Equality Period Limited
Annual Report for the period ending February 2023

Equality Period Limited
Charity No: NIC108424
Address: c/o Coast Road, Drains Bay, Larne BT40 2LF

Equality Period is a limited company, registered as a charity, that exists on a 'Not-for-Profit basis to carry out charitable purposes that benefit the community rather than private shareholders.

TRUSTEES
Suzanne Oag
Colleen Gardner
Shannon Taylor
Tracy McClean

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

We recognise the trauma, stress and anxiety caused by not having access to the products or appropriate knowledge needed to manage our periods and menstrual health. We work to create menstrual equity within society by providing those pulled into poverty, homelessness or otherwise displaced people and their dependents with access to free period products of their choice as well as essential hygiene and personal care products.

We recognise that hygiene poverty is not a standalone issue. We work in partnership with a varied range of statutory and voluntary organisations within Northern Ireland who have appropriate safeguards and ongoing comprehensive support in place. This includes but is not limited to Health and Social Care Trusts, Primary and Post-Primary Schools, Youth Groups, Trussell Trust and independent Food Banks, Women's Aid, Simon Community Northern Ireland, Libraries NI, Refugee services and Family Support Programmes.

Feedback from our network of community partners and testimony from beneficiaries tells us that the ability to access to period products and other essential hygiene items via the organisations that clients and service users are already involved or familiar with makes a huge difference to their overall well-being.

ACTIVITIES FEBRUARY 2022-FEBRUARY 2023

There was little prospect of a calm after the pandemic storm. The cost-of-living crisis was building, and immediately after the 2021 December hamper project our team began preparing for a difficult year.

Each month we provided on average between 300-324 individual care packages across our community partner network. In winter months we saw this spike to over 500 per month.

Despite the deep and relentless crisis 2022 was also a groundbreaking milestone year for Equality Period and menstrual activists right across Northern Ireland. The collective efforts of our trustees, Ulster University Students Union VP Grace Boyle, Youth Activist Ellie Massey and Menstruation Matters

campaign leads Homeless Period Belfast, finally saw The Period Product Free Provision Bill pass through the Assembly with full support on 24th March. This legislation sees the provision of period products in public buildings, including schools, finally locked into law.

Overall, despite this legislative progress on period product provision 2022 has been exceptionally challenging. The ongoing effects of the pandemic, rise in the cost of living and lack of a functioning government in Northern Ireland has greatly impacted our community partners, their service users as well as our ability to source and purchase certain products.

- **Pop Up-Space** - Supported by Eden Project Communities, we took a week's residency in a Mid and East Antrim Council managed Pop-Up space in Larne. This provided the first post-pandemic and lockdown opportunity for our team to be public facing. This event coincided with the passing of the Period Product legislation and was a very positive, celebratory experience.

- **'Here if you need'** - We continued this initiative encouraging local businesses, workplaces, and hospitality venues to include period products in their existing washroom provisions. Working in partnership with volunteers from The Hygiene Bank Moira we have been able to extend 'Here if you need' to areas in Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council as well Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon.

- **MEA Council Pilot Scheme** – Disappointed by opposition to the original motion for the provision of free period products in council facilities, our team took a proactive approach and delivered over 4000 surplus vending machine period products to Mid and East Antrim Borough Council offices. Community Planning staff agreed to use these products to implement a pilot 'Here if you need' scheme in council run community centres in Larne, Whitehead and Carrickfergus as well as visitor attractions in Ballygally and Islandmagee.

- **Hygiene Poverty** – Inflation has led to rapid increases in retail costs of period products as well as basic hygiene essentials like toothpaste and shampoo. As well as regular contributions across our community partner network we equipped the projects experiencing the highest levels of need; Horizon Surestart, Larne High School and Access Employment Limited; with on-site hygiene pantries designed to promote client autonomy, reduce shame and stigma. Staff are then able to provide feedback to our volunteers which products are needed most by their service users.

- **Menopause Café** – We partnered with Menopause Café (SCO48435) and Barbara Ann's Victoria Road Larne to facilitate the first in-person Menopause Cafe in the local are; an event we are keen repeat.

- **Training** - Suzanne and Tracy completed accredited training with ACET NI and Split Banana in Sexual Health & Contraception as well as Relationships and Sexuality Education Facilitation.

- **Workshops** – We ran 12 online period education and breast health workshops as well as 4 in-person events with our community partners at NHSCT and Women's Aid ABCLN.

- **Guest Speakers** – Equality Period were invited to speak at the 14th Onus Annual Awards Ceremony held at Stormont about our role as Community Safe Place Advocates in Mid and East Antrim. We raised awareness of the links between menstrual inequity and domestic abuse and explained how 'Here if you need' and Safe Place work together to make information on services for anyone affected by domestic violence or abuse accessible.

  Suzanne was invited to speak at Larne Foodbank AGM to highlight the continued close partnership between Equality Period and the Foodbank and raise awareness of our work to alleviate hygiene poverty. A total of 57 direct referrals were made by Equality Period to Trussell Trust Foodbanks across Northern Ireland this year.

- **December Hampers** - We contributed over 3500 hygiene products plus 240 packs of nappies for babies and children and 384 period products to the December Hamper project in partnership with Larne Foodbank and CAP

RINGFENCED GRANTS

A training and education grant was awarded to Suzanne by Brighter Futures at Larne Football Club to continue CPCAB (Counselling and Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body) training in line with Equality Period's long-term goal being able to offer counselling sessions and menstrual mental well-being support within the community.

The Human Kind Foundation awarded a grant to help cover fuel expenses when delivering care packages to our community partners which was very much appreciated.

SPECIAL THANKS

Equality Period are incredibly grateful to Carrie Ingram who raised an astonishing £2200 by running the Belfast Marathon. These funds allowed us to provide care packages to organisations supporting refugees, mental health in-patients at Shannon Ward and individuals in crisis accommodation as well as meeting the menstrual care and hygiene needs of 548 individuals as part of the December hamper project with Larne Foodbank.

CONCLUSIONS

We move forward into the new year hopeful that the Period Product Free Provision legislation will eventually reduce our need to exist in a product provision capacity. We also hope our partnership with Hey Girls will greatly reduce the volume of single use plastic period products we distribute.

Although I wish our organisation did not need to exist I am incredibly proud of the impact we have made. Not having overhead costs for storage, office space, amenities etc allows us to maximise the impact every penny has on practical supports to alleviating hygiene poverty and menstrual inequity.

Currently the level of need greatly outweighs the volume of public item donations received by Equality Period via The Hygiene Bank Larne. We are exceptionally thankful to all our funders and any monies donated directly to us by the public. The relationships we have built with brands and suppliers since we began this project, as well as our link with In Kind Direct allowed us to turn a £50 donation for

December's hampers into 170 essential hygiene products that could be spread across up to ninety households. Purchasing the same quantity of identical brand items from retailer would have cost us an eyewatering £420; it would also have directly contributed to the issue of hygiene poverty by reducing the availability of essential hygiene products in stores.

We are aware of recent project duplication in the Larne area however, we have not seen this translate into any reduction in need from our community partners, as such our efforts to tackle menstrual inequity and hygiene poverty will continue.

As co-founder and chairperson I would like to extend my gratitude and thanks you to Colleen, Shannon and Tracy for their roles as volunteers and trustees. This team and the work we do means so much to our community partners and those in need. You are the backbone of this organisation and without your time and commitment there would be no Equality Period – never underestimate the difference you are making.

This report was approved on behalf of the trustees at a meeting on 29/3/23 **and signed on it's behalf by:**

Suzanne Oag

Mrs Suzanne Oag
Trustee Equality Period Limited