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- I: So, [REDACTED] had sent you the participant information sheet?
- R: Yep, I've read that. Do you need me to send back the other one or are you okay with verbal confirmation?
- I: Yeah, we'll just do verbal. So everything's voluntary. You can withdraw at any time. I will get permission from relevant sections. Yeah, so only me and [REDACTED] will look at this except for sometimes we've got our GDPR person might just do an audit and make sure everything's okay.
- R: Yeah, that's fine. I was just going to check, is it anonymised if we are figures in the movement? Or is it only anonymised if it's lay people you're talking to?
- I: It's anonymised unless we ask for your permission. And only the researchers will have...no, it's fully anonymised.
- R: I think some things will potentially indicate who we are.
- I: And then we're supposed to remove...
- R: So I'm happy for you...oh really? Okay. It might not be possible because of some of the unique stuff we do. So I can give permission to be non-anonymised where appropriate.
- I: Great, thank you.
- R: Because otherwise the information loses its value, it becomes too bland, what you can actually say. There's a region does this thing we can't explain...
- I: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- R: ...it needs this.
- I: Highly identifiable to other people in the movement, for sure. Like that, there's no anonymising for that. But for general public, that will be easier. But anything that we get concerned about we'll just come back to you and about just about are you okay with this going out.
- R: Just to make your job easier. And also, like, I've had issues before with interviews that haven't credited me when it's been sort of something unique. So if you're able to be sensitive to that, that would be really helpful.
- I: Yeah, yeah, so any special contributions you would particularly like to be named for it.
- R: Well, that's the framework really. I think we are the only organisation that has written like a global framework. So as soon as I say that it's hopefully

obvious who we are. But also it would be rubbish if everyone went hey, let's all do global frameworks.

I: Yeah. For this study I don't think that's going to be an issue. 'Cause it's quite COVID [voices overlap 02:07].

R: Oh, that's all right, that's great.

I: And, I understand that personal data about me will be collected for the purposes of research. Yes, so that's just [voices overlap 02:16] the first one. The opportunity to consider the information and discuss it. Do you have any questions?

R: Not right now. If I have any, I'll come back to you. But obviously I won't, you know...if I babble and make a mistake, I'll correct it.

I: Okay. What is this one? Are you okay about audio recording the telephone interview today?

R: Yeah. So are you able to give me a copy of it? Because I would enjoy knowing what I said afterwards.

I: Sure, I'll put a note to [REDACTED]

R: Wonderful. Thank you.

I: And then...look at me, I hadn't read this consent sheet properly. So I agree for my name and my organisation's name to be used with my quotes from my interview and research reports.

R: Yeah, absolutely.

I: So you do get your name used.

R: Okay, that's great.

I: See then in the next one it says, I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in research reports, publications and conferences.

R: So I would not agree to be anonymised in quotes that represent my organisation. But I would agree to be anonymised in quotes that are like maybe a little bit negative or harsh or I wouldn't necessarily want to be associated for like politeness and advocacy reasons.

I: So I think definitely then it means one, the transcript needs to come back to you; and also prior to publication we just also need to check quotes with you.

R: Yeah, if you don't mind doing that, that would be really helpful. 'Cause I'm really happy to contribute and I want to be able to be critical where possible.

- I: Okay, great. So I will make a note to return the transcripts to you and then in that process we might get you to highlight anything that you especially don't want attributed to you but we are allowed to use, anonymised. And/or...
- R: Yeah, if you choose quotes you're particularly keen on or if there are bits that help you explain your case really well, just let me know what those are too? But I'm happy to annotate as necessary. Whatever makes your job easier and I know you've got a lot of data to mess with and I will only have one set.
- I: I understand that the transcripts will, yep, be anonymised. Yes. And then you're okay to take part in this study then?
- R: Sure.
- I: Great, thank you. All right, [REDACTED] had sent the questions in advance.
- R: Yep, I've got them. I made a couple of notes and thought about some of these.
- I: Great. So we know your organisation's name. And then location, do you say is it UK wide? Or international?
- R: So, it's Period Positive, two words, not with a hashtag. 'Cause I think we used to sell ourselves based on hashtags. So if you don't mind making a note of that, it's like capital P, capital P. And it's based in the UK but works internationally. As well as like locally and nationally.
- I: Okay. And then can you tell me about, so it's uniform across all the interviews, tell me about the work that you do?
- R: What we do. So, I wrote this down. We provide training and support for the framework for menstrual literacy based on a holistic model developed from research to teach, train and transform attitudes. And we provide training for schools, colleges, universities, doctors and hospitals, councils, governments and private companies and NGOs. We offer outreach and do public engagement events.

We are often available for ad hoc advice and support when members of the public get in touch on their own, through our website questionnaire. And we do writing about periods in the media and are interviewed by the press a lot. We also help students, colleagues with their research, and we provide extra advice to other organisations and advisory when there are media requests or like there is a cultural historian on menstruation needed.

So I mean some of that is what I do. So it's probably mentioning me as well as Period Positive.

I: Great, thank you. And so in that work, what did it look like prior to COVID?

R: So almost all of that was conducted in person. There were probably 'phone interviews now and again. But if I was doing a radio interview or some outreach, I was being interviewed on the radio at the studio. Even coming down to London or going to like the TV studios in Manchester. Or even going to the radio station locally to be interviewed down the line if it was for the BBC at their BBC studio.

Any performances were live. School visits happened in person. And it meant that I could meet people face-to-face, show them real resources and examples of advertising from the past with the messages or show them reusable menstrual products if they'd never seen them before. And it was really valuable for hearts and minds conversations. So live performance all over the country. And live meetings and training wherever I was wanted.

So it meant that if people were uncomfortable or unsure they had a real live human person in front of them who they could ask questions of. And like, asking those questions and answering them led to a huge forward step really quickly. And advancing taboo-breaking activities. And they fed into future activities. But a large part of what we did was face-to-face.

