



Irise International

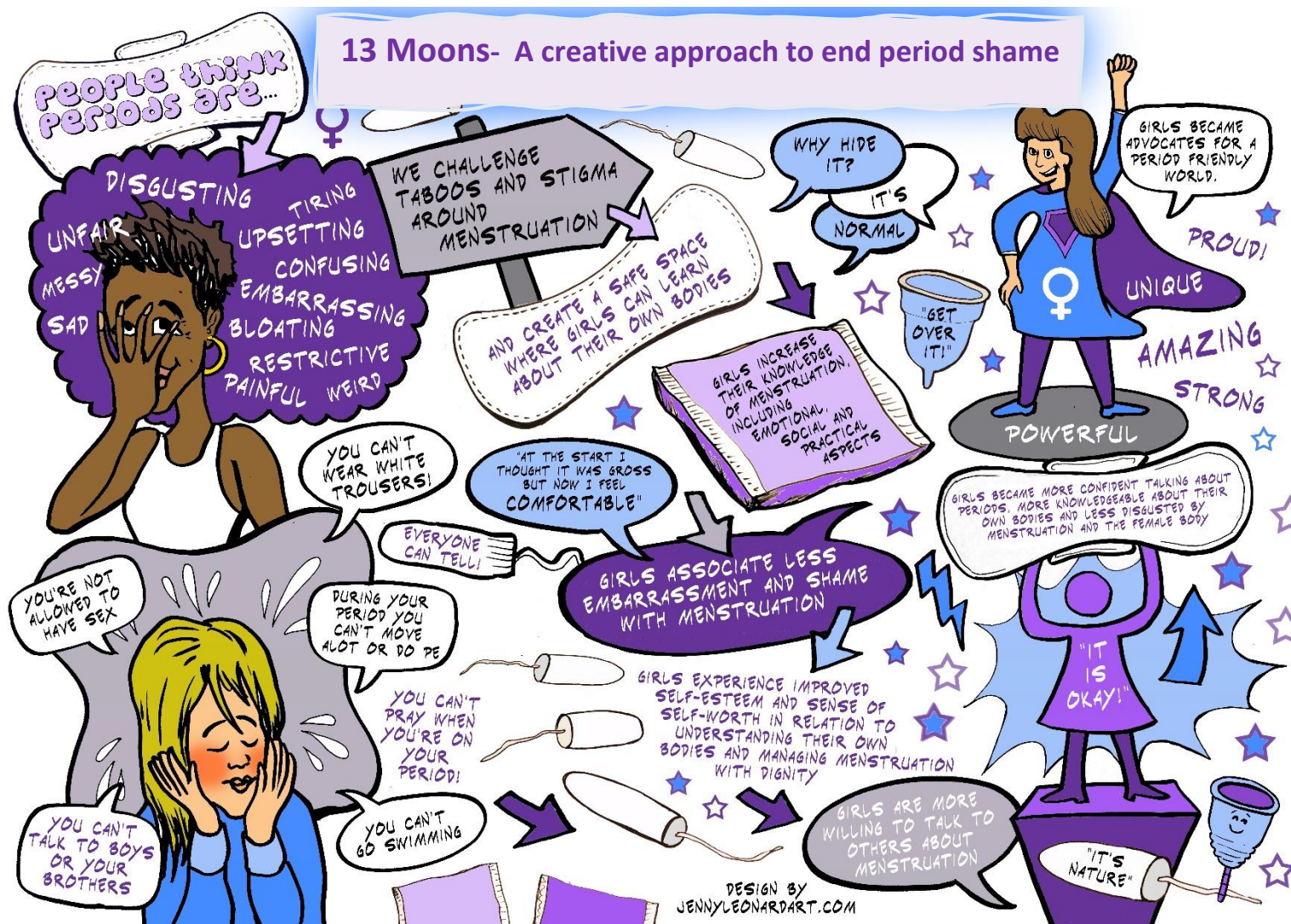
Empowering  
People through  
Period Equality.



let's talk. period

**feedback**  
THEATRE

## 13 Moons- A creative approach to end period shame



## Final Report

*"I will remember everything you taught me. I hope other girls in the future will feel the same way I do – proud!"*

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This project was delivered by Irise and Feedback, with Feedback Theatre leading on the use of creative activities and overall facilitation and Irise leading on the delivery of menstrual health content and evaluating the process. We also engaged an external visual artist, Jenny Leonard, to work with the girls to create worksheets to help end period shame.

## Background:

A creative and drama-based approach is a powerful way of challenging the stigma around menstruation, enabling girls<sup>1</sup> to achieve a better relationship with their bodies and build a narrative about menstruation that is positive, improving their self-esteem and sense of self-worth. It also facilitates a quick and natural conversion from learning to advocacy, enabling girls to turn their own new confidence and knowledge outward and realise their role as agents in creating a more period positive world for everyone.

Irise's model of social change has two pillars:

- 1) Leadership of young women and girls
- 2) Robust evidence of what works

This pilot project enabled us to test an approach that empowers girls and young women to lead the way towards a world free from period shame through dismantling their own internalised stigma and then using their empowerment to support others to do the same. We believe the process of change demonstrated in this project can and will end period shame within a generation. If young women and girls can become shame free, then they will transform the world around them until period poverty and shame are eradicated for everyone.

### **Aims:**

- a) Empower menstruators by breaking down menstrual stigma and creating a safe space where their voices can be heard.
- b) Enable menstruators to access the information they need about their own bodies.
- c) Test model of delivery for menstrual health education that uses creative and drama-based approaches to explore the physical, emotional, social and practical aspects of periods.

### **Objectives:**

1. Develop resources based on Irise International's existing menstrual health education resources and Feedback Theatre's approaches that apply drama and creative approaches to menstrual health.
2. Understand girls' experiences of menstrual stigma, their priorities, needs and barriers to starting conversations about periods.
3. Evaluate the impact of a creative approach on girls' self-esteem and sense of self-worth.
4. Share findings from the project to inform the development of menstrual health education that explores the physical, emotional, social and practical aspects of periods.

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<sup>1</sup> We wanted to make the workshops inclusive of all menstruators. Practically the Canaan Project and school had already selected a group they identified as "girls." Workshop participants spoke of themselves as "girls" and identified "boys" as a key contributor to their experience of stigma. As a result the workshop and resources are developed by and for people who identify as girls and boys respectively, however we recognise and are committed to being inclusive of all genders and there is a need to adapt these approaches to an audience of mixed genders. In addition, we believe that people who identify as women and girls are a large and powerful group and their advocacy can help create a more equal world for everyone. Creating a safe space for girls to dismantle stigma will lead the way towards more inclusive spaces for all genders.

## Summary of progress against objectives:

During the project we tested and developed activities with the girls to improve knowledge, dismantle stigma and support advocacy. Girls then worked with artist, Jenny Leonard, to create two worksheets, one to enable other girls to go on a similar journey and another to help boys understand girls' experiences. We have been able to write up the workshops into a short resource that others working with girls can use to dismantle stigma.

