



Empowering young people to lead change- Impact Report

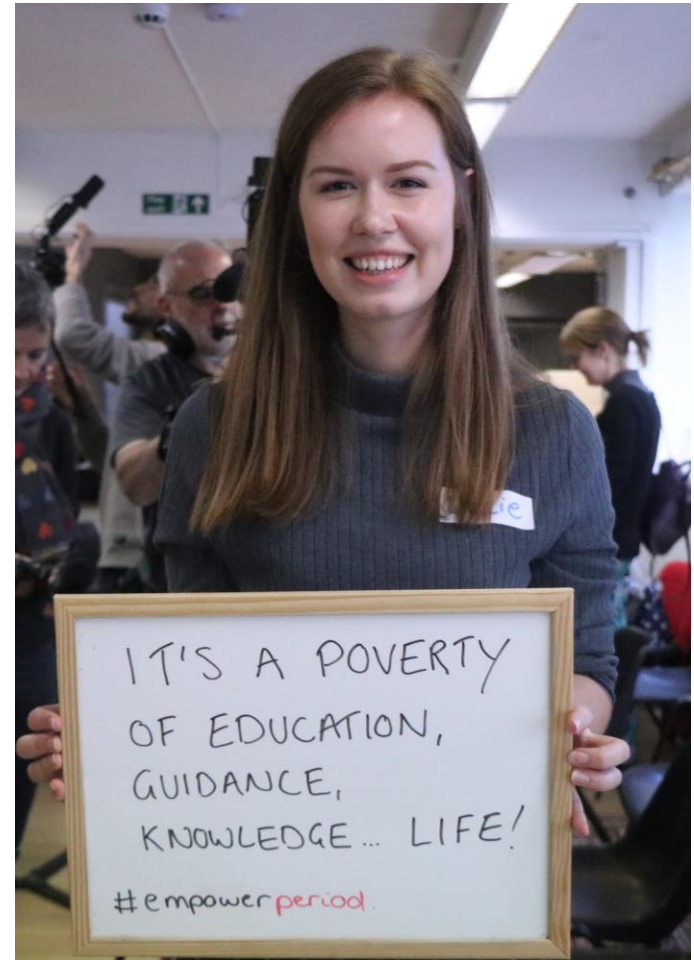


Goals

- To create a sustainable network of young people supporting Irise's work through;
 - Breaking the stigma surrounding menstruation and creating a positive narrative about being a girl
 - Raising funds to support Irise's project work to enable girls in the UK and Uganda to stay happy and healthy during their periods
- To create meaningful training and mentorship opportunities for young people enabling them to develop skills and experience for a career in the third sector

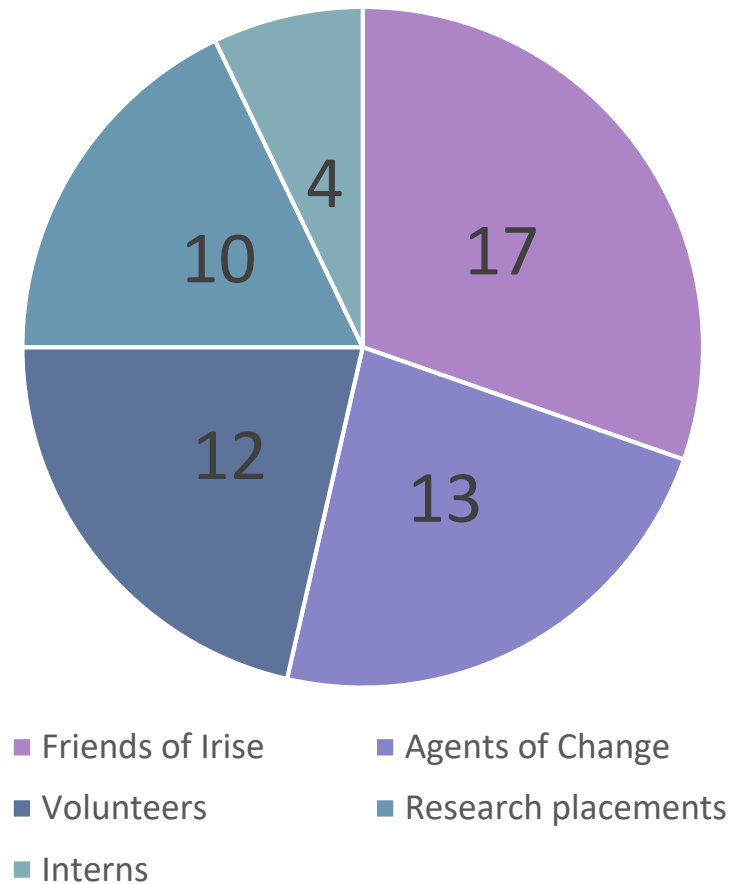
Our work with young people

- Since 2014 we've supported over 50 young people to take action to create a world where no girl is held back by her period through volunteering, internships, research placements and our Friends of Irise student network.
- Between 2017-2019 we piloted a tailored training and mentorship programme with 13 young people to run fundraising and awareness campaigns in their own community called Agents of Change.