I: Okay, great, thank you. We have a lot of prompt questions because it's for a lot of diverse different kinds of organisations.

R: I mean, I will try to answer every single one.

I: Oh, they're prompts, they're not intended for every single one.

R: Oh really?

I: Yep. So it's more again being flexible about what each organisation does. But out of them, you've covered a lot of them already, but...

R: Have I? Okay, 'cause I was ready for number two.

I: Okay, we can go ahead and do it, if you've got an hour? It's going to take a lot of time to get through.

R: Oh, okay, I'll try and answer more succinctly.

I: So what are the organisations that you do typically support?

R: So, we mostly support at the local or regional level. So a school or school network, like an academy chain. Or a city council. And sometimes it'll be like a large private school chain. So like a nationwide one. Like we advise the Steiner Waldorf schools.

Sometimes it will be supporting a university that's somewhere else and usually we'll just travel to them. But there's a lot of charities that ring us up

or email us and we can participate online. So there's a lot of office hours. And some of us are separated anyway in different cities, some of the volunteers. So we do communicate over Zoom or Skype normally sometimes. But most of the time it's about going and being with people. So I do travel a lot.

I: Fantastic, thank you. And what you provide, it's mostly education, it's...what do you provide? It's education and...?

R: So we provide education, training and outreach activities.

I: What do you mean by outreach activities? Can you expand on that?

R: So like public engagement performances and talks and lectures. And sometimes education events where you have a stall and kids come by and ask you questions and then they go to the next stall. Like a science fair. So Big Bang Fair in Birmingham, that one's at the NEC. And it has like 80,000 kids come through. And that was cancelled this year and moved online. So we did it as an online Q and A web chat. But the previous year we were there for the whole week and just gave outreach all week.

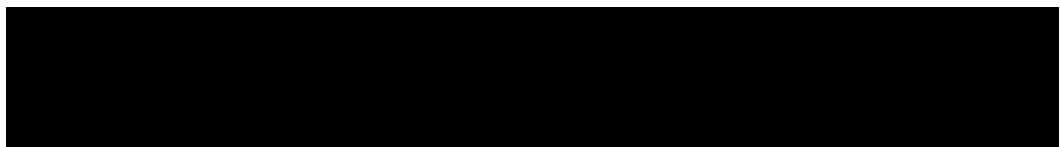
I: So we'll get to talk about how that feels so different, substantially different, when you do it online.

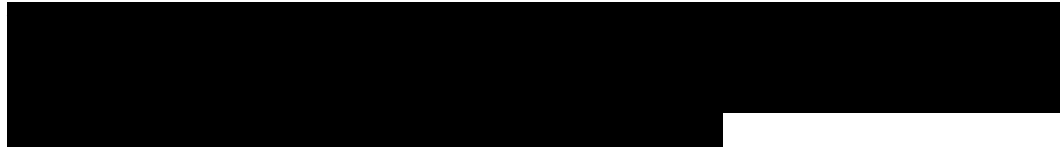
R: And I also go on comedy tours all the time doing Adventures in Menstruating, which is the period comedy show that is the sort of comedy way of sharing my research with young people and adults. So it shares all of the research and all of the tenets of the charter but in the form of an interactive comedy show. And it's live.

I: And all of that's come to a halt?

R: Yeah. So I've performed that...I haven't performed all this year. Like my last few gigs got cancelled in the spring. And it's rubbish because I should have performed at festivals all year, or gone on tour to schools. So, oh, you were asking me what things...how things have changed? So I've not been able to visit like any locations. So anyone that's reached out to me when normally I would go to them, they usually invite me to go. And it's me or our production assistant will go.

And often at these events people in the audience come and ask lots of questions and I often get invited to another event. So the sort of chain reaction of people being stimulated or inspired by what they've learned, and trying to host something of their own, hasn't happened. So there's not been an organic sharing of knowledge. It's all been very inorganic.





I was also going to be doing more YouTube videos to sort of make up for the shortfall in service we can provide. But my voice isn't very reliable right now because of the asthma because of the people using wood burner stoves and pollution around my house. We're in a stove use is banned area but people are ignoring it and because everyone has to stay home, they have to keep their heat on all the time. And they can't afford to pay gas bills so they're using wood burners. Which is like, it never would have occurred to me that this would be the reason why I couldn't do some of my work. But it is. Nothing I can do about it.

I: A consequence.

R: Yeah, completely unexpected. I also can't meet with any of the people I work with. So I can't revisit schools I was meant to revisit. I was meant to do tons of work in South Wales but it's not really safe for me to travel because I'm meant to be shielding. And now I'm in the vulnerable group so I'm not going to take public transport. Also even if I weren't, it seems like it would be irresponsible to travel unnecessarily right now. So I've been trying to do a lot of this work online.

One thing that has been useful is I have been doing a lot of training sessions over Zoom.

I: And how have those been going?

R: Really well actually. I adapted one of the activities where everyone runs around the room to one where they point to things onscreen. And using breakout rooms to discuss advertising messages and create lesson activity ideas has been all right. In one way, it's kind of shown me that I can adapt my message to make it slightly less bespoke. And it's still effective. Which I think I wasn't aware would work. I was sort of...there was no reason to take that risk while I was able to visit people.

But also I've got mobility issues as well, like I'm visually impaired, difficult to travel on my own. So in some ways some of the work's been easier to do without having to travel. But people usually want me to come. So I tend to come places. So even although it's difficult to get to London or Birmingham if there's an interesting event it's much better to be there. And like, actually make contact with people.

