just [voices overlapping 02:15] another way.
- I: Is that same for the education stuff and the ambassador programme, is that for anybody as well or is that targeted?
- R: Yes, it is. We're also doing some research around black women's health, vaginal health...
- I: Ah-ha, yes, I saw that.
- R: ...so we're doing some questionnaires around that.

- I: Yes, that's very interesting.
- R: What else? We do our sewing workshops. We're developing...we did sewing workshops before but we're developing online sewing workshops as well so people can actually sew their own. What else? We have done a little bit of impact work over COVID. There are questionnaires going out to some of our organisations. That's being done at the moment.
- I: Right, okay so that'll be good to talk about when we get to the COVID bit.
- R: I don't do any...well, I don't do all of this, obviously. We have people doing it now. We have lots of nice students who are really enthusiastic who are sat at home twiddling their thumbs and come to us and say, I'd love to do this project, and we go, right, go and do it, which is really good of them, you know, because it helps us as well.
- I: Yes, they're a useful resource, aren't they, the students.
- R: They are and they're really enthusiastic which is really cool and it just takes a lot of pressure off me because I've still got a job, a day job and a night job as well.
- I: Well, you must have time to be able to do all of this as well though, surely.
- R: Of course, yes, yes, well, I've been doing it for four years so, yes, nothing ever changes.
- I: Yes, that's nothing, that's nothing.
- R: Nothing except everything is just the same but just got extra busier.
- I: Yes. So what was your...sorry, I just need to take a drink.
- R: That's alright. I'm just going to go and put my kettle on because I've just walked in. I've been delivering products, would you believe, and food.
- I: I was just about to ask you, who is it...so kind of normally, who is it that you give products to and how do you get the products out to people? So do you work with...?
- R: Okay, so...
- I: Do you work with specific centres or organisations?
- R: We work with organisations, communities, council...yes, so we predominantly work with organisations, foodbanks, refugee and asylum seeker agencies, justice services, national services, children's department. Well, we've delivered since lock... well, I suppose since January to over 60 organisations within the Leeds and surrounding areas.

- I: Wow, and do they...?
- R: We've got some in Sheffield as well.
- I: Is that you contacting people or do they contact you?
- R: No, well, we had a lot of them to start with. We had...you know, because obviously we've been doing this for four years so we have a lot of them and with me working in public health for the last 12 years, I know a lot of organisations. Obviously I tackle health inequalities in my day job and people know me and I know them and they know what [inaudible 05:31] I do so, yes, it's quite easy for them to contact me. We have a big social media following as well and a lot of the migrant communities we, you know, it's all word of mouth and things like that so we deal with a lot of migrant communities as well or culturally diverse communities. I do apologise, that's the new word.
- I: I have lost track on what it is now but, yes.
- R: Culturally diverse communities, not BAME communities, which is a horrible label.
- I: Yes, it is. Okay, so that's fairly typical then working with quite a large number of like more kind of health related and like more kind of, I suppose, poverty support organisations.
- R: Yes, it is, yes.
- I: Yes.
- R: It's...yes, I mean, like I say, we worked with the foodbanks before and other organisations but we've got...you know, everybody knows us in Leeds. A lot of organisations, in my day job I have like this massive list of like 300 agencies and I send out information all the time out to these agencies and obviously some of those things, like we have like financial inclusion, like the thing that goes round, my head's gone. It's one of these days. Like, yes, financial inclusion, information that goes out every week through the council and I get it and obviously sometimes we're on there because we're like, you know, we're part of the poverty thing. So, yes, I mean, a lot of people know us and, like I say, we've got a big social media reach as well.
- I: So do you work...?
- R: So people know [inaudible 07:34].
- I: Is your day job then like Leeds Council?
- R: Yes, who also have apparently a really...a period poverty strategy that we don't really know of.