Girls response to activities enabled us to build an understanding of their current knowledge and perceptions of periods, their self-esteem and how this changed during the project. Theatre based techniques enabled girls to learn quickly and then turn their new knowledge and insight into creative advocacy, leading the development of resources to support others to go on a similar journey. Girls were able to reclaim their experiences of periods, defining it for themselves rather than letting the opinions of others define it for them. This led to increased self-esteem measured through their creative outputs and participation in related activities.

We used this information to develop a model of how change had happened within the project. This supported Irise's wider work to develop a theory of change for ending period shame in the UK.

Both the model and resources will be shared on our website and blog over the coming weeks and at The Let's Talk Period Research Launch Event. They will go on to inform our new Act for Change funded project which will support 50 young people to take action to end period shame in the UK over the next two years.

## Summary of progress towards Activities/Outputs:

### Original Activity Plans

- **Planning (6-8weeks):** resources and evaluation tools will be developed and/or refined for the purposes of this project including development of resources based on Irise International's Existing menstrual health education resources and Feedback Performance Company's expertise
- **Delivery (6 weeks):** 6 weekly, 2 hour after school workshops with a group of 10-15 participants who will develop a creative response that they will share with all users of the centre who will in turn be encouraged to share the key messages with their friends. This will be a participant led process, meaning that the partners will offer stimuli for creation and elaboration and will follow what the group desire to explore. Using Applied Theatre techniques to address topics through movement, play, objects and creative writing.
- **Evaluation and Reporting (6-8 weeks):** analysis of evaluation data and production of reports and case studies to produce generalisable learning
- **Sharing findings (6-8weeks):** sharing of case studies, findings and resources with relevant forums and networks.

## Planning and Delivery

We delivered 8 workshops using applied theatre techniques with a group of 12 girls from George Green school who were already taking part in weekly, compulsory, extracurricular enrichment activities with The Canaan Project.

A summary of our journey with the girls is presented below:

Date:	Workshop Theme:	Activities:	Notes
9 <sup>th</sup> October 2019	Creating a safe space to talk about periods and introducing the theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Co- creating ground rules with the participants</li> <li>- Getting to know each other games</li> <li>- Using our bodies in groups to represent “the best thing about being a girl”</li> <li>- Introducing “the Moon Box of things I wish I knew” so that girls can ask anonymous questions throughout the workshops</li> </ul>	Girls struggled to identify good things about being a girl (comments included ‘you can’t go out on your own’ and ‘you can get raped.’) Finally, multitasking, female friendship, having babies and self-care emerged as positives. Girls and Canaan Project staff were very awkward and embarrassed when periods were mentioned.
16 <sup>th</sup> October 2019	Perceptions of periods- understanding what girls think and feel about them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review of the ground rules in the context of talking about periods- aimed to reaffirm a safe space for girls and staff.</li> <li>- Everyone signed to confirm a safe space.</li> <li>- Getting to know each other game focused on what we are all good at to build self-esteem and identify girls’ interests to support activity planning.</li> <li>- Girls asked to finish the following sentences: periods are good because, people think periods are, periods are embarrassing because</li> <li>- Girls were asked to keep reading out loud the words written by the group, in the volume of their choice, after that they were asked to pick one word from the posters to say out loud and then the facilitator organised a ‘Circle of Sounds’ to encourage reflection on the words and their meaning.</li> </ul>	Some girls were more open than the previous week. One told us she was on her period. Many girls mentioned drawing and singing as things they were good at. This affirmation felt good following the previous week’s struggles identifying good things about being a girl. Strong negative feelings were expressed about periods in the complete the sentence exercise that we can unpack in more detail- this helped map out the focus of future sessions. Voicing the words together at the end of the session (many of them negative) felt cathartic and powerful. For the first time the group seemed to develop a shared identity in the unearthing of these strong negative feelings.



30 <sup>th</sup> October 2019	The menstrual cycle- sharing the facts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Warm up activities including sharing 'the best thing you did this half term' and throwing/receiving balls only using eye contact, continued to build confidence and teamwork.</li> <li>- The female anatomy and menstrual cycle were introduced using different cloths to build a picture and describe the purpose of different parts. The aim was to communicate information about the body without it seeming overly medicalised or scientific so that girls could internalise and own the information about their own body.</li> </ul>	Some girls' knowledge was revealed to be very limited. There was also diversity; some girls talked about contraception and having children, but these seemed like alien concepts to others. Girls brought out their science textbooks and used the diagrams to help them understand the more creative picture we were building. They also initially used the books as a barrier to avoid engagement with the more creative approach, which was unfamiliar, overwhelming and required more embodied engagement from the girls in comparison in textbook learning. A bunch of red lilies were used to represent menstrual blood, the girls found this funny and one of them said, "I am on my period!" and got the flowers.
6 <sup>th</sup> November 2019	Consolidating knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Warm up activities included making a noise to represent your week and continue to help create a collaborative space.</li> <li>- The main activity was a quiz about periods and female anatomy. Girls formed two teams and competed for the highest score. Some of the questions were task based. Every team got a blood drop for every question/task done</li> </ul>	Feelings of embarrassment seem to have completely gone. One girl shared that she had started her period on Friday. Girls knowledge had improved, and we were reassured they were ready to move onto more detailed work exploring stigma. The quiz led to discussions about religious restrictions during menstruation, particularly between Muslim girls and others in the group. We emphasised the importance of dialogue with each other and other people we respect.
13 <sup>th</sup> November 2019	PMS, self-care and menstrual products- how to look after yourself and get support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Warm up activities included food you used to dislike but now like and a movement game where the facilitator uses 'period' as an instruction to stop moving, helping to destigmatise the word.</li> <li>- Facilitated discussion about PMS and how we can manage it, including making an image in groups communicating coping strategies.</li> </ul>	Many girls weren't aware of PMS. They shared the following coping strategies; stay cosy, relax, watch tv, be with friends, eat chocolate/comfort food, take tablets, drink water. There were good conversations about adverts – 'why is the liquid blue? Because some people might be upset to see blood. Who are those people? The other half of the world. Whose problem is that? Theirs.'

