

## Irise's Advocacy Network

The network aims to end menstrual stigma and create a community of people passionate about creating a world where no girl is held back by her period.

By signing up to join the network you can begin a journey with Irise that will develop your skills and confidence whilst helping to end period poverty once and for all. You can find out more about the network's long term goals in our [Strategy Document](#).

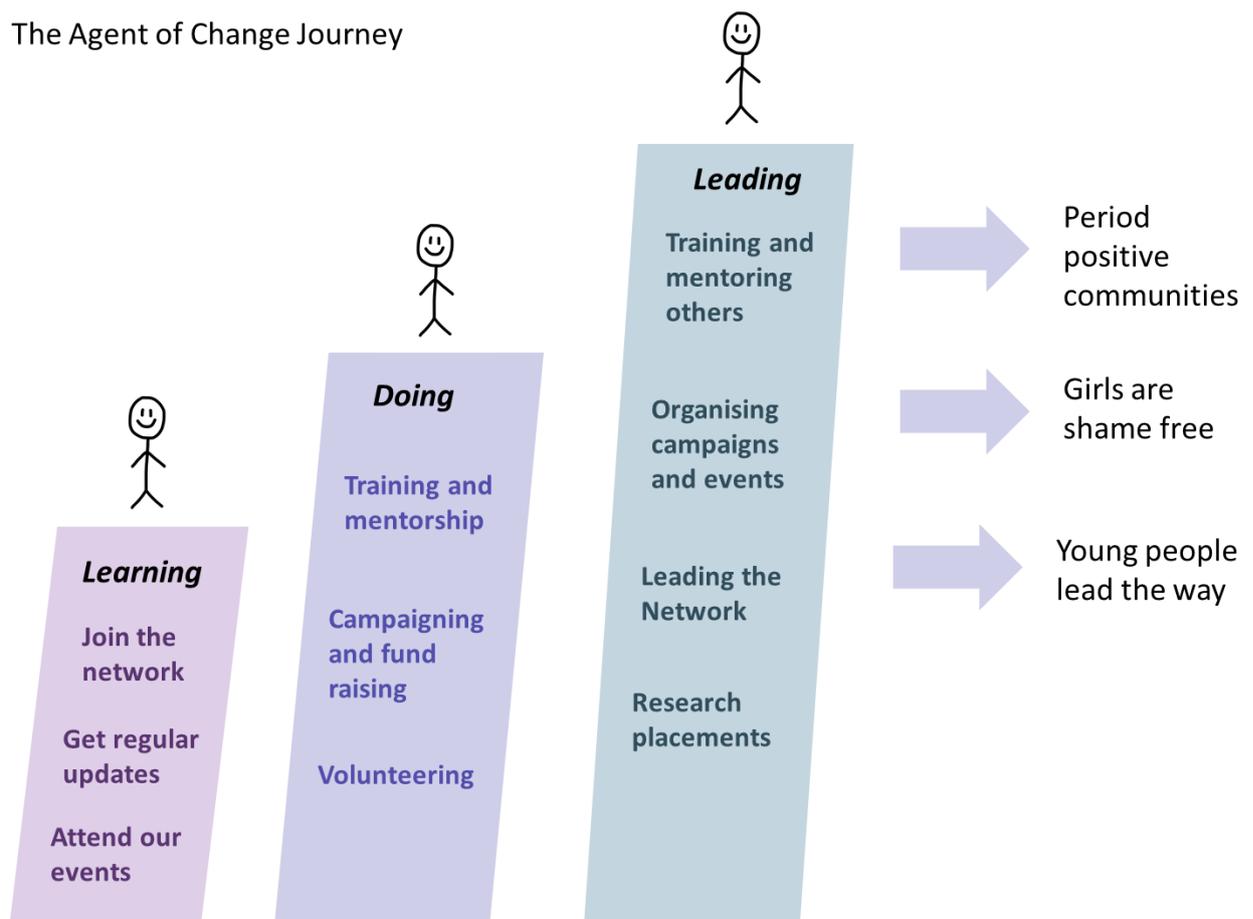
### The Advocacy Network

The network is made up of students, recent graduates, young professionals and others who are committed to Irise's vision of a world where no girl is held back by her period. The Network is steered by the Advocacy Committee which is made up of members of the network and chaired by our Advocacy Trustee. This means that the network is able to actively shape and lead Irise's work.