- I: Okay, I was just about to ask, do they actually do anything around period poverty?
- R: Well, they shout about it. They've always...I mean, what they did is we've met with them quite a few times over the last few years and they've been very them and us. Obviously I brought the UK period poverty on to the whole worldwide platform, didn't I, you know in 2017 and they didn't like it. The councillors didn't like it because they didn't do it so even though I worked for the council and period poverty is a health and inequalities issue, they just said, I have to do this separately and it's nothing to do with them. The council keep coming up with things like, yes, Leeds was the first council to tackle period poverty and they weren't [08:39] at the end of the day. You know what councillors are like and councils.
- I: Yes, I do.
- R: They're an absolute nightmare.
- I: Yes, I used to work for Birmingham City Council so, yes, I am well aware.
- R: Yes, oh gosh, yes. So basically, yes, they have a strategy but they've never ever shared it with us. I mean, they actually went out about 18 months ago, we met with them and, you know, because we used to deliver to all their hubs so they've got like hubs. We've done it two years, two and a half years and people got to know, we'd put them in the toilets in the hub so we had little posters and everything. Then all of a sudden, they said, we don't want you to do that anymore. We're buying our own products. We said, well, why buy your own products when we can supply them and we've been supplying them for two years? Yes, well, okay then, if you want to do that, then that's fine.
- So then they went out and bought really crappy products. I mean, you couldn't even wipe your windscreen with these products, never mind use them as a period pad. I mean, 50 grand they spent on these products and then decided that they were going to have their own logo and stuff like that which actually didn't get anywhere because obviously then COVID struck but that was their take on it. Even though we said to them, don't buy any more products, give us the money and we'll provide education for you, proper education, but, yes, no, they wouldn't have it. Hopefully now, the lady who was a little bit of a gatekeeper in the council's left so I've just met with another lady who's really into supporting us, not working against us so that's a positive. Sorry, have I gone off track?
- I: No, it's all linked and, yes, the fact that they...as you said, COVID happened and then it stopped, is like, yes, that's not surprising.
- R: Yes, I mean, and now when we've had meetings before this lady left, they'd go, oh, yes, we're supplying schools and we're supplying hub. I'm thinking,

well, the schools have been shut for six months and none of the toilets in the hubs are open so how are you providing any products anywhere?

I: That's how they're providing it though because they don't need to.

R: Well, exactly, you know, they're all stuck in a warehouse somewhere but they're not fit for purpose anyway so you may as well just keep them there, love. Somebody tried to offer me some and I went, I don't want them. I don't want to be associated with shit products when we give out decent products that work. I mean, we had a few people try them and they'd lasted about two minutes. It was like a liner, you know the cheapest liner you can ever buy.

I: Yes, I know the ones that you mean, yes.

R: All wrapped in a clear plastic...they were awful.

I: Yes, where on earth have they even found those?

R: Yes, I mean, talk about poor products for poor people, it was just disgusting, really. No thought went into it at all.

I: Well, that's a shame. Okay, well, we won't talk about them anymore then.

R: No, but hopefully this new lady who's come into post will be a lot more positive. I mean, she did actually personally give us £200 for our East Africa project which was brilliant so I was thinking, oh, that's a good start.

I: Yes, that is a good sign. Yes, fingers crossed.

R: I mean, basically she said, why get the council to do stuff they can't do, when you can do it just as well? So let's see, watch this space then.

I: Yes, as I said, fingers crossed. Okay, so we've kind of started to talk about stuff stopping because of COVID so how did you guys cope with what happened?

R: We just changed our...so basically what we used to do is deliver to foodbanks, we used to deliver to like community organisations, like community centres and offices and places like that where frontline workers could pick up and then take out to people that they were dealing with. Obviously with COVID that didn't happen so we had to devise another way. So what I did is I got in touch with a lot of the organisations, so a lot of the culturally diverse communities I knew the women who were almost like the leaders within, yes, and said, obviously now there's lockdown on, I know you still need products, and they said, just deliver them to us and we will get them out to our communities. We will either deliver them ourselves or we'll leave them on our front door step and they can come and pick up. So it was just...it just got ridiculously mad and we were delivering I think...we were delivering like 2,000 packs a month, maybe more...

I: Wow.

R: ...to, yes, like I say, lots of different organisations. There were repeats as well because there were more and more women needing them and I know, you know, in lockdown, obviously people were buying toilet paper...sorry, buying products to last them until their menopause and all that was left on the shelves were the really expensive ones. So normal people who are struggling anyway, they've either been on furlough or they didn't have...you know, they'd lost their job, couldn't afford them anyway so, yes, so we just ramped up. Then we had an issue at one point where we weren't getting any donations because ours is all on a donation model so it was a case of people have been buying so much, like they had been toilet paper, there was a little bit of a shortage but we got over that. It was great. We've got some really good partners so people like Hey Girls UK and Bodyform have been amazing.

I: Oh, really. No-one's mentioned those yet?

R: Sorry?

I: No-one's mentioned Bodyform yet.

R: Yes, well, do you know what, Proctor & Gamble don't like us for some reason. They've never given me anything. Not one product they've ever given me. They're really funny, I don't know. People are funny. Come on, people bleed, give me some products, please.

I: Aren't they the ones on the period poverty taskforce? That's Proctor & Gamble, isn't it?

