



EMPOWER
PERIOD 
transforming period
fear into freedom.

Irise International Act for Change Report, October 2020

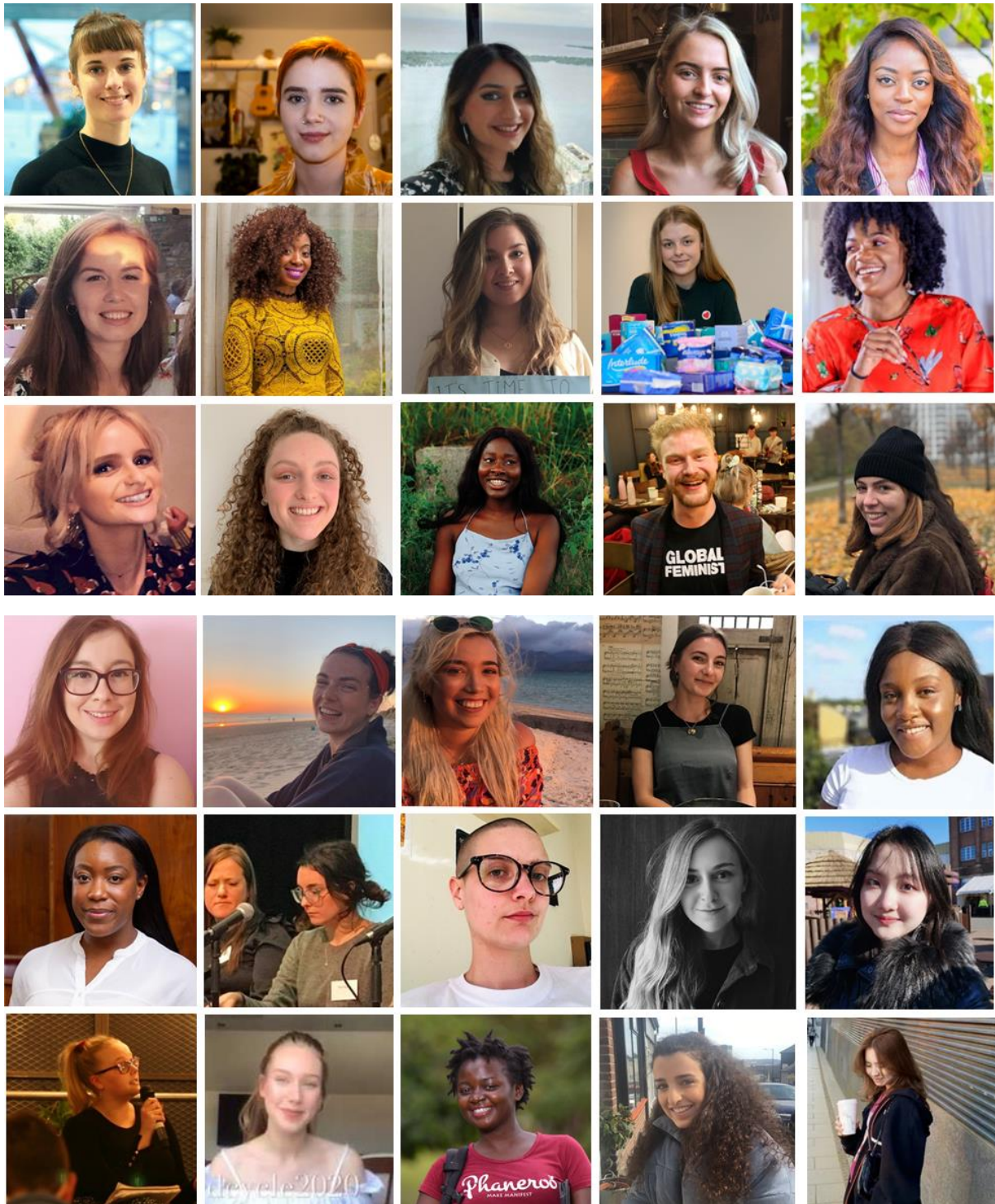
“The time is always right to do what is right”



