



December 2017

ENDING PERIOD POVERTY MEMBER'S BILL CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Introduction:

As the leading charity for girls and young women in Scotland we're committed to ensuring every girl has the opportunity to achieve our full potential. We were delighted to be asked to support the campaign to End Period Poverty and have actively engaged our members in this work by:

- Gathering their views and encouraging them to speak out on this issue
- Encouraging our volunteers to make sanitary products available at unit meeting places
- Encouraging our members to collect sanitary products and other toiletries for their local foodbank

We are grateful to have this opportunity to share our thoughts on MSP Monica Lennon's proposed Member's Bill to ensure access to sanitary products. You can read the full consultation paper on this bill [here](#).

To help inform our consultation response we surveyed our members and supporters to find out more about their experiences and views on period poverty. Our survey received 76 responses, 90% of which were from members age 30 and under. We realise with a small sample size our survey can only offer a limited insight into this important issue that affects individuals from a wide-range of backgrounds and perspectives, with diverse and far-reaching consequences.

However we are excited to have this opportunity to share our views and hope the consultation will generate further research and an open discourse on how periods and period poverty affects the lives of girls and women.

Aim and approach:

- Girlguiding Scotland is fully supportive of the proposed bill.

Girlguiding Scotland is fully supportive of the proposed bill to introduce a universal system of free provision of sanitary products and to create a duty for relevant bodies such as schools, colleges and universities to provide free sanitary products.

We believe making free sanitary products easily available to everyone who needs them will not only create economic benefits but support girls & young women's participation in education and extracurricular activities and help to end the stigma around periods.

In terms of the prevalence of period poverty our survey found that:

- 25% of respondents had experienced period poverty themselves or had friends or family who had experiences period poverty. The majority (20%) said this was an occasional experience, while 5% said it was happens 'a few times of year' or 'every or most months'.

In addition the vast majority of respondents had some experience of being 'caught out' and finding themselves without sanitary products when they need them:

- Nearly a quarter (24%) said this happened 'every or most months' while 99% reported that this had happened to them at least occasionally.

We acknowledge that with a limited sample size our findings can only offer a snapshot into this far-reaching and complex issue and would welcome further research on the impact of period poverty.

In particular we welcome the research Plan UK has carried out to map the prevalence of period poverty across the UK which found one in ten girls struggle to afford sanitary products¹.

Our members highlighted a wide-range of benefits such a bill could create for public life in Scotland:

- 89% agree free sanitary products would help make sure girls and young women don't miss out on school or college
- 91% agree free sanitary products would help girls and young to participate in afterschool activities
- 89% agree free sanitary products would help to reduce stigma around periods

We also asked our members to think about the benefits the proposed bill could create in their own, everyday lives and the lives of their peers. We found:

- 87% said access to free sanitary products would save them money
- 75% said access to free sanitary products would make them make them feel more comfortable talking about periods with family, friends and peers
- 67% said access to free sanitary products would make them make them feel more comfortable taking part in extracurricular activities like sport, youth clubs, and volunteering while they had their period
- 63% said access to free sanitary products would make them make them feel more comfortable going to school or college while they had their period

Here are comments from some of our members on why they believe everyone who needs them should be able to access free sanitary products:

"Periods are a natural process which no woman chooses and yet women are sometimes forced to choose between buying period products or buying food. A box of tampons can cost upwards of £2.99, depending on the choice available in the local area. Many women will need multiple boxes a month, which will quickly add up especially with multiple people experiencing periods in the same household. Which can be an expense a lot of households just can't afford."

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 23

"Sanitary products are as necessary as food to some women and young girls, this is an issue which should be just as concerning as a child not having breakfast."

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 22

"In 2017 girls shouldn't be missing out on opportunities because they can't afford basic toiletries."

¹ Plan International UK: [1 IN 10 GIRLS HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO AFFORD SANITARY WEAR, SURVEY FINDS](#) – 13th October, 2017

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 22

“We need to break stigma, and make sanitary products as easy to get as free condoms.”