R: Yes, P&G...yes.

I: Yes, Always and Tampax.

R: Yes.

I: Yes, for God's sake.

R: Yes.

I: That's why, that'll be why because they want that niche for themselves.

R: Exactly, they don't like giving them away. I mean, they say, oh, we give out 1.6 million products. Yes, but you have to buy one pack and you give one pad, what's all that about? All they're do is, because we've got them, you get the, you know, they give them [away to 15:32] schoolgirls and they give them as a sample pack and there is so much plastic in that sample pack. When I first started doing this, there was an organisation up in the north-east and they offered me 18 pallet loads of products. They said, oh, we've

had them in this warehouse for a year, do you want them because we were obviously leaving university and we don't need them and somebody got them and I said, yes, and they were all samples, Proctor & Gamble, all, yes. So, yes, so that's the only time I ever got them. I think actually I ended up getting 28 pallets of samples.

I: But indirectly.

R: Mmm, yes.

I: So okay...

R: But then I...sorry, go on.

I: Go on.

R: No, no, no. I've still got three pallets left because actually they're a pain in the bum. There's so much plastic in them, you've got to separate them all. Actually they're out of date now and we were offering them to an organisation that wanted to send them to Beirut and they were out of date. So we went back to Proctor & Gamble and said, why, if it takes 500 years to decompose they only last three years? What is the issue? Or five years. I think three years with the pads and five years with the tampons. They said, oh, depending where you kept them, the sticky on the pads might have degraded but they're alright.

I: Is that it?

R: Yes.

I: I thought it would be like some kind of, oh, the antibacterial thing would have...

R: No, they didn't mention anything. All they said, is it might be, depending where you've kept them, it might be the stickiness on the pads that won't be as good.

I: Right.

R: Because we said, well, we'll just get clarification before we give you them. Anyway they never came back so I've still got three pallets with blooming out of date products. We were going to send them down to Calais, actually. We were going to go and drive down to Calais to wherever but then obviously COVID struck so we didn't but that might be something in the future, unless somebody else comes up with wanting some.

I: So you were talking about doing like the online reusable...

R: Sewing workshops.

- I: ...sewing workshops, so did you carry on doing that type of thing or was that something that you introduced as a result of lockdown?
- R: Yes, something that we're introducing. We've got a lady called...a student [REDACTED] or something. She's from Imperial College and she's got some money and an internship to develop videos, online videos to make pads at home so that's what she's doing at the moment so that's nearly ready to launch, I think.
- I: So how did that come into effect? How did you find out that she was doing that or did she get in touch with you?
- R: She actually got in touch. We get hundreds of people getting in touch with us every day wanting to do stuff. So she said, oh, I'm part of Imperial College, I've put a proposal forward and would you be interested in doing it? We said, yes, because we do work...before lockdown we did workshops anyway, sewing workshops once a month which got really popular and people are still out in the community for us sewing and cooking for us but most of those pads go to East Africa but they haven't actually...well, some have gone to Uganda because [REDACTED] one of my trustees has gone to Uganda and I'm hoping to go to Kenya at the end of the year but we'll see.
- I: So the reusable stuff mainly goes over to Uganda.
- R: At the moment, yes, I mean, that's how we first started the workshops but we do get a lot of reusables and period pants and...period pants, reusables and menstrual cups donated as well.
- I: Okay.
- R: So we do try and push those all the time, especially to people who want to try something different. The period pants have been brilliant for autistic girls and girls with disabilities. We've been working with an organisation who works with young people and they've found them really, really helpful. They get them donated by...WUKA donated some and Hey Girls donate them to us as well.
- I: Yes, I've got loads of WUKA pants. I love them.
- R: See the thing is I started all this, I started Freedom4Girls and then I went into the menopause so I've never tried the menstrual cup or period pants or whatever.
- I: I don't recommend a menstrual cup. I didn't get on with it at all.
- R: Oh, didn't you? Yes, it's not for everybody, is it?
- I: I get arthritis in my hands so it's not a great thing and I had a bad incident at work and it was just like, oh, I'm not trying this ever again.