It's also easier to explain something taboo if you're physically there to be a reassuring and open presence. If you're just doing it over Zoom there's another barrier there, there's like an othering that doesn't need to take place. There's distancing which can be helpful for some people but I found for most people being able to tangibly play with period stains and cut them

out and pretend to have them on your clothing, is really fun. And it really breaks down a lot of the worries that people have.

And that is something you can't convey over Zoom. So a lot of the unexpected moments of learning are gone. Because Zoom meetings have a start and an end point. So you never have the casual moments like I would also have after a talk or after a show or after a meeting or a round table, where like the real conversation happens. Even organisations chatting in the pub.

Like, I'm friends with [REDACTED] who does Wuka Wear (the period pants company) because we just chatted the end of an event. And I happened to mention that I was broke and worked in café and she remembered being broke and working in a café while working on her idea. And we just bonded over that one sentence. And it was like, you know, there are no casual interactions anymore. Everything has to be strategic and that can be quite exhausting.

One thing I have done though, sorry I'm ignoring the questions I'm just telling you stuff.

I: No, that's what we prefer.

R: Oh, okay. One thing that has been quite good is the organisation, it started out as a piece of like young person activism and now I have got older. And so over that time I have done a Master's degree and disseminated my findings and creative resources. And gone back to the school that I worked at when I developed it and have shared it as a pilot and that's been successful. And that's starting to get a lot more recognition now. And more and more schools and hospital groups and NHS trusts are contacting me to join in. And the amount of people contacting me now wouldn't be manageable if I had to physically go to each place.

So what I've started doing is having a short 'phone conversation first because that way at least I'm making some sort of personal initial contact beyond an email. Or possibly like a very brief Skype like no more than half an hour. And then...oh, Zoom not Skype 'cause I paid for the expense of Zoom which is expensive but it seems to be worth it to have a call that won't get cut off. But I'm doing that out of my own money.

Oh, that's another thing. There's no grants I've been able to apply for because I'm not very good at...I'm dyslexic and dyspraxic and I'm very bad at reading and filling in forms so I usually have someone help me to do that kind of thing. But there's nobody around, there's nobody to help with that stuff right now. So there may have been things I was eligible for when we weren't able to deliver stuff in person. But it's not a company and it's not a charity, it's like a distributed network of consciousness raising and it's a framework. And the framework, the Period Positive Pledge, is the result of streamlining the message to make it easier for people to follow. And it's also the basis for charter mark.

One thing that's happened has been other people have been copying the charter mark and it's been becoming more and more difficult to dispute this and say they don't have permission to use the name or the logo because it's trade marked for use as a charter. And most of the time people are cool about it but I think because I can't actually go and visit them or they feel far away, they're feeling more defiant.

Most organisations are like, oh we're so sorry, how can we earn the charter mark? And then I tell them and then they do it and then they come up with a name for their project that is unique to them. So that they get credit for having their own project. And the charter marks stays this entity that is a mark that shows you that the organisation is all genders inclusive and not transphobic and is sustainable and talks about reusable products and looks at media literacy and is multicultural. And like all of those things are conveyed by this symbol.

So one thing that's actually been good about this is that it's made me put online a lot of the stuff that would normally be agreed individually. So talking to an individual organisation about where they feel they are in the charter, if they'd like to go for the bronze award, the silver award or the gold award. And what their audit of their school looks like. All of that stuff was done at the time with a walk around the school and a chat with the staff. And now I've started creating an online template for collecting information and doing the school audit and uploading evidence and following the tenets of the charter. And looking at the framework for the pledge in a way that logs their improvement online. So that we've got a database of everything.

And that's partly because it was time for that to happen anyway. But like, I was kind of dragging my feet because I'm not very good at that. And I've had to become good at it because there's no other way to keep track of it now. And it's also holding people accountable to using it correctly so that, you know, they are changing their language to be inclusive of trans menstruators, they are changing their provision in schools to include reusable products. And they are considering the imagery that they use and the imagery that they see and making sure that it doesn't uphold taboos.

And they do know that they can be an autonomous project that has its own name and represents the organisation and the Period Positive charter and not be called like Period Positivity or Positive Period or something. Because they understand that this framework is bigger than any one organisation. That it's for everyone. And I think that's been the biggest thing has been, you know, ensuring that we're a distributed network. We're not the company, we're not a charity, we're not a governmental organisation. Because we want to be able to critique all of those things and support all of them. And if you're a charity you can't really critique the government and if you're a company you can't really critique a company.

You know, I know there are different models for this but the model that I prefer is one that is community led. So that any region that has this charter

is supporting other places in their area to also support the charter. So the framework has been compared to the International Declaration of Human Rights and the sustainable development goals. And there are other frameworks that people use to lead policy but the value of this being a framework is that it's a guide. So Period Positive exists to support the use of this guide now. And it sort of just makes communication easier.

But it also means that more and more people are contacting us because of COVID. So a lot of people are contacting us because their menstrual health is a concern and they don't know what to do because their doctors is closed. Some people have asked about whether COVID is affected by periods and vice versa. And there's a lot more talk about whether there's menstrual inflammation around the time of the second stage of your cycle and if that impacts COVID test results. I mean, I don't know the answer but that's the kind of question people are asking.

There's a lot of general talk about procurement. Because the period poverty scheme being rolled out as a 'products first' initiative hasn't supported schools to make sure that people doing the procuring are comfortable and confident having those conversations. So a lot of the work that we've been doing has been talking to schools about procurement advice.

And the advice that I'm giving is if they don't have access to ways to talk to the kids right now they should go 50/50. 50/50 disposable/reusable, 50/50 internal/external. And adjust these measures based on take up. But for an initial offer at least try that ratio and then adjust hopefully towards reusables as time goes on. But as a first guess, and then talk to the kids about it.