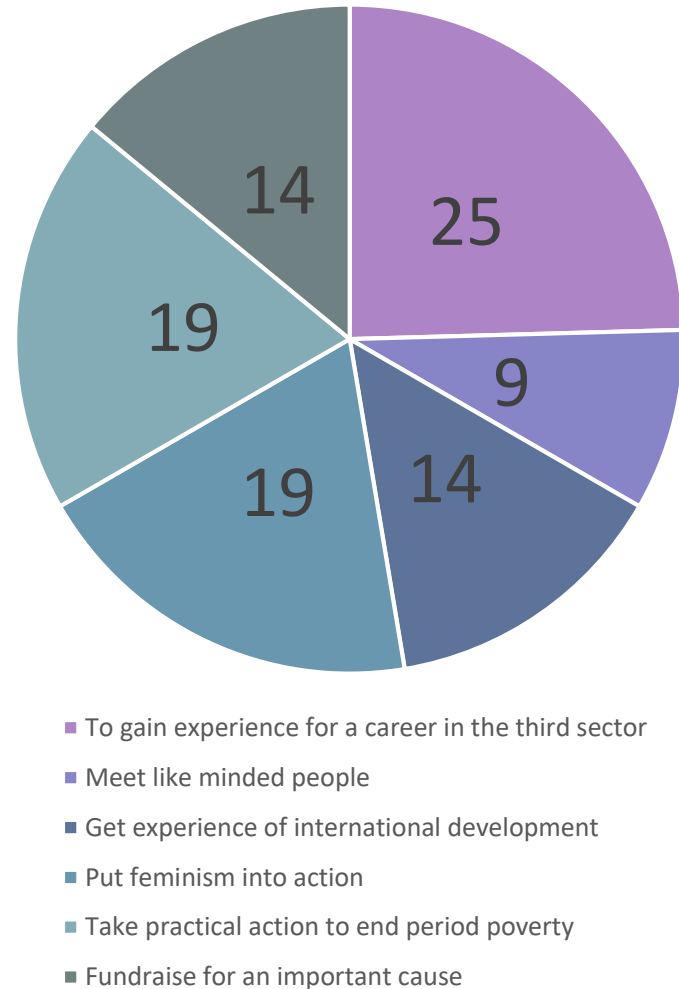


Who we worked with

Number of young people receiving direct support from the Irise team by engagement type



Why did people get involved (%)



Benefits of involvement

Creating Change

87% of young people feel their involvement with Irise has helped create real change for women and girls.

“It has changed my attitudes towards my body...and in particular periods, massively. I have a totally new found confidence with it and I think I have learnt how to communicate with others to help produce this effect in them...inspiring a new generation and empowering people to speak about their bodies in a different way.”

Skills Development

100% of young people feel their involvement with Irise has helped them develop their skills

“I have learnt how to put a passion into real tangible change, I have learnt how to effectively communicate and campaign for it...more than anything it has given me a sense of feeling empowered to make change happen.”

Benefits of involvement

Career Development

90% of young people feel their involvement with Irise has helped them pursue their career of choice

“My time with Irise showed me how rewarding it can be to work in a charity which influenced me to look for work in the third sector.”

Part of a Community

93% of young people feel part of a community of likeminded people

“The supportive culture has provided me with an important safe space to break down my own internalised menstrual stigma. It has also given me the chance to meet other people...who also care strongly about women and girls.”

Case Study- Fundraising



On 4th 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- Awareness Raising



Sophie became an Agent of Change in style by walking an incredible 268 miles over 3 weeks to 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.

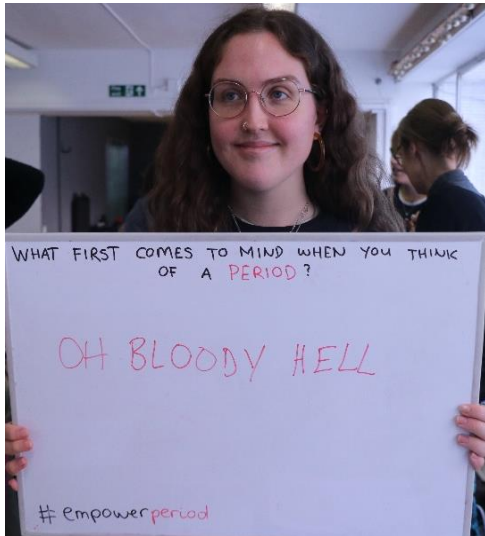
“The stigma surrounding menstruation meant I was too embarrassed to ask to go to the toilet at school, or even to ask my mum for more absorbent pads, meaning I used menstrual materials for longer than was healthy.”

Sophie’s 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.

“As I’ve got older and particularly through my involvement with Irise, I have been able to dismantle this internalised stigma... For me, leading the advocacy committee is a fantastic opportunity to work in partnership with a growing network of young people and their communities to transform menstrual stigma into menstrual positivity and create a world where no girl is held back by her period.”

Sophie

Case Study- Community Projects



Both Ellie and Romany ran fundraising and awareness campaigns with their family and friends as part of their initial involvement with Irise, raising almost £1,500 between them.