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Exploration of different menstrual products—including placing tampons in water.</li> <li>- Discussion about what menstrual product adverts tell us.</li> </ul>	
20 <sup>th</sup> November 2019	<p>Period shame and inequality (artist present) to explore how menstruation is perceived in our own cultures and the effect this has on girls</p> <p>- to think about how we can change the narrative around menstruation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Warm up activities included saying something that's unfair to start to introduce the idea of advocacy and grandmother's footsteps with a pad to continue to dismantle stigma and introduce the idea of 'hiding' periods.</li> <li>- Girls then created some improvised scenes about hiding pads at school and home and discussed why we are embarrassed to be seen with a menstrual product.</li> <li>- Girls then worked on creating an advert for menstrual products that follows the rules they want for their periods.</li> </ul>	<p>In this session the focus started to shift from girls own knowledge and shame to becoming advocates for wider change.</p> <p>From the beginning the question 'what is unfair ' offered them the space to talk about many issues, they mentioned: it's unfair that they can't go to the bathroom during classes or they get quizzed about it, poverty, homework, gender stereotypes, that boys don't get periods or get pregnant ...</p> <p>When we discussed privacy and embarrassment and they got to the point that it's a private thing - not everyone needs to know - but also its boys that are embarrassed and that's their problem that shouldn't limit girls. They also realised that boys are acting immature around periods. Why are we so worried for them?</p>
27 <sup>th</sup> November 2019	Becoming Advocates (produced by artist)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Our arm up activity was if you could be anything/anyone, what/who would you be? This continued to build a sense of agency and aspiration to create change.</li> <li>- The remainder of the session was spent completing the work sheets produced by the artist.</li> </ul>	<p>We invited an artist to work with them because so many of them were passionate about art and drawing. She created a worksheet based on their previous session that they could complete. The idea was that the worksheets would help other girls go on the journey they had been on during the workshops.</p>
4 <sup>th</sup> December 2019	Celebration and wrap-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The final warm up was to describe a time when you were proud of yourself, helping build a sense of celebration in the final session.</li> <li>- We then recalled the whole journey and we asked how</li> </ul>	<p>It was a good ending, they enjoyed recalling the journey and shared positive feedback. Most of them shared very positive moments when they felt proud of themselves and we all cheered after each one. The Period Pouches were a physical takeaway that will hopefully</p>

		<p>they feel now about periods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Girls spent the remainder of the session taking part in informal evaluation discussions and decorating self-care period pouches containing pads, chocolate and power words.</li> </ul>	<p>remind the girls of what they learnt every time they use them.</p>
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Key learning from delivery:

#### *Stigma is infectious*

During the first session girls and staff were embarrassed. The stigma was infectious and representatives from Irise and Feedback Theatre found themselves feeling awkward talking about periods. We need to recognise that breaking the stigma is embarrassing and space for those leading the process to reflect on their own reactions is essential. We found the important thing is to persevere, keep talking, joking and sharing and the stigma will break down.

#### *Preparing partners*

It's important not to make any assumptions about the project partners attitudes or preconceptions about menstruation. Stigma is pervasive and even those supportive of the project may need support to speak openly about periods. Be prepared to take everyone on a journey. Create space for everyone to reflect and dismantle their stigma as part of the project planning and delivery.

#### *Time and space*

Time and space are so important for a creative approach to be successful. Space needs to be physically safe (e.g. closed doors) and emotionally safe (e.g. ground rules, team building) before people can open-up and go on a journey together. Shame and stigma are embodied and we can only start the process of dismantling them when we are comfortable with our environment.

#### *Cultural difference*

Girls experiences of menstruation are rooted in cultural and religious belief. Be prepared to facilitate respectful dialogue about complex social norms. Ask questions, invite others to ask questions, share objective, factual information when you have it and encourage conversation.

#### *Led by Participants*

Creative methods need to play to the strengths and interests of the participants. Find out what participants are already passionate about and use that as a way to explore tough topics and create advocacy to support others.

#### *Evaluation and reporting:*

Girls responses to interactive games and activities were captured and used as part of project evaluation. Detailed notes were kept by the facilitators and girls' responses to content and activities were recorded in a reflective session with all volunteers and facilitators at the end of each workshop. This was used to produce an evaluation report and case studies of girls' experiences. Key findings are presented below.



## Sharing Findings:

We have produced a short resource with two worksheets co-designed by artist, Jenny Leonard, and the workshop participants. These will be made available freely to other organisations and individuals wishing to use creative techniques to work with girls to end period shame.

Irise will also produce a blog and one-page summary of the project so that other groups can access and build on our work.

## Outcomes:

Participants will:

- Increase their knowledge of menstruation, including emotional, social and practical aspects
- Associate less embarrassment and shame with menstruation
- Experience improved self-esteem and sense of self-worth in relation to understanding their own bodies and managing menstruation with dignity
- Be more willing to talk to others about menstruation

We evaluated the project using the 3R framework for participatory theatre for change – reach, resonance and response (Herrington 2016). Reach establishes who the project is engaging and ensures the appropriateness of the audience. Resonance reflects the immediate responses of those involved within the project, particularly focusing on changes in perceptions, feelings and values. Response reflects the long-term impacts or social change that occur as a result of the project.

Our evaluation framework is presented here:

Component	Measures
Reach	Break down of gender, age, ethnic group, socioeconomic status and number of menstruators involved.
Resonance	Change in the individuals' knowledge of menstruation and perceptions of menstruation and the stigma attached to it
Response	Change in girls' self-esteem and sense of self-worth Change in girls' willingness to talk to others about menstruation

Results for each area are now presented:

## Reach

Girls were from diverse ethnic backgrounds including white British, Asian Bangladeshi and Black African. They were all from George Green school which serves predominantly low-income households in inner city London. A significant proportion of girls were practising Muslims. The project aimed to focus on diverse, potentially marginalised populations and the girls included in the project met this criteria.

## Resonance

### Knowledge

Knowledge is power and the way knowledge is learned can impact on its meaning. We felt that using creative methods (that allowed for personal expression) to teach the menstrual cycle and female anatomy would help girls internalise knowledge, generating a sense of ownership of their own bodies. A traditional, didactic approach to teaching about periods and puberty means that girls' only exposure to female anatomy is often in the context of a clinical, medicalised textbook diagram. Exposure to the information in this format does not promote and encourage girls to take control of their own bodies and may even lead to a sense of dissociation or lack of control because their anatomy is firmly placed in the realm of the scientific and medical.

During the third workshop facilitators constructed a uterus from fabrics and asked girls to guess what was being displayed (see photo below). Guesses included 'a lady' and 'a body.' Once girls were told that the display was meant to represent a uterus only one girl attempted to label the fallopian tubes by calling them "tubes". One girl pointed to the vagina and asked, "is that your bum?", another girl pointed to the vagina but didn't want to say the word out loud and mouthed a 'V'.



Early on in the session one of the girls got out her scientific textbook and tried to compare it to the cloth uterus. Everyone rushed to follow her and seemed more comfortable hiding behind their books. Facilitators asked the girls to put their books away and used the display to prompt girls to share their knowledge of periods and the menstrual cycle. Girls knowledge was revealed to be very minimal. No one could describe the menstrual cycle and girls had a lot of questions about the basic facts. It is interesting that despite having scientific information about anatomy and periods in their bags none of the girls had internalised this knowledge or was able to describe what this meant for their own personal experience of periods. When the discussion turned to practical questions about when and how girls would experience periods one girl even exclaimed, "I am too young for this!"

In the following session girls took part in a quiz to test what they had learnt in the previous weeks. The facilitators agreed that basic knowledge was a prerequisite for changing perceptions and dismantling stigma so the process could not proceed until girls were familiar with the basics about their bodies. Girls worked together to label the parts of our fabric uterus and order the stages of the menstrual cycle correctly. Significantly, girls had been given the language to talk about their bodies confidently- the initial reticence to name parts had vanished when faced with an opportunity to beat the other team! Even the girl who originally mouthed “V” when she referred to vagina said the word confidently during this exercise.