But the people doing the procuring aren't the people who've had menstrual education training. They're just the people who buy stuff. And it's not something that people are considering a priority because the funding went predominantly towards stuff. And the sex educational curriculum that came in last year only had about £7 million directed at education and training for schools. And that's for all of the sexual and reproductive health training and wellbeing work. So I'm critical of this because it's an oversight by the task force. A huge oversight. And I wasn't invited to be on the task force (so I couldn't contribute this view).

And there were a couple of other organisations who were very critical of the focus on disposable products. But what I've noticed is a focus on product exclusively or with a nod to education, or with education being provided by product sellers or product distributors rather than menstrual educators, has been that people have reinforced that periods are something to panic about and that only products will solve the panic.

And some of the stuff that I'm reading at the minute is coming from some excellent research by Chris Bobel and colleagues from the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research that show that 'menstrual concealment' can reinforce taboo messages and a focus on products reinforces menstrual concealment or passing as a non-menstruator. When it would be more

practical to discuss leaking might happen more when you haven't got as much access to products. Leaking might happen more when you change from disposables to reusables. People might have hang ups about touching their vagina and that might be due to taboo or stigma or culture or trauma. And all of those things need to be acknowledged and addressed and there are ways to address them.

But all of that stuff plays a part in people not being able to use menstrual products when they want to. And there's also stuff around access. People can't get places right now. So there are people who are contacting me that are afraid of menstrual blood and seeing it for the first time in ages. So they've decided to use reusables but they're not sure about how much they're bleeding and what is the right reusable to use for that. Or they're seeing menstrual blood because they've changed their birth control method to something that's more manageable right now and they're freaking out at seeing so much blood because their period's heavier.

And it's interesting having all of these conversations but the main thing I'm gathering is that everything is just amplified. There is a desire to find out more about periods which is amplified. There's a desire to find out about reusables which is amplified. There is a lack of access to products whether that's through financial reasons or fear factor or lack of access to people they can talk to reasons. And that's bigger.

But schools are way more interested in taking this on. They're always contacting me about the charter now, several times a week. And it used to be that either I would have to reach out or schools would hear about it through other schools or through events. So now there is hearing about it. So there's a level of awareness that has been reached which is great. And we've had to grow to accommodate that.

I: I'm sorry. When you talked about amplified, like these amplified desires for information and for product and from schools. Do you link this to the menstrual movement in general? Or are you talking about COVID specifically?

R: It's hard to tell. I think it's both. I think COVID has amplified everything. I think it's giving us a lot more time to reflect and think and it's given us a lot more quiet time. And I think the teachers that are coming to me are coming to me because they are thinking more about their lessons in general because they have to rethink how to do them online. And in that, they are probably thinking more about the curriculum. I think that doctors surgeries and people who work at them are also having a little bit more thinking time. So it's necessarily a positive, it's an interesting observation that so much has slowed down that these conversations have now had time to marinate.

And so things I was saying to people last year that they were going to take a natural step forward on probably this year with me coming and doing outreach, are now resulting in people being creative and flexible. And that creativity and flexibility that they're applying to COVID solutions is kind of

starting to open them up to the more transformative messages in the work I'm doing. So my hearts and minds conversations are easier right now.

And I don't necessarily think that is to do with the menstrual movement. Because the menstrual movement has been very focused on products in the media. Whether people are doing products behind the scenes, I don't...so I think the education messages are starting to happen in various charities and NGOs and stuff. Because people are seeing that there has to be education alongside and are doing education stuff.

It concerns me that the education is not coming from educators but people sort of training on the job. Because I think when they train on the job there's a danger that the old tropes and taboos could be passed on as hidden curriculum just the way they are now. So one of the things we're looking at is doing a Trained and Trusted Award for other educators. To sort of say that they've shown that their resources that they teach or train with follows the framework.

And the framework isn't just because I said so, it's sort of the distillation of about 15 years of interviews and research and action research and feedback from the communities that I work with. So following it provides support without bossing people around. And it's quite nice, it's quite nice to work with. So I think as the framework embeds as well, it's more helpful to people.

I think what the menstrual movement has done is open up the conversation around menstruation. If we're talking about the menstrual movement as a whole, I think the free periods stuff in particular has a danger of influencing towards a product only or disposables only solution based on the imagery the general public already uses. The wellbeing stuff that's come through in the last two years has been helpful in moving the conversation broader.

And I'm looking at making it go broader still by focusing on the history of media messages. And I don't think there is a whole lot on that. Or if there is I would appreciate if people took that from us or got support from us on how to do that. Because there is already a campaign doing this. And it would be great if we were amplified or signal boosted – rather than co-opted, which has happened – by campaigns and also by advertising. Sometimes the adverts we've advised on but often they're not, they're just the same corporations trying to get in on the same audiences. So we'll see.

I think the kind of mobility I had before where I could, if I was invited to talk in parliament I could go, or invited to advise MPs I could, or invited to speak...like I was meant to be speaking in the Scottish Parliament in May and I couldn't go to that. And I was invited to do some work in Sweden on the education side from a couple of city councils. But also on the standard that we're developing. And I couldn't travel there. And that was difficult because the language barrier, it was very difficult to try and do those meetings over the 'phone. Being there in person would have really helped

with that. Because my Swedish is poor (and following a Swedish language session is difficult online).

So now things generally are...people email me, I'm responsive. I'm not able to reach out to new organisations right now because I'm doing my best to manage the calls coming in.

I: That's good to hear. But COVID's laid out all these obstacles for going in person but you are finding new opportunities, not new opportunities but new innovative ways of doing things. And you're still quite busy even though you're not able to go in person.

R: Oh I should say that the reason I'm so busy is that I'm also doing a PhD right now. Which has also been badly affected by COVID. So everything that I would do on the PhD in person I'm also having to do online. So the amount of time I have to spend on Period Positive is greatly reduced.

I: So is your PhD related to...?