### The Agent of Change Journey

When you join our network you become an Irise Agent of Change. An Agent of Change is someone with the potential to change their community and the world. The picture below shows the journey our Agents of Change can embark on through our Advocacy Network.

#### The Agent of Change Journey



Let's explore the journey in more detail...

## Learning- change yourself

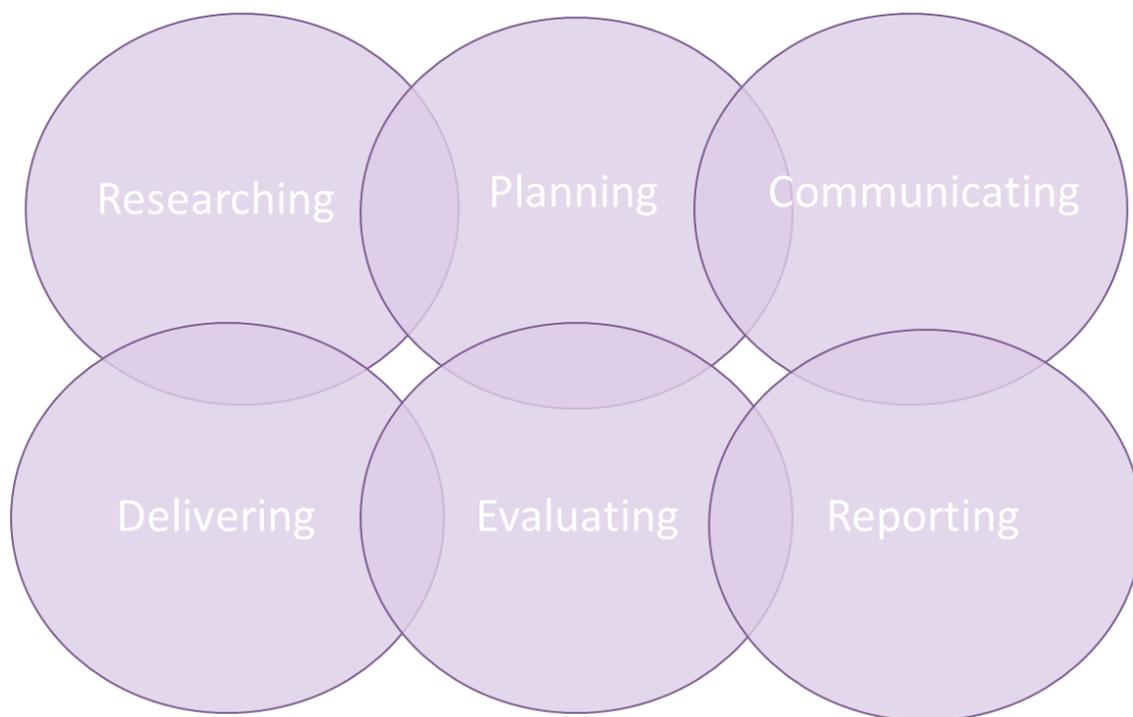
By joining the network you'll receive regular updates about our work in the UK and east Africa, including the Irregular Periodical, which features stories from the network and period positive events, books and other opportunities to help you learn more about our cause. We also host events throughout the year where you can meet people, make new friends and get inspired.

## Doing- change your community

Through the network you'll have access to loads of practical opportunities to make a difference in your own community. Through taking action you'll develop the vital skills you need to change the world around you throughout your career.

*Training and mentorship:* Throughout the year we'll offer in-person and remote training opportunities across our six learning themes. These themes follow the cycle we go through when we're developing or delivering a project and they also align with the key skill areas we think people who want to change the world need.