Girls themselves commented, “I didn’t know what the parts were, but now I do” and “it is useful, I’ve never seen it, I only have brothers!”

### Perception

An individual’s perception is influenced by their knowledge and social norms within their groups and wider society. We hoped that articulating a shared experience of stigma and shame within the group would create an environment where individual perceptions could start change and the origins of stigma could be explored.

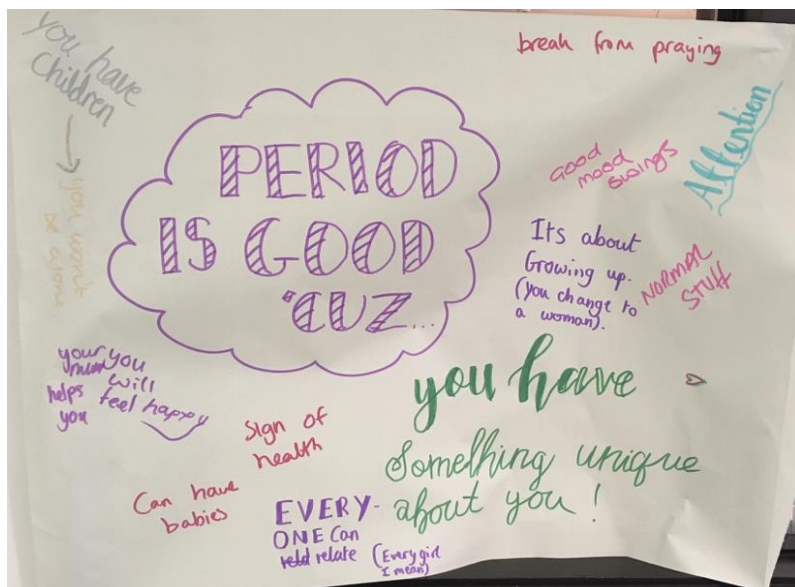
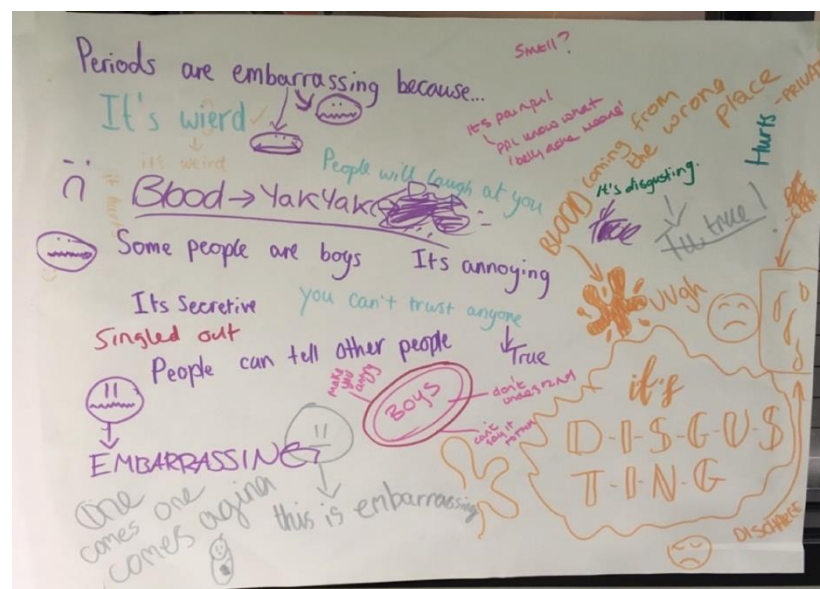
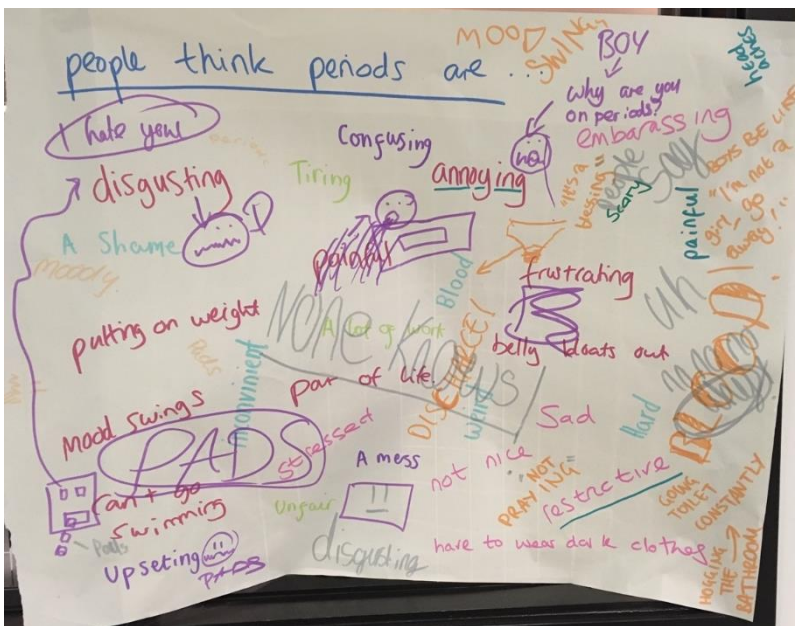
In the first workshop we introduced the theme of the project and girls reacted with disgust and dismay. One girl even leapt up to make sure the door was closed so that nobody outside could hear what we’d said. In the second workshop girls were asked to finish the following sentences: periods are good because, people think periods are, periods are embarrassing because...

Perhaps the most striking comment on girls’ perceptions is the sheer volume of negative comments vs neutral or positive statements. Photos of their responses are displayed on the following page.

When the facilitator asked girls to choose words from the posters to read out loud only one girl chose to repeat a positive statement (“can have babies”). This was met with disapproval from other group members demonstrating that individual perceptions were interacting with a powerful social norm within the group. However, the act of vocalising the negative thoughts and feelings marked the start of a change in social norm. Through vocalising their perceptions girls recognised a shared experience and became a group with a shared identity for the first time. From this point onwards the stigma began to lose power and significance within the group environment.

In workshop 6 girls were given the opportunity to redefine their perceptions of menstruation through creating advert about a new menstrual product. All three adverts focused on ending the shame and disgust surrounding periods with the slogans, “bloody=greatness”, “Stop hiding!” and “No biggy!” One of the pictures the girls drew for their adverts is displayed on the following page, in direct contrast to their responses at the very start of the project.

Girls themselves recognised that their perceptions had changed during the course of the workshop saying “in the start I thought it was gross but now I feel comfortable” and ‘I felt embarrassed at the beginning but now I think it is really good and I wish I thought this at the start, so I got [more] use out of this opportunity thank you.’



Top right, top left, bottom left show girls' responses at the start of the project. Bottom right shows an advert created in Workshop 6 to change perceptions about periods.