- R: Oh, bless you. No, I can imagine.
- I: But the pants are great. So, yes, when you were talking about people with autism and those with disabilities and the period pants, that's actually...so I'm doing a PhD at the moment on how people with chronic health conditions manage their menstruation and it's that sort of thing that is one of the things that I'm really interested in, is the accessibility of products.
- R: Yes, I mean, we had a girl, well, it was a mum through a nurse actually who contacted us and said, we've got this 12-year-old girl and she gets really frustrated because she can't peel the thing off for her pads and she's a really heavy bleeder so she has to change a lot. So anyway we gave her some pants and oh my God, it's changed her life, bless her.
- I: Yes, oh, that's great.
- R: So that's really, really good and then we've just had...like I say we're working with an autistic group of people, young people, well, we're not working with them but somebody is and they keep asking us for them which is great. We can supply them and they're expensive.
- I: Yes, they are and they're still taxed as well.
- R: Yes, exactly.
- I: Yes, that's the next thing to sort out.
- R: Yes, so we've had some really good feedback which is really good. We try and get the reusables out as well. We have a couple of companies who give us reusables so, yes, we try and get them out whenever, you know, just for something different to try.
- I: So what about the education stuff that you provide, have you managed to do any of that during lockdown or has that kind of stopped?
- R: We haven't, no. We did last year. We got some money from Plan International to do a year's course around stigma and taboo with girls. I wasn't involved in that but we have got two specialists who have been looking at all the education and they've re-written and they've started, obviously with schools, schools not around for a while, they have started approaching schools again around delivering education within schools. So not just, you know, I mean, it was like the council said, oh, what's your education policy because we're developing one as well. I think, is it a paragraph in the policy, isn't it, or something?
- I: Yes, it's not even that, in the guidance.
- R: [Voices overlapping 23:17].
- I: Yes, it's not even a paragraph.

R: Yes, it doesn't actually say...yes. It doesn't say anything. I'm going, you're developing an education policy about one paragraph in the whole thing. Anyway so we're doing a little bit differently about...and it's about talking about stigma and taboo and about, you know, your proper periods and why is that white stuff in your knickers and all that, you know...

I: Yes, the proper stuff.

R: ...people need to know the scientific...not the scientific stuff but the NICE stuff, they need to know.

I: Yes, the experience and what's normal and what isn't normal, yes.

R: Yes, exactly.

I: With your education thing, was it part of Let's Talk. Period? Was it that?

R: Yes, it was, yes.

I: It would have been my colleague [REDACTED] interview you as part of...?

R: It wouldn't have been me. It would have been [REDACTED], she ran it with Getaway Girls.

I: Yes.

R: So we've applied for the money with Getaway Girls so we halved it and did it that way but, yes, it wouldn't have been me. I wasn't involved in that.

I: This is going completely off track now but I'll talk about it anyway.

R: It's fine.

I: With the Let's Talk. Period stuff so we, like BCU, did the menstruation, we were commissioned to do the menstruation learning briefs as part of that project by Plan.

R: Right.

I: I think you returned...we did a call for evidence and I'm sure that you returned something, it was a form...

R: Yes, we probably would have done, yes.

I: ...about good practice and then I know that someone which you've just mentioned...

R: Getaway Girls.

- I: ...yes, they got interviewed as part of the inclusivity brief that we were doing. They were meant to all be launched just before lockdown and we had a big launch event set up in Birmingham and it got cancelled.
- R: Oh, I remember that. I remember that.
- I: Yes, so nothing's really happened with them but we're trying to...like everyone at Let's Talk. Period got...the funding ended so and it just kind of floated for a while so they've got some new people coming into Plan that will hopefully have that in their remit to pick it up.
- R: Well, yes, because they all left at once, didn't they?
- I: Yes, they did.
- R: I know, [REDACTED] left, didn't she, and who else?
- I: [REDACTED] and, yes, everyone left.
- R: Yes, I know, it's really weird.
- I: Yes, so we're trying to pick it up now to start doing a series of like online events to try and launch each of the briefs separately because there are four but, yes, and they are available on Plan's website but they're quite well hidden so do you want me to send you the link to where they are?
- R: Oh, yes, that would be lovely.
- I: Because we're just trying to...and this project is good actually because as we talk to people, some of the people that we're talking to for my Periods in a Pandemic project and Let's Talk. Period people so it's a way of saying, hey, they did get done and they're on the thing and we'll send them to you.
- R: Oh, that would be really cool, yes, that would be lovely.
- I: The launch will happen eventually so it's not lost.
- R: I know we were supposed to do something with Leeds University just the week before lockdown. We gave them like some money to help and then it got locked down and we just lost like 1,500 quid.
- I: Oh, God.
- R: We were so annoyed and then we were, well, what did you actually do with our 1,500 quid because we didn't do anything.
- I: They've probably still got it.