R: Yeah, it's looking at lifecycle transitions and attitudes to our lifecycle transitions as we age. So it's a bit broader still. I'm looking at developing a framework for that. But not being able to be on campus means that I can't continue the Period Positive stuff because we're a Period Positive university. So being a student should have helped with that. It also means that I don't have access to a lot of the stuff like I would have as a student. So there's funding I'd be potentially eligible for and projects that I'd be able to do. But everything has ground to a halt at uni.

And everything I need to do for uni, like reading, takes longer. Writing takes longer. Getting books from the library posted to me takes longer. Meetings with supervisors and colleagues takes longer. So everything's just like extremely slow, and exhausting. So I'm already disabled and deal with fatigue anyway. And all of this is very, very fatiguing. So it's just slower.

One thing I have been doing is working on a book. Which has been something to do in lockdown but it's just taken me out of the loop, like social media and stuff. 'Cause I haven't had time to do social media. So I've been doing a lot of writing but it's been long writing, not short, snappy writing. And I'm not great at social media at the best of times.

I was looking at the sort of 'things you want' section and I would love to have admin support and press support. Because those are the two areas I really struggled with while trying to cope with the amount of work I normally deliver. So the priorities have been when young people have questions, I answer them. And when schools want support, I deliver it. So like if people want help, I help them. It's usually free, I think only one organisation's been able to pay me this year.

I: And most of this you've had to do remotely? Not in person?

R: Yeah, I had to do everything remotely. The only thing I did in person was a BBC interview where they had to spend so much extra time following all the protocols for a three minute segment, it was like unreal. So like everything else has been remote. But that's been partly because I had to shield. That's been partly because everything's been locked down. 'Cause Sheffield's been in tier three when it hasn't been on lockdown. So we couldn't go anywhere anyway. Nothing was open. Schools are open but I can't go into a school.

So I think like the...oh, I was going to say what the needs are. People are asking me for advice on lesson plans and how to recognise good resources or write them. They're asking me for policy advice and I'm getting a lot of media requests from students who are doing student journalism, who are doing research about periods as well. Not just student journalists but like students studying administration.

I've also seen students who are struggling to finish their work. So there's like kind of a new generation of menstrual researchers coming up through but a couple of them had to take extensions. So people I've heard from who wanted to interview me about my work or read papers I've written, they've slowed down.

Also, I should say, I've written a lot of academic journal stuff about periods. And all of that has been delayed. So I was meant to present at a conference this summer and that was cancelled. And that was on the interactive work I've done with kids on advertising messages. So I couldn't deliver that. There was another one about stains, like leaking on periods. And that was cancelled in April and it's just been postponed and is now an online conference in June. But the price to attend has gone up. And I don't know if I can afford to attend it now. They are probably not offering like priority cheap student rates any more.

I've also not been able to visit the US and I do some work there as well as that's where my family is. So it's also been really sad to not see anyone I know here other than my partner and a couple of friends who've stood outside. So my health has been worse and my mental health's been worse because there's just less interaction with people.

As for what people are asking for, people are asking for books. I've written two books that'll come out next year, which is going to be great. Oh, and I don't know if I'm allowed to mention the second book yet. Well, anyway.

I: I didn't hear that.

R: Cool. So I've written a book for kids and hopefully...oh, the book I wrote has been delayed because of COVID. So the book will now be out later because of COVID. Which is frustrating because it was in the works for a while. But it's great that there'll be little kids reading about period positivity. But later than planned. Like, they could use the message now. And they have wanted more video content. Like, a lot of people have asked me for

short videos. I think the thing I've been most interested in is the Q&As. Like, I set up a Q&A form that people can fill in, and I've got a lot of questions. [Voices overlap 38:49].

I: Is this on your website?

R: That was on Twitter. But my website also has a form for just contacting me and it's used pretty regularly. The things I mostly get asked are from reporters, from university students, from other researchers, from teachers, but often just members of the public who are freaked out. But I haven't really used social media. It's just been too hard to keep up. Because everything's just onscreen so much that I can't...like, I get fatigued and eye strain really easily now. So just looking at social media on 'phones and on big screens is just too much. Which sucks, because like a lot of stuff happens on social media. And I just can't tap into it.

I: How do you think things are going to pan out now that...I mean it's going to be a rocky road to post COVID but I can imagine for you there's going to be, like you're talking about this amplification, you're talking about people being primed and ready for these new ways of doing things. But then it's going to be a rocky road 'til we're post COVID. So what do you think the next six months are going to look like for you?

R: If I'm honest, all of my work has been disrupted by Brexit. I did a show that was meant to be on Radio 4 and it was aired the day after the Brexit election. And then it was re-run the day after the Trump election. And like a lot of media opportunities and chances to bring the conversation around to taboo just kind of got caught up in that. And then I was quite ill for a while and other charities kind of filled in the gap for a long time. And so I sort of feel like the campaigns I'm working on don't really have as much of a reach with the media any more.

So that's been the most difficult thing. I sort of felt like I was just getting back on track. Like, my health was good enough, my reach was good, the work had a lot of evidence behind it. And the pilot projects that I talked about maybe three years ago had all finished now and are working really well. And then the pandemic caused...like, I just had to completely back track and just almost feel like I was starting from scratch.

So I'm worried that the combination of possibly a further lockdown or being outside of London where all the action seems to be or like further Brexit chaos will also impact the COVID stuff. So I don't think (Covid) is an issue in a vacuum, just like I don't think period poverty is an issue in a vacuum. Like, period poverty is clearly linked to austerity. And it's clearly linked to the financial crisis that's come about through COVID.

But the deeper issues that I was just starting to get some attention shined on are being missed. So I think that the chaos of all of this means that people will still focus on the financial aspects. They won't look at the

environmental stuff as much, they won't look at the media messaging and the opportunity for young people to become more savvy about that.