## Stigma

We defined stigma as the external disgrace associated with periods that is created and perpetuated by society. This interacts with individuals' perceptions of their periods resulting in feelings of shame. Within the workshops we were able to dismantle stigma through breaking the silence and enabling the girls to articulate their shared experience. This process enabled them to build a shared identity as a group and created a new social norm within the workshops where periods could be discussed, and stigma understood and dismantled. Girls identified fear of disgust from men and boys as a key driver of their own feelings of shame. By the end of the project girls believed they had matured and no longer cared what boys thought. They described being embarrassed as "childish" with their increased knowledge and insight giving them a sense of power and superiority. At the start of the project the girls had been fearful of anyone else even overhearing the workshop but by the end they were advocating for boys to be included so that they could also learn to be shame free as well. One girl suggested, "maybe a mix of genders, because it proves you can have a conversation with different perspectives from boys" and another replied, "yes! They will have to know anyway," another added, "yes, help them to understand and you can get new ideas from boys". By creating a stigma free space, we were able to start conversations that quickly turned to advocacy and how to tackle stigma in the wider community.

## Response:

### Self-esteem

According to Rosenberg, a sociologist who developed the widely used Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale, as individual with high self-esteem "has self-respect, considers himself a person of worth. Appreciating his own merits, he nonetheless recognizes his faults [...]. The term 'low self-esteem' [...] means that the individual lacks respect for himself, considers himself unworthy, inadequate, or otherwise seriously deficient as a person." We can assume this definition holds true for other genders as well! Originally, we had considered attempting to complete Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale with girls but after the first session it was clear that this would be intrusive and disrupt the natural flow of activities that was so essential to dismantle stigma. Instead we used activities to assess self-esteem in line with the components of the scale<sup>2</sup>.

During workshop 1, the girls were asked to name the best thing about being a girl. Sadly, girls struggled to pinpoint the positives of being female. During the second workshop the girls were asked to say one thing they're good at, some of the girls simply said they did not know and struggled to think of anything to share. If we fast forward to workshop 7, the girls were asked if they could be anyone who would they be? Most girls expressed that they wanted to be existing people who are female. During workshop 8, the girls were warmed up by asking them to share a moment where they were proud of themselves. Unlike the warmup activity during week 2 where some of the girls struggled to speak about themselves positively, most girls spoke about themselves in a positive light and were comfortable sharing their achievements.

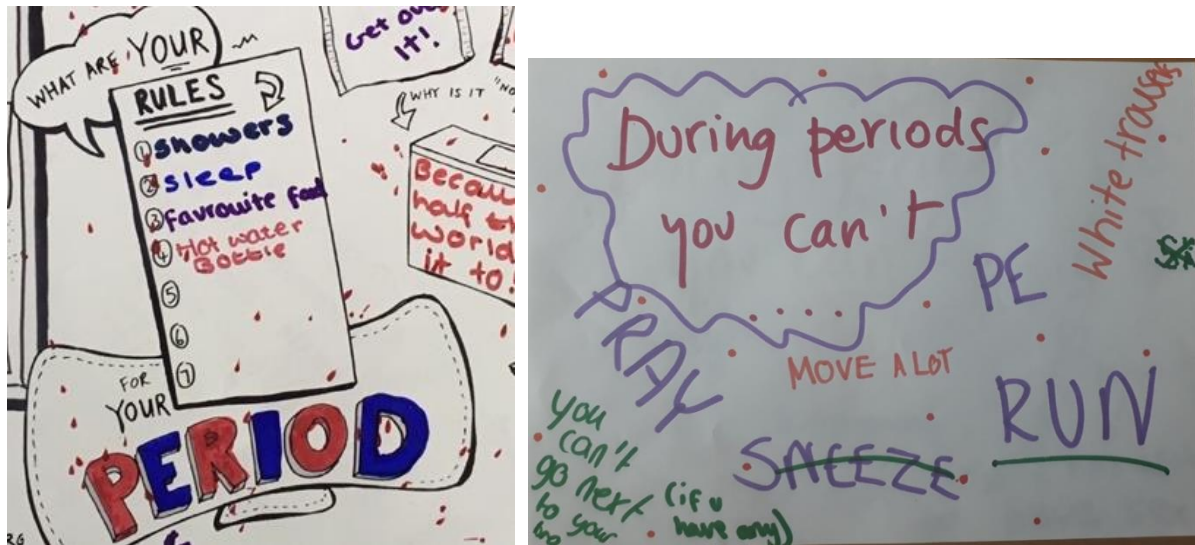
Girls responses to the "what are your rules" section on the worksheet they had co-created with artist Jenny Leonard focused on self-care such as 'sleep well' or eat your 'favourite food.' This was in

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<sup>2</sup> The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale asks respondents to indicate whether they agree or disagree with the following statement; 1) I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others 2) I feel that I have a number of good qualities.. 3) All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. 4) I am able to do things as well as most other people. 5) I feel I do not have much to be proud of. 6) I take a positive attitude toward myself. 7) On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. 8) I wish I could have more respect for myself. 9) I certainly feel useless at times. 10) At times I think I am no good at all."



direct contrast to the restrictions girls had chosen to stop and list during a discussion in a previous workshop.



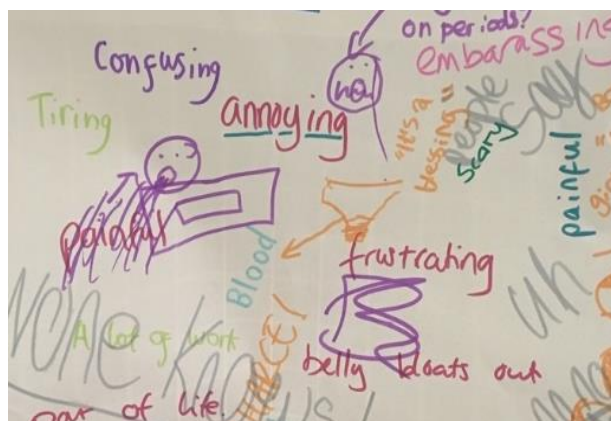
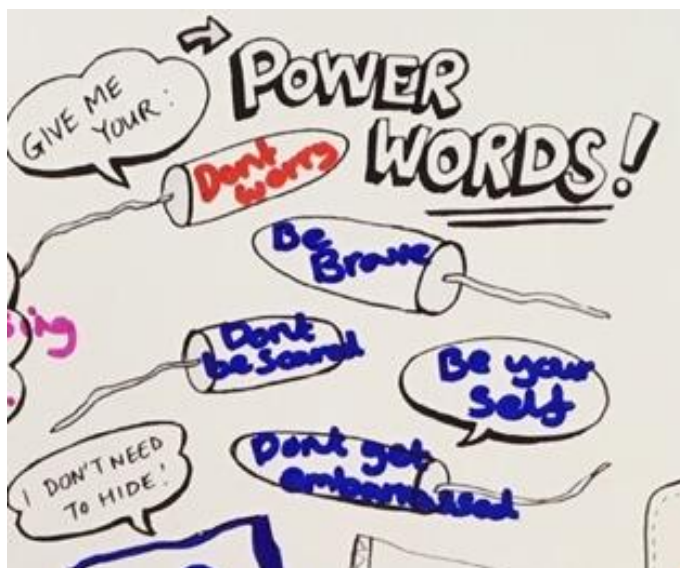
A typical response to the worksheet “what are your rules” section (left) compared to the restrictions girls chose to list earlier in the workshop (right).