Romany and Ellie then both decided that they wanted to use their new skills to share their passion for periods with their old schools. With support from the Irise team, they developed new project planning and delivery skills as part and built their confidence to realise their own ideas. 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



Case Study- Volunteering in Uganda



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- Volunteering in the UK



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.”

Case Study- Research Placement



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!”

She 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.

“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

Other Impacts

- The network have raised a grand total of **£75,300** over the last 5 years enabling **15,000 girls to stay happy and healthy during their periods.**
- They have directly **empowered 1,840 school aged boys and girls** with education and mentorship about periods.
- Our evaluation of work in schools and communities found:



Knowledge

Over 90% of young people demonstrated significant improvements in knowledge



Confidence

Over 50% of girls demonstrated significant improvements in confidence

“I went on the internet to learn more about my period when I was 9 because I didn’t know what it was, I used a help line to find out and they were rubbish...we could say anything [in the Irise session] and we wouldn’t get in trouble for talking about it and we could share our opinions.”

Moving Forward

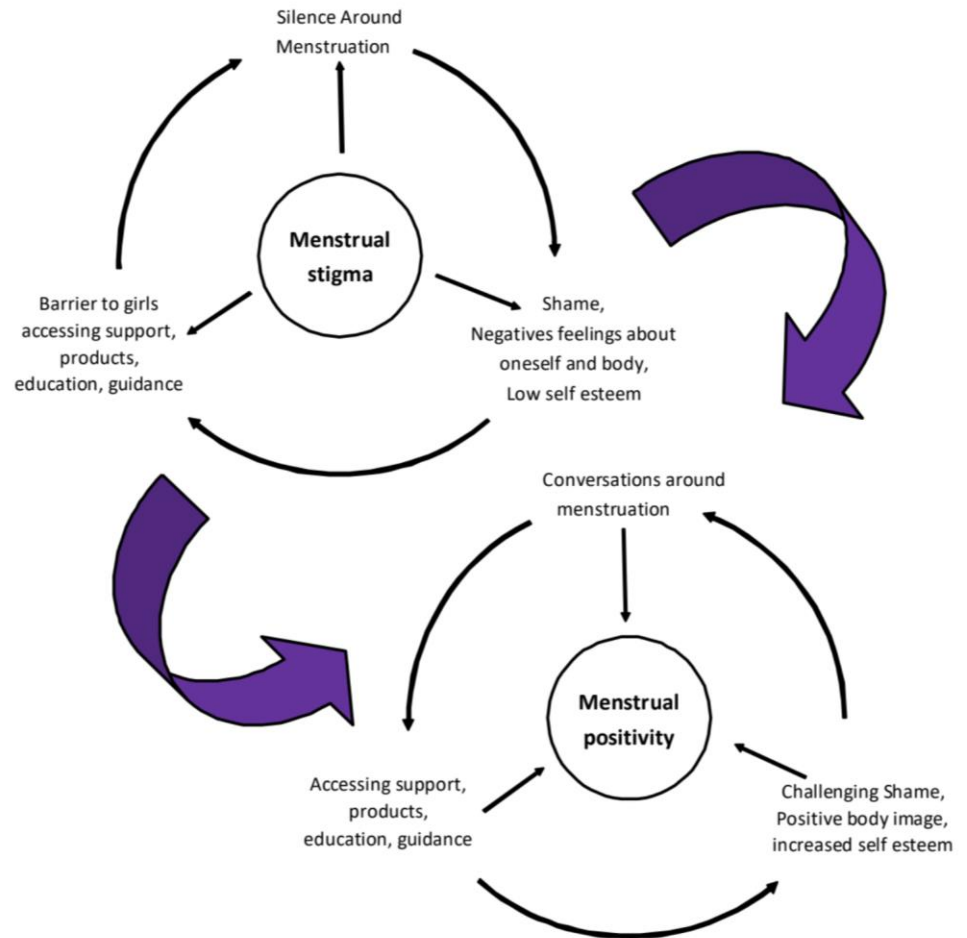
In the UK:

- 1 in 7 girls don't know what's happening when they start their period and more than a quarter don't know what to do, leaving girls poorly equipped to make decisions about their own bodies.
- Approximately half of girls feel embarrassed about their period and 70% of girls aren't allowed to go to the toilet during school lessons resulting in feelings of low self-esteem.
- We believe that young people are uniquely placed to catalyse progress to end period poverty and shame. Many young people are directly affected by menstrual stigma during an important window in their lives, are more aware of gender inequality and are still forming their attitudes to menstruation. If they become shame free then they will raise the next generation to be shame free, breaking the intergenerational cycle of stigma.

Moving Forward

Key priorities for the future are:

- To enable our network of young people to lead our work to end menstrual stigma in the UK.
- To develop more opportunities for young people to advocate and lead projects in their own communities.
- To continue to support the network's fundraising so that it can become a sustainable resource for young people.



Moving Forward

We have redeveloped our work with young people so that everyone joining our network begins a journey with Irise that:

- builds their knowledge and confidence enabling them to take action in their own communities
- then enables them to use their experience and skills to lead the network, helping Irise create change nationally and globally.

The Agent of Change Journey