Or, to be frank, organisations that have enjoyed a bigger platform because they have focused on product donation will incorporate this work into their work. And because they already have a government ear or a bigger platform they will adapt the message as they interpret it and those messages may be missed.

Like, I've noticed that when other organisations look at taboo breaking they don't really include media messaging. And sometimes that's through not being aware of it. But sometimes it's through having to work with disposal menstrual product companies who don't want those messages to be a focus. And that's really difficult. I think one thing that we enjoy the freedom of is being completely independent. Like, we're not a company, we're not a charity, we're not a government led project. We have worked with them.

In fact, one thing I'm really disappointed about is we had an early day motion put forward in the last session of parliament that hasn't really been able to go anywhere because I haven't been able to meet with my MP. The focus of everything has been COVID or Brexit. And she's the Northern Ireland minister now. So there's no chance of all that conversation.

But, because I've had to focus all my energy on working with actual members of the public that want help, I haven't been able to work on much media or press promotion of the work I do. And I have noticed that organisations that have a strong media department or a lot of funding to support their media or who are able to synchronise their media messages because they are a natural fit for each other, those organisations are getting their messages out there.

[REDACTED] d. And that we're a tiny, insular place and we might think we're bigger than we are. But like, the people who have been able to do promo for me don't have a national or international reach. So I kind of have to wait for opportunities to come to me. But the priority has been on supporting people who want to do stuff whether they can afford it or not. So I'm just working with people and continuing to have hearts and minds conversations. And trying to publish journal articles so that the work can be carried out, whether I can do it or not. But ideally I would love some funding for media support and for admin support. Because the project needs to grow a little bit and those are the two things I can't do.

I: So those were things that, prior to COVID, were getting on okay?

R: Yeah, because I could travel in person. So the press I was doing was me going places and making a bit of a splash and doing a bit of comedy and doing a visit and going on local radio and I could do it. Sometimes I had a PA to travel with or a production manager to set up, like a stagehand. But,

yeah, it was all doable. And just being on my own at home isn't helping. And of course the need is greater now, more and more people are contacting me. So dealing with more people with fewer resources is hard.

And then also my income has been impacted by COVID. I'm just sort of dealing with my student stipend now. I rarely get freelance work right now. I've had one booking to talk to some students and it was paid. And the rest have been free. And I've had one booking to do some training and that was paid. And the other stuff's for free. So I've also licensed the logo for use to three organisations, for free. Because it's meant to be free.

And I've done some outreach work with a couple of colleagues abroad. And that was just advice and stuff. Yeah, I think COVID impacting everyone and me has had the impact. It's not just been like the impact on me or the impact on them, it's a co-created problem. Because there are some things I can't do because of COVID and there are some things that just can't be done because of COVID. So it's not just the rules, it's also how the rules impact me, because I'm disabled. I don't know, it's hard to pin down. Something you can put into your report.

But there's also, I think it's worth saying that organisations that focus on product donation have been able to use the messages of COVID to amplify the need and get more products. But I think we're about to reach peak tampon and it needs to be acknowledged that this is an opportunity for an organisation like mine to support with these soft skills that are needed to enhance the take up.

And I think that's been further amplified by schools operating in isolation right now. There aren't council meetings. There aren't school board meetings. There aren't teacher networks meeting in person. There isn't time to do that kind of stuff, I would presume.

I: Sorry, it's just 'cause we've got to wrap up soon and there was an important point that I just want to pick up on. Because some of what we've been hearing is that actually people are having less access to product. But you're seeing actually there has been an increase? That people are able to...organisations are able to access product?

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

I: Sorry, that's why I want to make sure I get it right. You were saying that...

R: No, I think there's less access. I think that the issues around austerity were like the first thing impacting that badly. And the issues impacting people due to COVID are the sort of next layer on top. But it's worth mentioning if you're writing to the government that austerity was a huge factor first. So when times were more...when people were experiencing less poverty in general they were experiencing less period poverty.

But it's important to remember that access and conversations are also missing right now. So you can't go get products necessarily if you can't go to the supermarket, or a food bank, or school. But you also are missing access to the conversations and the lessons and the dialogues that people could also be having about periods which make access smoother.

I: Fantastic, yeah. No, no, I was just trying to qualify about the organisations that distribute products. Because that was really useful what you were saying about how actually their message, their being able to raise the profile of period poverty via COVID and then whether or not they are able to access more product or not. I was like, 'cause I have been hearing, sometimes people are. So I'm trying to pick up on the situations where actually those hidden opportunities and those hidden things that are actually happening. So...

R: I would say, not it's worth saying, there are care packages going out and those care packages that people are developing to deliver to doorsteps are including menstrual products. You know, where appropriate. So that's been happening. We didn't do it, but another organisation did. And they included menstrual products in the take home packages. I think what's happening is the opportunities to educate schools on how to use the government scheme were missed before COVID.

And the opportunities to explain how to use the scheme have been amplified by COVID interrupting the school year and school priorities. So as a teacher, and I don't know how many teachers you're interviewing, but as a former head of PSHE (Personal Social Health and Economics Education), I know that schools frequently feel pressure to implement new initiatives and if there's not a priority on the new initiative it doesn't get implemented, whether there's funding or not.

So there are free book schemes, there are free resource schemes, there are lots of free things that people try and get. But there usually has to be an in-school person in charge of that. And sometimes it's the PSHE teacher, sometimes head of English, head of science, could be a headteacher or a deputy head but the priority this year has been surviving and coping with rapid changes that are being announced by government before they're being told to headteachers. So sometimes you're hearing that your school's open or closed on the news before you're hearing it from your local authority.