This illustrated an important shift in thinking that the girls spoke about towards the end of the workshops; the idea that they could define their experience rather than allowing others shame and embarrassment to define it for them. This reclaiming of periods was expressed throughout the second half of the program through creating positive period adverts, worksheets to support others and a self-care kit for themselves. Through these activities, girls communicated the message that they were of value despite the shame associated with periods and made an active choice to see themselves and their periods positively.

### Willingness to talk to others

Once girls had dismantled their own internalised stigma, they were able to become advocates for others. When they were given the opportunity to create a menstrual product advert all three focused on ending the embarrassment surrounding periods for others. The worksheets co-produced with artist Jenny Leonard and based on these activities also focused on replicating their journey from shame to freedom. Girls shared their “power words” as part of this worksheet including “Be brave” and “Be yourself” in direct contrast to words girls shared about periods at the start of the workshop, including “confusing”, “annoying” and “disgusting”. Again, girls’ language had changed. Their power words made them active agents in their experience of periods rather than passive recipients of an entirely negative process. A critical part of this reclaiming was the act of sharing with others and choosing not to be affected by the embarrassment of others.

One girl shared during the final workshop, “I hope other girls in the future will feel the same way I do – proud!”



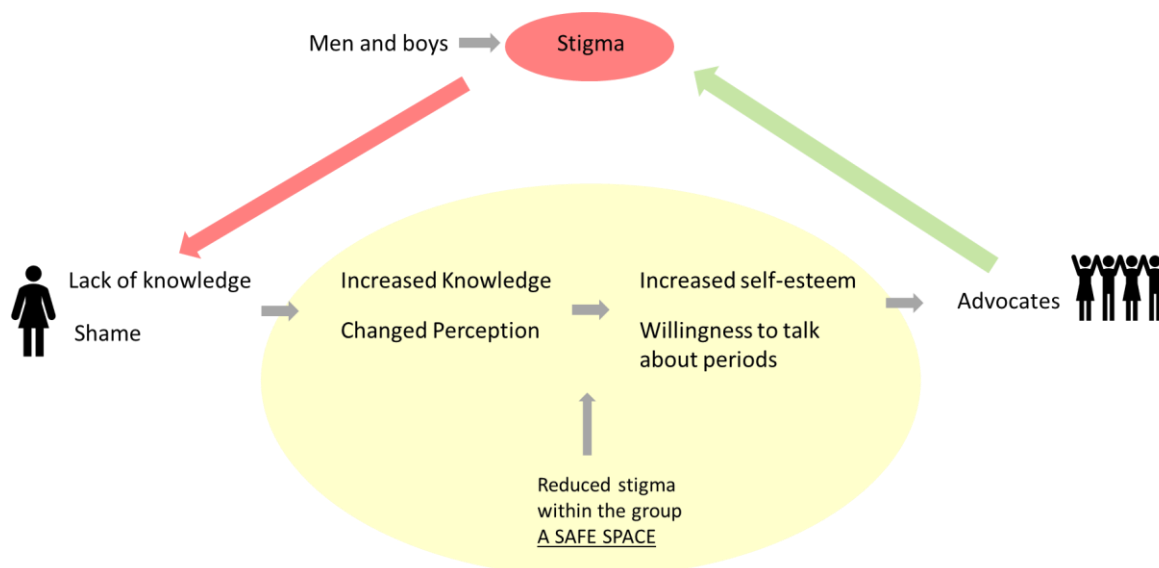
Girls “power words” (left) compared to words associated with periods in the second workshop (right).

Workshop participants identified men and boys as a specific driver of stigma in their own lives. They worked with our artist, Jenny Leonard, to develop a second worksheet focused on engaging boys in the conversation. As mentioned previously, by the end of the workshop girls were keen to include boys in the conversation so they could learn to change their behaviour.

When directly asked during focus group discussions if the girls felt confident to talk about periods to other people outside of the project group, they replied said “yeah”. Then one girl adding, “I never used to, I used to be childish about it.” The others in the groups supported this sentiment.

### A Model of Change

Through exploring the journeys of individual girls, we were able to develop a model of change.