- R: We're still asking now, you know, like nine months later. Tell us the breakdown of what you spent that 1,500, which is not a lot of money but it is when you're a small charity.
- I: It is, that is a lot of money, yes.
- R: Especially for like Leeds bloody University who are just like...yes, anyway, that's another...yes.
- I: Okay.
- R: When you're really small, yes, people just take advantage.
- I: I know, it's bad, isn't it, and like for a university as well to do that, that's just extra crap.
- R: I know, never mind, sorry, let's...shall we get back?
- I: Yes, we've talked about your products, we've talked about your education and how that was the Let's Talk. Period and that kind of stopped naturally anyway but you're going to try and pick that up now that the schools are back.
- R: Uh-hmm.
- I: Was there anything else that you had to either stop or adapt at the beginning of lockdown?
- R: Well, obviously we had to stop all our fundraising, you know, [inaudible 27:54] we used to do lots of fundraising things. We had to...yes, I mean, I suppose everything stopped but we just ramped up the delivery because we knew that there were more people in need, so trying to get the word out but I was actually on the local news quite a few times and actually they came round and they followed me round for the day.
- I: Oh, right.
- R: That was on the local news and actually we're going to do it again next Wednesday because, you know, they got in touch with me and said, oh, the BBC really liked what I did in the summer, do you want to do it again? I went, yes, but it's even worse now. So, yes, they're doing it again and because we deal with a lot of obviously culturally diverse communities the BBC like that. So I think that's what...yes, so, yes, I'm doing that again showing them that actually period poverty hasn't gone away. It's not...you know, so yes.
- I: Yes, because I think you and [REDACTED] are like the superstars kind of saying...
- R: Aw.

- I: ...hey period poverty is still happening, it's not gone away and it's actually worse now. So, yes, it's great that you two are still poking and prodding and making your voices heard.
- R: She's a lot more eloquent than I am though. I never know what to say and just say the same thing but you know what, I don't care as long as it's on the news and people know about it and people think about it, you know, if they want to donate or whatever.
- I: Yes, and I'm really hoping that by doing the research to properly back-up what people like you [REDACTED] are saying, will give that added weight to the people that need to actually see this and have a kick up the arse again.
- R: Exactly [inaudible 29:48], yes, because there was all that money, wasn't there for the group taskforce?
- I: The taskforce, yes.
- R: Yes, where's that quarter of a million-pound gone then, hey?
- I: Yes, who knows? I'm on the data and evidence taskforce for that and we're trying to kind of revive it in some way but it's not coming from the government, it's coming from us saying we need to keep it going.
- R: I mean, do you know what, we had to travel down to London for an hour and, you know what, we kept putting our, you know like our expenses in because it was a hundred quid.
- I: Yes, it's not cheap.
- R: Plus we had to have a day off work, plus you had to get your lunch and the buggers...it was so difficult to get expenses back that I think we gave up in the end. I think we got one and it went on for like four or five months, I think, before it got shutdown. It was really badly managed. It's like, well, we've got this...you know, the form to fill in to get a hundred quid back from the government was like, oh my God, it was like doing a bloody thesis.
- I: They don't make it easy. They do not make it easy. So, yes, we're all still there and trying to remind everyone and make noise and everything.
- R: Yes, torch above your ahead sort of thing, yes, we're here, we're here.
- I: Okay, so what does it look like at the moment then in terms of your service provision?
- R: Service provision is still massively needed. Like I was saying, a lot of the communities are culturally diverse communities that we work with because Leeds is a very culturally diverse city. We have big populations, Eastern European populations, African populations, Asian population, they're the ones that are really suffering at the moment because obviously jobs, I

mean, people don't think, they think, oh, people will be sat at home on furlough, and it's like actually that's 80 per cent of your wage, if you spend 50, 60 per cent of your wage on your rent, what happens with all the other...you know. So, yes, we're still...it's still really needed and more so all the time. I mean, like yesterday, I had a new organisation call me up saying, right, we need some products and we've just heard about you. Then, yes, so it's just...for us it's business as usual but just, [like I say, 32:28], I think we were doing like 500 pads a month before lockdown and now it's 2,000.

I: God, bloody hell.

R: Something like that.

I: And that's all reliant on donations as well.

R: Yes.

I: So where do your...have we already talked about, where do you get most of your donations from?

R: So we get people sending them, we get Bodyform who've been amazing.

I: Yes, Bodyform and Hey Girls.

R: I mean, last time, so they sent me like three or four pallet loads. So they were having trouble getting some. I just got in touch with them because I've worked with them for years and they...yes, just we had stock anyway before lockdown so that was fine and then I just got in touch with like Bodyform, Hey Girls UK. I got all the volunteers to ring round and the organisations, you know like, Time of the Month and other people so Bodyform gave us three pallet loads and then they've just given us another five pallet loads, I think, six pallet loads and a pallet load of shower gel as well; 2,500 shower gels.