Our six learning themes are:



We'll also provide one-to-one mentorship opportunities with members of our network who have a strong track record raising awareness and funds on this issue.

### *Campaigning and Fundraising:*

We encourage all our Agents of Change to take part in or run their own campaigns using the training and mentorship they receive. Every £5 raised supports a vulnerable girl to stay happy and healthy during her period and by starting conversations about periods with family and friends you'll be taking us a step closer to a world where all girls are shame free.

If you want to run your own campaign we can provide you with lots of ideas and resources to help.

If you want to join an existing campaign we'll let you know about our sponsored challenges and other events to mark Global Menstrual Hygiene Day (28<sup>th</sup> May), International Day of the Girl (11<sup>th</sup> October), Christmas and International Women's Day (8<sup>th</sup> March). You can join one of our teams and work with others to help make a difference.

You may also want to join a local Friends of Irise group and organise your fundraising and campaigning with them.

### ***Case Study: Falling hundreds of feet to support hundreds of girls***



*Jess and her mum, who is Jess's biggest inspiration*

On 4<sup>th</sup> April 2018 Agent of Change, Jess Pearson, undertook a remarkable feat of bravery! She completed a sky dive to raise awareness about the challenges girls around the world face during their periods and funds to help Irise empower more girls. Through working with our team to understand her network she developed a campaign focused on engaging professional networks of women in her fundraising. She raised a grand total of £962.50 and started conversations about periods with people who had never thought about the issue before. Jess now sits on our Advocacy Committee and is responsible the network's relationship building and management.

*"I'm motivated because I believe that it is unacceptable that women and girls are being held back by their periods, something that is a defining quality of being female. For me, being able to retain their dignity is a basic human right and it should not be a burden on their education or employment opportunities. I'm proud that I've stepped out of my comfort zone and done things that I've found difficult, including booking a skydive! **After all, sisterhood is and should be global.**"*

Jess

## Case Study: Starting conversations about menstruation in schools



Ellie and Romany take part in an Irise campaign to end menstrual stigma

Both Ellie and Romany ran fundraising and awareness campaigns with their family and friends as part of their initial involvement with Irise. Ellie organised a Cocktail Night raising £420 and Romany enlisted her brother and cousin to take part in our “do it in a dress” assault course challenge, raising over £1,000 between them. With support from the Irise team they developed new project planning and delivery skills as part of this process and built their confidence to realise their own ideas.

Romany and Ellie then both decided that they wanted to use their new skills to share their passion for periods with their old schools. Between them, they went on to empower 1,150 young people through discussions about period poverty and stigma and how young people can create change. Romany chose to train U6th students to become champions and teach the rest of the school, an approach that Irise is now exploring in larger projects.

Both Romany and Ellie are now part of our Advocacy Committee and are working to shape and develop Irise’s work with young people in the UK.

“With an ethos of empowering students, we contacted our old school, and came up with a sustainable approach. That is, we wanted to recruit ‘Period Positive’ champions from the L6th year who would then deliver our teaching material to the rest of the school. We wanted the teaching to be relatable and promote a big conversation amongst all the students within the school. The way we delivered the material was almost as important as the content itself in encouraging a period positive culture...The response has been incredibly positive and we are really excited to see how it develops... The future plan is to inspire more girls to become champions so that the project can continue to run by itself.”

Romany

“The teachers were very impressed with the workshop and said that it had helped them just as much as their students - a lot of them hadn't heard of period poverty or considered the taboo in this way before. I thought this was significant as many of them said they have young children and would make an effort to consider what they learnt in conversations with them about menstrual hygiene.”

Ellie

### *Volunteering:*

We have short term volunteer placements in the UK and Uganda to help our Agents of Change gain hands on practical experience. Our training and mentorship help prepare our volunteers for their placements, make sure that they are useful to our team and that they get lots of useful experience out of the placement.