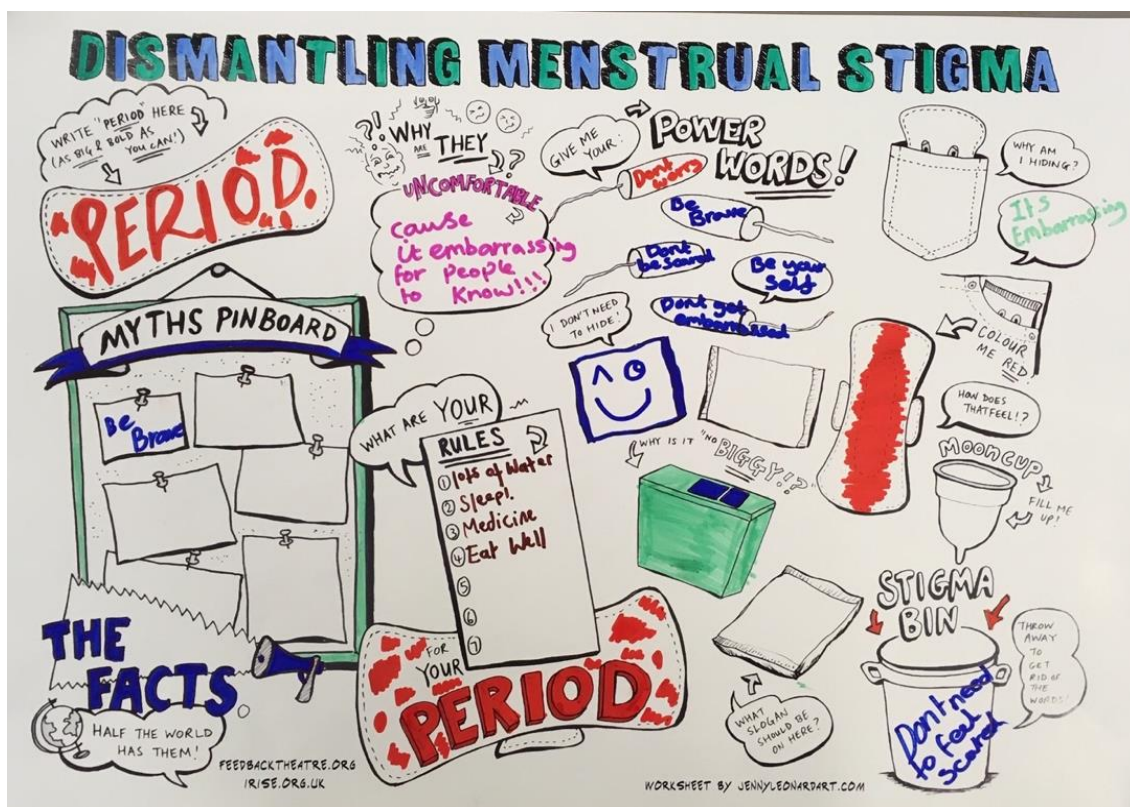
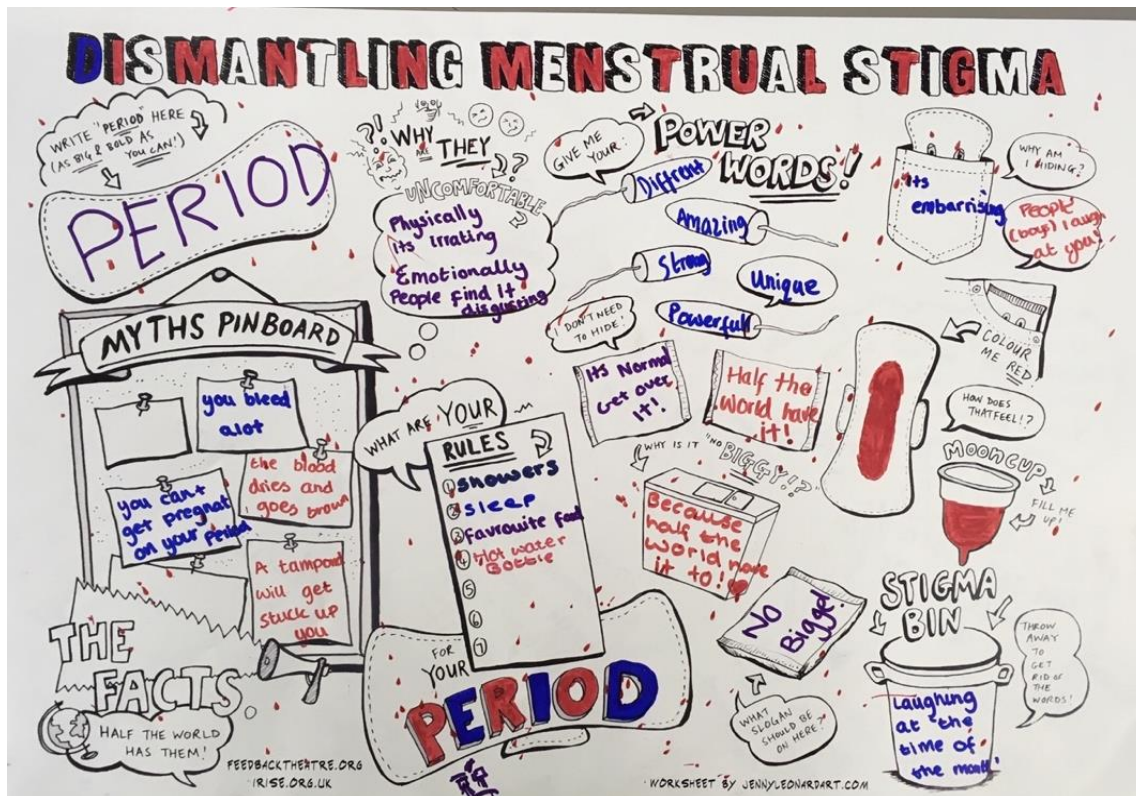


Girls came to the workshop lacking knowledge and experiencing shame about periods because of stigma within society. Through using creative approach, we were able to reduce stigma within the group, creating a safe space where knowledge could increase, and perceptions could change. Girls

went through a process of dismantling their own internalised stigma, manifest as embarrassment and shame, and then quickly became advocates for dismantling stigma in wider society. This group specifically identified men and boys as a significant driver of the stigma in their own lives (although there are others). They were then able to work with facilitators to develop a worksheet that could engage boys, effectively becoming part of dismantling stigma in wider society.

A creative approach was essential in enabling this process. A didactic approach may have increased knowledge (although the fact that girls had textbooks about puberty and female anatomy but couldn't answer basic questions suggests not) but it will not empower girls to become part of the solution. Shame is embodied and therefore using the body to generate movement and using the mind to produce individual creative pieces about menstrual experience allows exploration of an alternative narrative that can catalyse a change in mindset over a short time period. It is this process of dismantling internalised stigma and supporting a journey from passive victim of societal attitudes to active author of a different story that will end period shame for everyone.





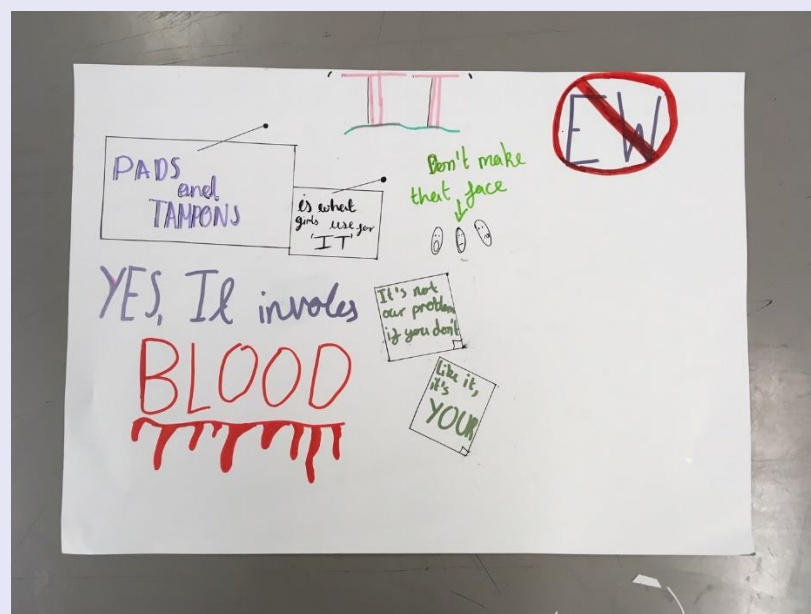
Two worksheets completed by girls to illustrate their journey during the workshops.

### Joy's journey...

Joy was very outspoken in her disapproval of menstruation being the focus of these workshops. Especially during the first few workshops, she often pulled faces of disgust and made noises of discomfort when menstrual topics were introduced. She also wished that the project included a wider variety of women's topics beyond menstruation; she said, "I think one day it should be periods, then other topics on other days". During the introduction of the female anatomy, she giggled and whispered to her friends throughout the activity. When I pointed to the vagina on the diagram and asked the girls to label this area, Joy incorrectly guessed that this was "the bum".