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 30

“That periods cause enough pain and issues already, especially to young people who have just started and aren't used to them. Not having sanitary products because they can't afford them is only adding to the problem. Young girls are missing school due to their period which, if they miss school frequently, could have a big impact on their education and their life in general.”

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 19

Universal provision of sanitary products

- We a universal card-based system providing access to free sanitary products to those who need them.
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We are broadly supportive of proposals for a universal, card-based system providing access to sanitary products for those who need them.

Our survey found 57% of members supported this idea while 28% were unsure whether this would be an effective system while 15% did not think this would be an effective way of providing access to free sanitary products.

Members who were familiar with the c-card scheme felt this system worked well and could be applied to sanitary products and highlighted the need for any system to be open, easily accessible and avoid adding any additional stigma to those making use of it.

“I believe there should be a no questions asked sanitary product system - similar to the current "C-Card" condom system. I think this availability would increase confidence levels and the opportunities taken by young girls in difficult situations.”

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 20

However some members expressed concern that a card-based system may not go far enough to tackle stigma and that some girls and women may still miss out if they don't have the confidence to register.

“The card based system would not cause the cultural change we need. It would be similar to the free contraception policy and would mean only those with access, awareness of and confidence will reach those services. This would still affect vulnerable, remote or younger members of society.”

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 26

- We want to make sure any system for providing free sanitary products is open and accessible to all who might need it.
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We support the card-based scheme and believe that ease-of-access is fundamental to its success.

Our survey found 60% of participants supported a card-based system that was open to anyone who wanted a card without having to meet eligibility criteria.

Of those who believed cards should be available to all, 26% said they believed card-holders should be able to receive unlimited sanitary products while 34% believed that the number of products a cardholder can claim a month should be limited.

Further comments from our members highlight that they believe a universal system will help to address the stigma associated with period and period poverty and that whatever system is implanted it is essential it reaches those most in need.

"I don't believe that the government can provide to one group of women and not the rest. Period poverty affects everywoman not just the ones who are visibly in need."

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 18

"Period poverty is unfair and unnecessary - everyone deserves fair access to this most vital health product."

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 17

"Sanitary products are essential for so many people (not just women and girls but trans and non-binary people as well) and they should be free and accessible."

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 21

"It is those who are truly struggling to afford them and having to use alternatives which should be focused on."

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 22

- We believe free sanitary products should be available in spaces where girls and women spend their everyday lives to promote participations in school, work and extra-curricular activities.

Girlguiding Scotland supports proposals to make free sanitary products to be easily accessible in the places where girls and young women spend much of their everyday lives such as schools, colleges and universities.

Our survey found:

- 99% of respondents said having sanitary products at schools and colleges would be very or somewhat helpful
- 99% of respondents said having sanitary products at GPs, health centres and clinics would be very or somewhat helpful
- 96% of respondents said having sanitary products at sports centres, leisure centres, libraries and community centres would be very or somewhat helpful

In addition our members recommended a wide variety of other spaces where access to free sanitary products may be helpful including pub and train stations, airports, supermarkets, shopping centres and all public bathrooms.

As part of our efforts to support the campaign end period poverty and ensure our young members feel happy and comfortable at unit meetings we have been encouraging our volunteers to provide sanitary products at the unit meeting place.

- We believe every girl and young woman has the right to feel safe and happy at school, college and university so they can get the most out of their education. We'd therefore

support proposals to create a duty for schools, colleges, and universities to provide free sanitary products in bathrooms.

Girlguiding Scotland supports the proposal to create a specific obligation for schools, colleges and universities to make free sanitary products available for free as we believe. Education is a fundamental right for all young people and we believe all young people have a right to feel safe and happy at school, college and university.

As mentioned above, 99% of survey respondents agreed making free sanitary available at schools and colleges would be helpful.

We also recognise the anecdotal evidence cited in the consultation paper suggesting period poverty may contribute to absenteeism and would welcome further research around this link.

Feedback from our own members suggests that stigma may make it difficult for girls to be open about problems they have related to their period - including their ability to afford sanitary products.