#### ***Case Study: Story telling Placement in Uganda***



*Autumn with a member of the Irise Uganda team during a trip to our projects in Soroti*

In 2017 Autumn spent six weeks working with our Ugandan team to collect stories from the women and girls we work with. She had been an active part of Friends of Irise Sheffield for two years and was keen to see the impact of her support and take some practical action to amplify the voices of women and girls. As if that wasn't enough she also decided it would be fun to complete a sponsored triathlon for Irise while she was in Uganda. Her triathlon raised an amazing £596.25, enabling our team to support another 120 vulnerable girls in Uganda. The stories Autumn collected are still being used by our team today to make the case for more investment in this neglected girls' rights issue. They were the centre of Irise's Christmas Big Give Campaign 2017 which raised over £8,000 to support our work and were shared with funders who later went on to renew their commitments to our projects. Despite moving to Australia, Autumn has stayed in touch through our Irregular Periodical newsletter and recently wrote about her experiences volunteering with Irise to help inspire others.

"Having this involvement with the charity was a highlight of my University career as in this time, I got to teach in nearby schools and help organise great fundraising club nights. But last year [In 2017]...I was able to see first-hand how the money I helped raise back in England was being used to change the community through the education and training of local women into Irise entrepreneurs. My role was to document this great work through collecting materials, such as videos, photos and interviews, that could be used for upcoming fundraising events and newsletters...The highlight of this work for me was definitely going into schools with the Irise educators and seeing how the students reacted to some of the new information about menstrual health- witnessing the moment a class of teenage girls saw how a tampon expands for the first time is one I will never forget!"

Autumn

**Case Study: Young People in Control Placement in the UK**



*Bianca poses as part of delivering a Young People in Control session*

Our Young People in Control project trained 6 volunteers to work with 690 students across 3 schools in deprived parts of Birmingham. The project found that young people were navigating puberty alone and that girls' experiences of menstruation were surrounded by embarrassment and stigma. Our volunteers created a safe space for students to explore their concerns, increasing knowledge and confidence surrounding menstruation and puberty. Students said that they valued getting support from near peers who were more approachable and likely to understand their experiences than older adult.

Bianca, one of our volunteers, said the following;

"The education we deliver is honest and upfront, it also feels personal to me as I get to deliver these sessions in my local area, making a difference in my own community. I learnt so much...about my own body that I didn't know before joining Irise. When you can see that you have really helped a young person, if they have come to you to ask a question and walked away feeling more knowledgeable, confident and reassured, thanking you for your advice, you know you've made a valued difference."

## Leading- change the world

Once Agents of Change have taken action in their own communities and developed their confidence and skills through fundraising and campaigning, they are ready for the next challenge. They are then equipped to take on more long term leadership roles within the network.

### *Training and Mentoring others*

We encourage experienced members of the network to become Agents of Change trainers and mentors and help train and mentor new members of the network as they start their journey.

### *Organising campaigns and events*

We offer longer term volunteer placements, creating opportunities for Agents of Change to organise Irise's campaigns and events through leading teams of other volunteers, developing new concepts, managing our social media channels or helping to create blogs and resources.

### **Case Study: Friends of Irise Sheffield's Moon Rise Club Night**



*The Friends of Irise Sheffield Committee pose at a Moon Rise event*

In 2015 Friends of Irise Sheffield created Moon Rise, a club night designed to raise funds to support Irise. Four years later the club night has grown into a termly event and is a well known feature of the Sheffield music scene, attracting support from influential local DJs and event organisers. The original master mind behind the event, Caitlin, continues to mentor and support the new Friends of Irise committee, ensuring that learning and experiences are passed on from one chair to the next. The last Moon Rise in June 2019 was the largest yet, raising just under £1,500 in one night! The combination of creativity and social responsibility has created a amazing party that empowers more women and girls every year.

“This night [Moon Rise] is FOI's biggest fundraising event and receives huge amounts of support with many DJs keen to take part – as the new Co-Chairs we hope to carry on its success, mixing it up with new collaborations or new twists on previous ones!”