I: That's good, not feminine hygiene wash.

R: Yes, it is but it's...

I: Oh, no.

R: ...she just said [33:44] it's shower gel, [voices overlapping 33:44]...

I: Oh, that's fine.

R: I said that's fine, as long as you can wash yourself because people are washing themselves with bloody washing up liquid because they can't afford washing...you know they can't afford everything.

I: Yes.

- R: So we actually do give those out now which is nice and Leeds are doing...a lot of the third sector organisations have come to us and said, we're doing all these wellbeing packs for Christmas, can we put some products in there? I said, yes, you can also put shower gel in there as well. So we've given probably about 1,000 packs out for organisations to give out to the women that they're working with.
- I: So are you...
- R: Then obviously...
- I: Go on, carry on.
- R: No, no, go on.
- I: I was just going to say, so you do this voluntarily, don't you?
- R: I do.
- I: Is everyone a volunteer?
- R: Yes, everybody's a volunteer. They can claim back expenses. We do have an admin worker but again, she just claims expenses on the hours she works so we don't have anybody on a payroll, put it that way. So, yes, I mean, even I don't get paid and I'm like, oh my God, I need to get paid for doing this.
- I: It is a full-time job though, isn't it?
- R: For me it's 30, 40 hours a week because I do a lot of the organisation of the operational stuff, you know, as in the deliveries, the pick-ups, the organising, you know, getting products, you know, organising lock-ups to put them in, you know, and all that sort of stuff. Then, you know, we have an admin worker doing all our emails but obviously she fields them all to everybody so this is the second one of these I've done today.
- I: Oh, I'm sorry.
- R: No, that's alright. It's fine, yes. I'm just looking at all my work emails and think, no, sod it. It doesn't matter. It can wait. Like because I've been doing the period product stuff, I've also been done food as well and also so all these women that we deliver to, they're really in need of food as well for their families so I've been delivering food. Also during lockdown there was a lot of the women were saying, we're at home, I've got kids...I've got families with kids at home with nothing. They haven't even got a pen to draw with so I managed to get like put on Facebook, has anybody got any toys or whatever activity stuff that they can donate to me that I can give to these families, which was a silly thing to do because I got...because all the charity shops were shut and I got about 10,000 items and I got them out to

loads and loads of different families which was really good. Then I managed to...well, through the charity, get 10,500 items...school uniforms so Marks & Spencer sweatshirts that had been in a warehouse for two years, and brand new.

I: That's amazing.

R: So I managed to get, yes, them from ages three up to 16 so I managed to...I sort of work with another part of the council and they helped me get...it was 40 pallet loads. So we got them all into a warehouse, sort them all out and get them out to all the schools so a lot of the kids had free school uniforms as well. [Inaudible 37:09]. I feel I'm a bit of a diverse woman.

I: Yes, so is it a wild assumption that all of your volunteers are female or identify as female?

R: No, I've got one man.

I: Okay, out of how many?

R: Oh, God, we've just done this. I think it's about...out of the whole organisation.

I: Yes.

R: We did this the other day. I can't remember. I think there are about 12, 15 of us, including the trustees so obviously we've got a board of trustees and operational and volunteers. We've been put forward for a Queen's volunteer award.

I: Good.

R: And we were scrutinised last week by, I don't know, the Lieutenants of the Queen or something so they...

I: And the Corgis.

R: Yes, by the Corgis, yes, we were like, oh my God, what you have to do to...I mean, somebody...we had to put in...like somebody had to write a referral and then I had to get two references and then they scrutinised everything. Then they wanted all this paperwork, you know, like all our accounts, they wanted our board report. They wanted every...it was due diligence really. Then they wanted...they would have come and seen us but obviously couldn't so they did Zoom. So they had an hour's Zoom with the trustees and the operations and then they had an hour with the volunteers and beneficiaries. So I got people from Kenya, from Uganda, we got people from America, we got our ambassadors, we got loads of people to say how fantastic...it was really lovely. There was like so much love in the room, in the Zoom room so, yes, it was lovely. So we go on to the next bit now and

then apparently there's another bit where the Queen decides if you actually get the award which is really nice to be...

I: Well, I'm sure that you will. I can't see why you wouldn't.

R: You never know, do you?

I: Well, I guess it depends what mood the Queen's in.

R: Yes, exactly.

I: Let's hope she's had some gin.

R: Yes, but actually Meghan's quite good if it's...

I: Yes, that's true.