The situation was already not going to work though. The school based product scheme was not going to work based on how little focus they'd put on education. So this is an amplification of that, it is not the problem. COVID is making it worse but it was already poorly executed. And a way to execute it better would have been to again do a 50/50 thing. Fifty per cent education and training for staff so that they champion the issue and champion the wider issues around taboo messaging so that no-one in the school buys the wrong stuff, doesn't buy anything or undermines the delivery.

I: Thank you. Sorry, I'm so sorry about that. Yeah, I'm all right. Somebody just came to my front door [voices overlap 52:32]. I think, is he coming back? But I was really happy that we got to clarify that.

R: Yeah, that wasn't what I meant. So what it is, is I don't want the government in a year's time to blame COVID on the scheme not working. The scheme didn't work because they did it wrong. Because they didn't ask the right questions of the right people. And the people they did ask questions of (including corporations heading the taskforce) may have had a different agenda. So what they should do is spend more money on training and education and I think they should implement the charter. It's already there and available. They just need to ask about it.

There's also a curriculum model (I've developed) that's already been tested and available and it's been given to members of government and they just need to roll it out. That way teachers can create their own lesson plans with their own autonomy that follow better practice. And we will end up with a model that is about being trained and trusted but doesn't put the focus on the panic of blood and the panic of hiding periods. Which has been the focus.

But I completely acknowledge that not having menstrual products is a problem and we should give them out when needed. But also not being confident enough to talk to your doctor might be a bigger problem that could end in you dying. So that's a focus. And not being able to talk to students about periods is completely understandable based on the paradigm we live in now. But we should be looking at changing the paradigm and that's the work I've been doing.

So support with that would be amazing. But because it's not part of the like current zeitgeist which is based on believing a lot of those old attitudes, and influenced by many of the large companies that sell the products, there isn't funding for it, there isn't opportunity for it. Unless you are an organisation that is already doing what the government thinks is the right thing to do. And I'm not.

I: Yeah. No, I get it. [REDACTED] and I know of the complete silver bullet solution of, oh, period products, there you go – done. We're done, we've done our job here.

R: Even down to, like, saying period products. Like, it's been fascinating seeing that evolve. So I've been saying not to say sanitary products for a long time and there's still some organisations that do but many of them are changing. But the move to period products, and I know this is rich coming from an organisation that calls itself Period Positive 'cause it's cute, period products is still a euphemism. And menstrual products get people reclaiming the word menstruation and know that word is for them.

And that helps people talk about menstruation with their doctors. But thinking that menstruation is a medical word or a scientific word makes

people who get periods disempowered to feel medical or scientific. Which undermines their ability to ask for help when they're having a wellbeing problem.

And it also means that we are still not using the most internationally recognised word or word family that is the true word for the thing. So the more we say period – like, we say menstrual cup – but we say period pants. And we've stopped saying sanitary products, we say period products. I'm trying to get people to say menstrual and menstruation more. Because this is, it feels subtle but it's incredibly powerful to say menstruation and not be a scientist or a doctor. Just the way it feels powerful to know the definition of vulva and a vagina. But if you don't know, you don't know.

So people feel positive saying vagina but if they mean their vulva they're losing a whole lot of learning about what soaps they can and can't use on the internal and external genitalia and where different types of cancer can manifest. And how to have a great orgasm and how big your clitoris really is. And all those kind of things. And that labia look anything like other people's labia is a complete fantasy. And everybody has their own vulva.

And, like all that stuff is very nuanced and linguistic but it's really powerful to try and influence that shift because it means that people coming into the country at this time who say something that sounds a bit like [menstruatie or menstruación 56:23] understand what we're talking about. But that's a language thing. I wrote an article about it. You probably know that, I don't want to waste your time.

I: You're all good. No, I remember last year we were...I remember this conversation last year. So it's good. No, this has been really, really helpful. Thank you so much for your time.

R: Thank you for taking the time, it's really great that you guys got some funding to do this because it's important work and it needs to be shared.

I: Oh, yeah, it's seed funding for... 'cause it was all COVID focused. But that was all [REDACTED]. She wasn't going to...so you worked for the Body Shop and it got interrupted by COVID.

R: I don't do much corporate work because it's easier to be critical and support corporations in a holistic – this is our model, you should do this – advocacy kind of way than getting into bed with a particular company and getting paid by them. But the Body Shop wanted to do some campaigning in a few different countries in the Americas and they asked me if I would come over last year and do training with all of their regional managers. So Period Positive did a huge three day training event with all of their North American and Central American managers.

And it was going to be for a period poverty campaign where they would be breaking taboos and collecting products and providing like a wet bag to carry reusables or products. It was part of a global initiative. Some of it was

to happen in the UK and I was doing some advisory on that as well. And some of it was happening in the Americas. And there was also going to be a global push on it. Some of which is actually happening now, some of the global stuff. And I did this huge trip over and did a big performance for them and a Q&A brunch and stuff. And it was a lot of fun and I was really excited that they were doing this in a way that was very modern and innovative.

Like using the Period Positive pledge is an innovation that a lot of people are unsure about because it seems so radically different in some ways to things they've done before. But this huge multinational corporation who recently got new ownership with an eco company in South America. So it was not owned by L'Oreal any more. So it was interesting to see the direction it was going in. So there was a colleague in Mexico who was one of the Period Positive champions abroad.

Oh, that's another thing. I'm not going to get to meet with all of the global champions next year because we meet at the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research conference every two years and that conference has been cancelled. So we won't be meeting up next summer. But anyway, one of the Period Positive champions in Mexico translated all the pledges into Spanish and they were all going to be shared as part of the Body Shop campaign on the Body Shop's Mexican social media. And all of that got cancelled by COVID.

So they may start doing it next year but it'll be in fits and starts. And my bit is finished now. So I won't have any input. So I won't know necessarily when they're going to do it again unless they contact me again. But it was going to be a really great initiative on their part. And then, like, nobody goes to the mall. Nobody's going to their stores. And their online sales are the only way and they can't really do it there.