- 68% of respondents said they did not feel comfortable talking about periods with staff at school or college compared to just 13% who did
- More than half (52%) said they would not feel comfortable telling school staff that they were struggling to afford sanitary products
- Even among friends 39% of respondents said they would not feel comfortable speaking about problems affording sanitary products

These figures suggest many girls may be struggling in silence and feel unable to approach school staff for support due to the stigma of period poverty.

We acknowledge the findings of Plan UK and echo their calls for action around the stigma around periods as well as addressing the cost of sanitary products - for example by ending restrictions allowing girls to use toilets during lessons and encouraging a school culture where pupils can speak to school staff about periods and any challenges they are experiencing.

Encouragingly, when thinking about their own everyday lives and experience 63% of our survey respondents said access to free sanitary products would make them feel more comfortable going to school or college while they had their period while 75% said access to free sanitary products would help them to feel more comfortable to talk about periods with family, friends and peers.

An accessible and anonymous approach like making free supplies available in school and college bathrooms could make it easier for anyone who needs sanitary products to access them without worrying about embarrassment or stigma.

That it's a real problem that needs to be tackled - politicians need to use their unique position to provide concrete change and ensure that girls don't have to lose out on education and life just because of a biological function that they have no control over."

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 16

That periods cause enough pain and issues already, especially to young people who have just started and aren't used to them. Not having sanitary products because they can't afford them is only adding to the problem. Young girls are missing school due to their period which, if they miss school frequently, could have a big impact on their education and their life in general.

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 19

For those of us who have problems with periods, sanitary products are not the only cost we endure to cope with them. Would also be helpful in schools and places where women are perhaps struggling to have access to a change of underwear.

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 30

Financial implications

- We believe provision of free sanitary products will create a significant economic benefit for anyone who experiences periods and relies on these products
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Predicting the potential cost impact goes beyond the scope of our survey and research and we aware there will be organisations and bodies much who are better placed than us to address cost implications to government, schools and colleges and businesses.

We are better placed to speak to the cost implication for individuals. 67% of our survey respondents indicated they would expect to make use of free sanitary products regularly (24%) or occasionally (43%) suggesting that the proposals would result in a cost reduction for them.

We also recognise the growing body of research highlighting just how much individuals can expect to spend on sanitary products with recent research finding the average woman spends more than £18,000 on sanitary products over the course of her lifetime².

Equalities

- We believe providing free sanitary products will have overall positive impact on equality, by eliminating barriers that make it harder for girls and women to fully participate and get the most out of education, employment and extra-curricular activities.
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We believe this proposed bill would have a positive impact by:

- Helping to end the stigma around period poverty and periods more generally
- Tackling a barrier that may prevent or have a detrimental impact on girls' experience of education and other opportunities such as extra-curricular activities including participation in youth groups and sports clubs
- Making it easier for anyone who requires sanitary products to access them via a convenient accessible and inclusive system and in spaces where they already spend much of their time (schools, colleges, universities etc.).

We welcome the provisions set-out in the consultation paper acknowledging that period poverty constitutes a discriminatory practice, disproportionately impacting of women and girls.

We also welcome recognition of the additional barriers young women and girls of school age face as they are unlikely to have access to their own income and recognition that individuals with disabilities may be at an increased risk of period poverty.

In addition to the economic benefits the proposed bill offers, our members felt it could also be instrumental in reducing stigma and increasing participation. Our survey found:

² Huffington Post: [Women spend more than £18,000 on having periods in their lifetime, study reveals](#) - 3rd September, 2015

- 89% of respondents agreed free sanitary products would mean girls are less likely to miss out on school, college or university
- 90% of respondents agreed free sanitary products would make it easier for girls to participate in extra-curricular experiences like sports and youth clubs
- 89% of respondents agreed free sanitary products would help to reduce stigma and embarrassment around periods

“Periods are something that most women experience regardless of wealth. Each individual has different experiences regardless of wealth. I think it is just important to raise awareness and improve perceptions of periods in general. I think greater understanding, awareness, openness and flexibility will improve 'period poverty' though since it isn't only detrimental to the less wealthy I think it would be better phrased as 'period positivity' as women (and men alike) should be embraced as individuals and periods should not be viewed negatively.”