R: Was it Meghan?

I: Yes, she's spoken about period poverty.

R: [Voices overlapping 39:39] yes, she did but I don't think the Queen likes her though, does she?

I: Well, I don't know.

R: Anyway, watch this space. Well, Binti got an MBE, didn't she?

I: Yes, that's true. Anyway...

R: Anyway, so that's...yes, back to...

I: ...going back to your volunteers, did any of them have any problems helping to carry on like with their volunteering during lockdown?

R: Yes, a lot of them went home so a lot of our volunteers were students so they weren't doing anything. A lot of them went then online. They were doing stuff online but me, I just stayed and did everything operational which I had done before. I've done like most of the deliveries and the pick-ups, now we've got one or two back now which is good but during lockdown I did all the deliveries and all the pick-ups because we did have still some donation stations in the supermarkets and they were really pushing them which was really good. At first, they had to take them away in the first lockdown and then as lockdown eased, they put them back for me. Then people just send us them, all the time.

I: But you do pretty much everything, from the sounds of it or did do, during the lockdown.

R: Yes, well, as in operational as in getting products out to women, yes, that need them, yes, because I was the only really in Leeds but then what we did is...so now which is really good, my new lock-up is in a cultural food hub.

I: Right.

R: So I'm working with an organisation called Hamara and they have a cultural food hub in Leeds and they actually get cultural food out to different communities and a lot of the communities are the ones that I work with so it's really, really handy now. This has only been like in the last month or two so when they're delivering food to these organisations, they can also deliver the products as well.

I: Yes, that's great, that's good.

R: Oh, just hang on one minute, hang on, sorry.

I: Yes.

R: I'm so sorry about that.

I: That's okay.

R: Can I just text somebody a telephone number?

I: Yes, go ahead.

R: Would you mind?

I: Yes, that's fine.

R: If you hang on one minute, thank you, sorry. Hi, sorry about that, I do apologise.

I: No problem.

R: Because I do all food as well, now it's Friday, people are ringing round saying, oh, I've got some food spare, and obviously it will go off over the weekend and there's a food provision on a Saturday that get loads and loads of people. So he's just rang and said, oh, I've got loads of food, where do you want it delivered? I'm like, oh, hang on a minute.

I: I won't keep you for much longer anyway.

R: No, it's okay. I know we've been on the line for quite a while, sorry.

I: So the only other thing that I wanted to ask you about, so at the beginning when you first started chatting you mentioned that you'd been doing some impact stuff around COVID. Can you either tell me a bit more about that or

give me the details of someone so I can get in touch with them and speak to them? That would be good.

R: I mean, basically, we were just doing a questionnaire on how COVID has affected women during lockdown and I suppose that's all we've done, really. I don't know if it's been done yet. It's [REDACTED] who is...I don't know if it was one of the...I think you need to speak to [REDACTED] because she hasn't actually...I don't know if she's finished it yet. She was working with one of the students. [REDACTED] in Uganda at the minute but I think she was still working on it but you can, you know, if you want to speak to her or can email her if you need to.

I: Yes, that would be great just to...because the next phase of this project is getting feedback from people that have been experiencing period poverty during lockdown and if people are already doing stuff, what I'm hoping is that I can tap into what's already being done instead of asking the same people, the same questions.

R: Yes.

I: Yes, so that would be really good to speak to [REDACTED]

R: Okay, well, it's [REDACTED]

I: Yes, I've got her contact details.

R: Yes, you'll have her, yes, at Freedom4Girls.co.uk.

I: Yes, great. Right, yes, I will bother [REDACTED] now instead of you.

R: Yes, I think she's on and off a bit, you know, with Wi-Fi in Uganda but...

I: Yes, completely.

R: ...she'll answer an email, eventually.

I: Yes, I'll get in touch and see what we can sort out.

R: Okay.

I: So the very final question is have you got any other thoughts or comments or things that you think are important to highlight about period poverty within the pandemic at the moment?

R: Just how people are really suffering. There are a lot of people obviously that are in period poverty who come forward but it's the ones that aren't and I feel for the people say like the people in coercive relationships, domestic violence situations, DSD that sort of thing, yes, and also people being exploited and people that we don't know about and that's what...well that's what worries me about it. I mean, you know, people in Leeds, women and

girls in Leeds are pretty okay around period poverty because we're here but what about in other towns and cities? We get asked all the time why haven't we got something in wherever, why haven't we got something here? It's like, well, we're only tiny. That's why we started the ambassador programme because we got so many people asking us, I want to help, what can I do, how can I do it but I'm in this town or I'm in that town, which is why one of the...yes, we came up with the ambassador programme so they can replicate what we're doing.