So bits and pieces of it have happened in the UK and bits and pieces have happened in other countries. But not the full on onslaught they were planning which was going to be all the aspects of talking about period poverty that you can imagine. Plus, these taboo breaking messages and the Period Positive pledge.

I: And you don't know yet...maybe in the summer if it will relaunch?

R: It might but I got to see their whole plan for about three years worth of the campaigns they were going to do. Because one of the events was introducing the two year calendar to everybody. And then explaining what was coming further down the pipeline and introducing products and stuff. And I wasn't on the training for that, I was just there in that session as an attendee. And it was really interesting seeing how far ahead they plan.

So it's possible that they may decide to go to the next issue if it's at a different time of year. Because everything is in months, they might tie something in to women's history month or black history month or queer

history month. There might be other things they have planned that tie in better with those times and this might just get missed.

That's why I was gutted that my book was delayed. Because that should have come out I think like in March and it'll now be later. And it would have been really nice to have that out for kids to read. Because it would have covered a lot of the stuff that they're missing right now.

'Cause schools can't...so PSHE stuff can't be taught if you aren't setting up the ground rules for healthy discussions or sending...like, it's a sensitive topic. Or you think kids will have additional particular questions. Or in a home environment where they can't talk about certain things with their families. It can be difficult to just send them away after that Zoom call after that topic. So anything to do with reproductive health or trauma or cultural taboos, like all of these things are a little bit trickier to teach. So some of it's getting missed.

But yeah, I was really gutted about that because the framework is only as valuable as the number of people that use it.

Like also, the COVID...oh, here's another one. There's a charity down south – is it a charity even? – no, it's not a charity, it's a project about a GP surgery doing some Period Positive training. And the charter is going to be used by all of the GP surgeries in this one region, or in that trust, GP practices. And the present training actually had a press person who was going to do a big PR release and we prepared lots of material for it and she was promoting the charter and she was using her contacts – press guys – to do this great big thing. And it was completely eclipsed by the first COVID vaccine rolling out.

So the COVID vaccine rolling out is amazing, it was brilliant hearing this lovely old lady on the radio being interviewed. It is fascinating that the second person to get it is called Bill Shakespeare because that means that kids a hundred years from now will be completely messing up history reports, saying Shakespeare the playwright got the second COVID vaccine. And getting bad marks. It's going to be hilarious if Wikipedia get it wrong.

But I was talking to this person that I was inviting the other day and she was like, we're going to have to do it all again in January and hope it doesn't get eclipsed by Brexit stuff. Because that whole press cycle was completely taken up, quite rightly, by the COVID vaccine rollout. So, you know, vaccine awareness is absolutely essential and crucial. And press about COVID has also disrupted press about the more nuanced issues of menstruation education and menstrual literacy. So period poverty stuff has to acknowledge that menstruation education and menstrual literacy are essential to its success in dealing with it.

But those messages are a harder sell because they are more complex. So if it's not a sound bite it's not getting into the media. And the sound bites are free menstrual products in Scotland and charities are struggling to meet

the needs with poverty related to COVID. And third lockdown means schools don't have access to what's it or only 40 per cent of schools are taking up the government's offer. All of these things are easy to say but like, when did you first learn about menstruation? Did you realise the person who taught you might have been influenced by tampon ads from the 1920s? It's fucking weird. So I'm writing about that. Sorry to swear. It's just really frustrating.

And that was why going and talking to people and meeting them in their environment and helping them facilitate ways to support their service users' needs was the most effective. Because just advising someone over the 'phone or over a video is an impersonal way to deal with a really personal topic. And I never undermine the fact that it is very personal for people. I just hope that it won't be secret, but it can be private. And while having these conversations over Zoom can make it more private it really loses some of the genuine hand holding that some people really need and want. Everyone wants a hug afterwards. And you can't do that.

People are doing really hard work when they work with me. It's a lot of the stuff that Brene Brown does. It's about shame and about the joy that you can experience about being proud of how your body works. And it's harder to convey that when you're on a screen. But I'm learning how, and I'm trying.

Yeah, a lot of opportunities that were really good have been missed. But it's made me try and find ways to make it scale. But the thing that I'm missing is the funding to scale it because obviously I need people helping me or I can't do the PhD at the same time. And I need to earn money so I can only do as much as I can do for free in the time that I have. Having somebody help with admin or with press would mean that I didn't have to find a way to either do those things or pay for those of things, neither of which I can do right now. 'Cause I have no disposable income or disposable time.

I: Thank you. That's great, thank you very much. I've got...this is really rich and touches on some aspects that we haven't heard yet so this is really useful.

R:



I: We would bring you your own quote to say, was this what you meant? Are we getting the gist of this? Are we getting this right? And then you can elaborate.

R: Yeah and also if you're seeing a correlation between things, I would be very curious about that. And I might be able to either back it up with something

I've read in literature or might be able to tell you that I also noticed that and give you more evidence.

I: Right.

R:



But I know that if this had been rolled out there would be a lot more consideration for like, okay, do we have spare menstrual products on the COVID ward? Are we researching how people's cycles influence their symptoms and temperature? Are we thinking about the long term effects on the health of pregnant women? Where does reproductive health fit into COVID symptoms and long COVID effects? And I know there's not enough research being done on that. I've only seen two papers on it and they are not widely disseminated papers in big journals.

So if there is more funding it should be going towards researching the intersection between medical stuff around COVID and medical stuff around reproductive health. But in the meantime it just means that any kind of work with people who are in charge of disaster preparedness is not going to happen. So if the disaster is no access to menstrual products, that is no longer considered a triagable disaster. Okay. Now, I'm finished. You need to hang up before...

I:



End of transcript