However, the following week the girls were asked to independently label the internal genitalia, and Joy was able to label the vagina correctly. During week 6, Joy also took a lead drama role in her group's creation of a menstrual advert that focused on reducing menstrual stigma and promoting a new menstrual pad. During a scene where a girl was speaking of her embarrassment around her period, Joy interrupted the scene and yelled "STOP! Don't be embarrassed!" Joy exuded confidence when discussing menstrual embarrassment and products during her advert; displaying a far less negative attitude towards menstruation than she had demonstrated at the beginning of the project.

Joy's change in attitude towards menstruation throughout the project can also be seen in this menstrual worksheet she produced for boys during the second to last week of the project. Instead of reproducing her previous attitudes of disgust and embarrassment towards menstruation, Joy discouraged feelings of shock and repulsion towards periods within her worksheet for boys. This can be seen through her drawings of shocked faces with the words 'don't make that face' written above, as well as her large, creative inclusion of blood, stating 'yes, it involves blood!'



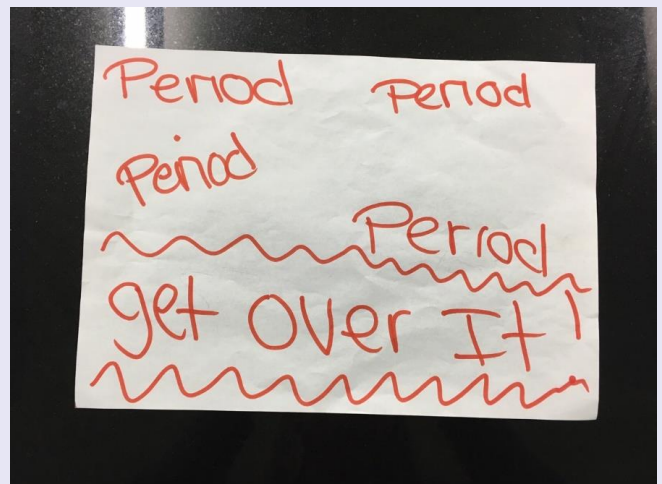
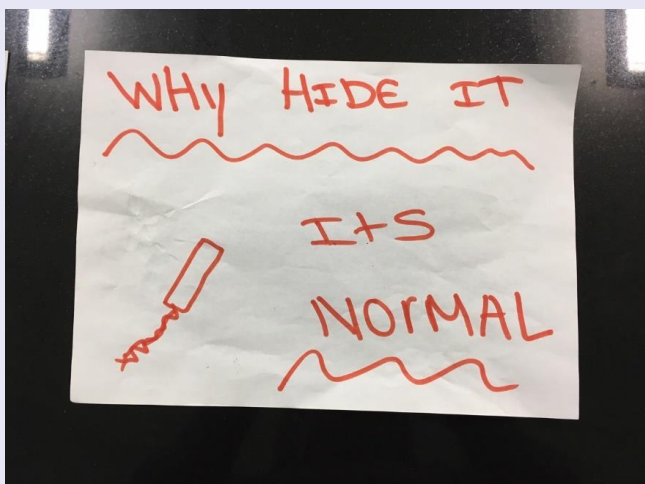


### Beth's journey...

When first introducing the topic of menstruation, Beth was visibly shocked, with wide eyes and an open mouth. During all of the workshops, she became increasingly engaged within the topic discussions and activities, showing a genuine interest in the topic and desire to participate. After the first few workshops, Beth approached two members of staff smiling and excitedly shared that she had started her period that week, but expressed her desire to keep this a secret from her classmates. A few weeks later, the girls were tasked with producing an advert, focusing on what they would change within the world of menstruation. Beth was keen to emphasise the importance of not being embarrassed during your period and promoting the normalcy of menstrual blood. She did this by creating a series of empowering posters and slogans to be shown during the advert, aiming to dismantle menstrual shame (see below).

During the first introduction of the uterus, Beth shared her knowledge that there are “tubes” within the female internal anatomy. However, other than this, she could not label any other parts of the internal female genitalia or describe the menstrual cycle. During the revision session, Beth was able to correctly label all parts of the internal female genitalia and put the four stages of the menstrual cycle in the right order.

Beth was known for missing school because of anxiety so her positive engagement in the project was particularly encouraging and rewarding to witness.



## Budget Report

Budget line:	Cost:	Spend to date:
Materials and refreshments for workshops £30/workshop	£180	<b>203.74</b>
Staff and volunteer expenses for host	£150	<b>150</b>
Documentation. External support to document the project (video, photography, sound, graphic) – base don estimate form freelancer	£1000	<b>850</b>
Implementing team travel expenses In London travel expenses for Feedback Performance Company and Irise implementer Sheffield to London travel to deliver 6 sessions	£1110	<b>618.95</b>
Feedback Performance Company Facilitation: £200/day, 6 days planning and reporting, 6 days implementing, Movement Artist Consultation 1 day	£2,600	<b>2600</b>
Irise International Staff Time £190/day director time, £176/day Head of Operations, Director 6 days implementing and 6 days evaluation, administration, reporting data analysis etc	£3,384	<b>3865.17</b>
Additional DBS checks		<b>136.14</b>
<b>Total Cost: £8,424</b>		<b>8424</b>
<b>Budget narrative (is the spend as expected, any concern about spending through to end March 2020, co-funding etc):</b>  Underspend of travel and documentation was reallocated to staff time.		

## Next Steps

### What has your organisation learnt from the work funded by the Period Poverty Grant Scheme?

The project confirmed and fed into ongoing work to develop a Theory of Change for ending menstrual stigma in the UK. It demonstrated that the journey from shame to freedom can be achieved quickly when creative techniques that enable people to reclaim their experiences of periods are used. Importantly, girls were able to become advocates, creating outputs that will go on to reach many others. This “chain reaction” will be critical in ending period shame within a generation and needs to be at the heart of any work to transform social norms around menstruation in the UK and beyond.

### How has this learning changed the way you work?

The pilot has confirmed our commitment to using creative, participatory approaches to end period shame in the UK. We have also recognised that these initiatives are an opportunity to take all the stakeholders involved on a journey to end period shame, in fact the process is more authentic if everybody works together to understand and dismantle their internalised stigma.

### Please describe the overall impact of this grant funded work on your organisation and future plans:

The project enabled us to pilot a creative approach that has worked for Irise in other contexts. It catalysed a key partnership with Feedback Theatre, enabling us to develop our approach from theory into practice. Through doing this Irise was able to develop and test aspects of our Theory of Change for how to end period shame in the UK. We have just received a two-year grant from the Act For Change to support 50 young people to become advocates and end period shame in their own communities. Learning from this project will feed directly into plans for this larger scale work, including shaping our training approach and the tools we are able to offer young people. Irise and Feedback theatre also plan to take this powerful approach to a larger audience. We would like to complete the exercise undertaken in this project with a wider more diverse group with the aim of producing a creative output that could dismantle stigma nationally through creating a space for comfortable conversation about periods. A critical part of this next piece of work will be focusing on how to include all menstruators and engage men and boys whilst maintaining a safe space where women and girls can understand and address their own internalised shame.