I: Yes, so do you get requests then from other parts of the country?

R: Oh my God, yes.

I: Yes, that's not uncommon. I know...

R: Yes, all the time.

I: ...[voices overlapping 48:15] Wolverhampton one of the organisations in Wolverhampton got contacted by people in Scotland.

R: Yes, we've had people in Scotland contacting as well.

I: Yes, which is odd because it's like, well, I thought Scotland were pretty good with period poverty stuff now but there you go.

R: Yes, I know.

I: But who knows?

R: Yes, what we usually do if somebody says, oh, I've got some products to donate, we just usually just Google the nearest refuge or the nearest foodbank and say just give them to them, don't bother giving them to us. I mean, you know, we've got enough which is great and if people really want to send us them, we won't say no because we don't want to upset people, you know what I mean. I mean, people do send us some right crap, you know what I mean. It's like, no, we don't want ten-year-old like flea-bitten tampons, thank you but...

I: Yes, or just five random tampons that you found in the bottom of your bag.

R: Exactly, yes, I don't need these anymore. Here's the menstrual cup, I've only used it once. Oh, you're like, oh, right okay, that's fine, but, yes, we get all...yes, but we do get...in fact we get asked all over the world. People, yes, contact us from all over the world asking for products or how they can help or how we can help them.

I: Wow.

R: We're really lucky because we've got a lady who works for Facebook and she spends her...people who work for Facebook are allowed to have a

budget to boost posts, you know you can boost a post on Facebook or Instagram.

I: Oh, yes, I do.

R: So she uses every month she has \$150 to boost posts for us so if we want some...you know, so, yes, we've got a really good reach.

I: Yes, that's great.

R: I know. I mean, I did some work for her in...because she had a little bit of a charity in Kenya and I did some work with somebody in Kabera in one of the slums in Nairobi for her so she's ever indebted to me, bless her.

I: Yes, it's never what you know, it's who you know, isn't it?

R: Oh, absolutely, and the older you get the more you actually realise that actually, you know, you can have all the qualifications in the world but actually it's who you know.

I: No, it doesn't make...yes.

R: I mean, I've got geography O level. I haven't got any qualifications whatsoever. I don't even know how I got here. Do you know what I mean? I don't even know how I got in, as in you know into public health because all my peers in public health have got a Masters but actually I do 50 times more work than everybody else.

I: Yes, and that's why you're there.

R: Yes, possibly but, yes, so there we go.

I: Alright then, I have taken up way too much of your time but it's been brilliant.

R: No, it's alright.

I: So thank you very much.

R: I mean, have I answered your questions alright?

I: Yes, it's been great so...

R: Are you sure?

I: Yes, thank you so much for your help and for your time.

R: No, it's no problem.

I: Yes, if you think of anything else at any other point or you want to flag anything that suddenly pops up or...

R: Yes, I mean, I've found...I'll tell you one interesting thing that I've found around when delivering products is there is a lot of heavy bleeders. It maybe sounds really...but most people want thick pads, especially in the culturally diverse communities. It seems, and I think this is why we're doing this thing around black women's health, that they're wanting thick pads all the time.

I: Yes, I think some menstrual disorders are meant to be more prevalent within black and Asian women.

R: Yes, they are. Well, we can prove that, by what we deliver. I mean, if you ever need to do any insight work or want to talk to people, let me know.

I: Yes, that would be great. Certainly phase two, I will get in touch with Victoria and then I'll probably get back in touch with you.

R: Yes, okay, no worries.

I: Yes, but that won't be until like January, February time so...

R: No, that's fine, don't worry...

I: ...you can have your Christmas off.

R: ...not a problem.

I: Well, yes, thank you so much...

R: No, no, it's not a problem at all.

I: ...and I'll let you get on with all of the other zillion things that you do because you're amazing.

R: I'm just trying to do my day job now. I was looking at my emails thinking, oh, I think the Lord Mayor's invited me to a Zoom meeting.

I: Oh, fancy pants.

R: Oh, go away [inaudible 53:05] council. It'll be piecemeal crap that they give me. I don't know.

I: Alright, then, [REDACTED] let you get on.

R: Alright, love, no worries.

I: Alright...

R: Okay, [voices overlapping 53:14]...

I: ...thanks for your time.

R: ...so much for...alright, love, see you later.

I: Take care.

R: Have a nice weekend.

I: You too.

R: Thank you,

I: Bye-bye.

R: Bye, bye-bye.

End of transcript