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 23

“It is unfair that girls are still disadvantaged by something that is a natural part of being female and shocking the government is making a profit on periods. We need to make periods normal and socially accepted to reduce stigma and make girls feel included every day of the month.”

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 22

“Not having access to sanitary products is a barrier to equality for girls who may not be able to partake in activities, especially sports, and this leads to a wider gap between boys and girls.”

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 20

I think the stance on considering sanitary products on a luxury item is wrong: it is a necessity for some women and young adults and even those who aren't classed as low income or on benefits can struggle to afford them: they could be able to afford food or tampons one month, but not both. Letting girls/women know that this issue is something that is understood and they can be supported with would help a great deal to help combat embarrassment and stigma, but also money worries and stress.

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 22

- We welcome a universal approach and believe this will help to end stigma around periods and period poverty and ensure anyone who needs them can access free sanitary products.

We believe the measures put forward in the proposed bill should be implemented in a way that is accessible and inclusive to help end the stigma surrounding periods and ensure that free sanitary products reach all who need them.

For this reason we support a universal approach that does not require recipients to prove eligibility criteria. We also support the proposed bill's recognition that some transgender individuals experience menstruation and that the provisions of the bill must apply to these communities.

Sanitary products are essential for so many people (not just women and girls but trans and non-binary people as well) and they should be free and accessible.”

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 21

Sustainability

- We believe this proposed bill can be delivered sustainably and will create a wide range of economic and social benefits. We also believe it's could be an opportunity to raise awareness of environmentally-friendly sanitary products.
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We believe the proposed bill will create a wide range of economic and social benefits not only for individuals directly impacted by period poverty but across public life in Scotland including:

- Increasing participation of women and girls in education and an improved experience of school, college or university
- Increasing participation of women and girls in extra-curricular activities such as sports and youth clubs and an improved experience for girls and young women in their everyday lives
- Tackling stigma and promoting an open and honest discourse about periods, poverty and the health challenges individuals can face in connection with menstruation

Some of our members highlighted concerns around the impact disposable sanitary products can have on the environment and the suggested the measures outlined in the proposed bill could offer an opportunity to raise awareness of reusable and environmentally-friendly alternatives.

It should be taught more in the curriculum that periods are perfectly normal and the way you handle them has an effect on the world. I was only taught about pads and tampons when at school but after doing my own research I'm the proud owner of a menstrual cup. I think the way to tackle period poverty is to tackle the idea that you have to use disposable products. It would be much cheaper for the government to give everyone reusable sanitary products than to provide free disposable ones.

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 17

Our message to the Scottish Parliament

In addition to the questions covered in the consultation we asked members if they could tell the Scottish Parliament one message about period poverty what they would say.

Here are some of their messages:

"That it's a real problem that needs to be tackled - politicians need to use their unique position to provide concrete change and ensure that girls don't have to lose out on education and life just because of a biological function that they have no control over."

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 16

"In 2017 girls shouldn't be missing out on opportunities because they can't afford basic toiletries."

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 22

"We need to break stigma, and make sanitary products as easy to get as free condoms."

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 30

That everyone should be allowed access to suitable products... not just cheap inefficient ones!

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 30

Periods are a natural process which no woman chooses and yet women are sometimes forced to choose between buying period products or buying food. A box of tampons can cost upwards of £2.99, depending on the choice available in the local area. Many women will need multiple

boxes a month, which will quickly add up especially with multiple people experiencing periods in the same household. Which can be an expense a lot of households just can't afford.

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 23

Period poverty is real. Don't ignore it.

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 22

"I think that periods are a very important part of girls' lives and they should be taken more seriously by places of education, and places really should provide free product support to anyone who needs them."

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 17

If we can provide free condoms it should be a no brainer to provide free menstrual products. Period products aren't a luxury!

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 19

"That it should no longer be a taboo subject and we should face this genuine issue that girls have."

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 17

"That periods cause enough pain and issues already, especially to young people who have just started and aren't used to them. Not having sanitary products because they can't afford them is only adding to the problem. Young girls are missing school due to their period which, if they miss school frequently, could have a big impact on their education and their life in general."

Girlguiding Scotland member, age 19