Isabella and Catherine, current Chairs of Friends of Irise Sheffield

## *Leading the Network*

We support members of network with leadership potential to consider setting-up a Friends of Irise group and inspiring friends, university or colleagues to support Irise long term.

Alternatively, there are opportunities to join our Advocacy Committee and help lead the network, share our learning with others and advocate for a period positive world nationally and internationally.

### ***Case Study: Our first Advocacy Trustee***



*Sophie recently joined our Board of Trustees as our first Advocacy Trustee*

Sophie became an Agent of Change in style by walking an incredible 268 miles over 3 weeks to raise funds to end period poverty and help break the stigma surrounding periods. She used her own experiences, managing a period whilst camping, to help her audience relate to the challenges many girls around the world face accessing basic facilities and support during menstruation.

Sophie raised £553.83 and her video talking about the issue reached nearly 1,500 people on social media. However, this was only the start of her journey. Inspired by her own experiences she went on to become Irise's first Advocacy Trustee and is now leading our work with young people to end menstrual stigma within a generation.

*"When I started my period, the absence of empowering knowledge combined with menstrual stigma and a pelvic pain disorder made menstruation a difficult experience. The stigma surrounding menstruation meant I was too embarrassed to ask to go to the toilet at school, or even to ask my mum for more absorbent pads, meaning I used menstrual materials for longer than was healthy."*

*As I got older and learned that women and girls all over the world are held back by their periods in myriad ways and that this is ultimately as an issue of gender inequity, I was compelled to act.*

*Since...Agents of Change, I have become Irise's first Advocacy Trustee and have set up the Advocacy Committee in order to grow and provide opportunities for Irise's network of supporters. Our ultimate aim is to empower the Advocacy Network to enact real change on the "toxic trio" of period poverty in the UK and East Africa."*

Sophie

## Research Placements

Irise is a research and learning focused organisation with many opportunities for our network to make significant contributions to our learning agenda. By completing a research placement with Irise, either as part of a university course or as a standalone piece of work, Agents of Change can learn about menstrual health in-depth whilst creating learning to help shape our work.

### Case Study: Hidden yet Shared



Lizzie presents her research at the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research Conference

Lizzie was motivated by her own experiences of getting her period at school to make sure future girls don't struggle in the same way.

*"I remember vividly being sat down in assembly at school and being terrified every month that I'd stand up with a stain on my skirt. I was so terrified that I was going to leak and people would talk about me behind my back that I couldn't concentrate in lessons when on my period. I wouldn't socialise as much and even felt embarrassed carrying my bag into the toilet!"*

Lizzie completed her Masters dissertation with Irise International, exploring similarities between girls' experiences of menstrual stigma in the UK and Uganda. Her work broke down traditional divides between low and high income contexts, demonstrating that girls' experiences of stigma, although hidden, are shared. She won the POLIS Dissertation prize for the highest grade achieved in 2017-18 and went on to present her research at the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research Global Conference. Her work has informed Irise's understanding of stigma across our programmes and supported the development of our new five year strategy. She is now working with the Irise team to publish a paper based on her dissertation and is helping lead the Advocacy Committee's work to end menstrual stigma in the UK through empowering young people to advocate in their own communities.

*"My findings suggest that despite living in the UK or Uganda, girl's feelings and reactions to menstruation are very similar and this is likely due to common taboos. Thinking holistically, as well as working together with our sisters across societies is essential for dismantling taboos and improving the lives of women and girls throughout the world...I want to fight the stigma and taboo around periods because if people were more open to talking about periods when I was at school I wouldn't have been so worried!"*

Lizzie

## A Lifelong relationship

Our network of passionate supporters are key to us realising our vision of a world where no girl is held back by her period. We aim for our Advocacy Network to be the start of a lifelong relationship with Irise. People working partnership across cultures and geography to achieve change has always been the driving force behind Irise's success. We want to offer our supporters the opportunity to be part of creating long lasting social change alongside forming relationships that will catalyse their growth as individuals and leaders.

A lifelong journey with Irise