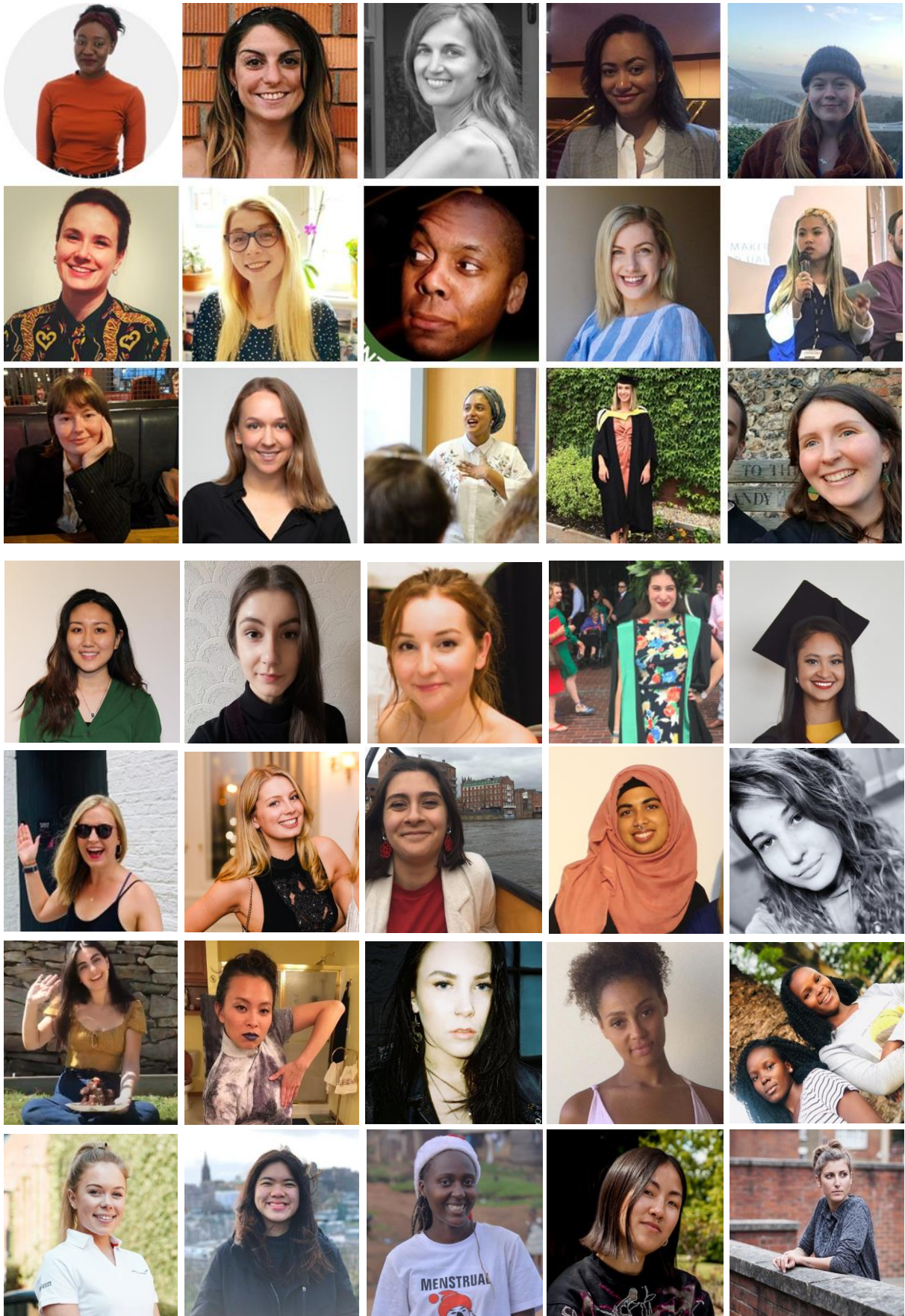
An Instagram post shared by Empower Period social media volunteer, Biba, at the start of the coronavirus crisis.

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Meet the Movement



Left to right from top to bottom:

Sophie Rowson, Irise Empower Period trustee and co-chair of the Empower Period committee. Sophie began her Irise journey as an Agent of Change, running an online campaign to raise awareness among family and friends. She co-led the development of the Act for Change application and works with our Advocacy Coordinator to oversee the programme (and movement!)- *"Periods are currently receiving a (relatively) significant amount of media attention; through the Empower Period campaign we intend to take this moment, and transform it into a long lasting movement for change. Let's be the generation to end period shame once and for all."*

Sadie Chandler, volunteer graphic designer who created artwork for the Empower Period podcasts and other lockdown events.- *"Period poverty in particular is an absolute travesty, women and girls shouldn't have to be unsafe, humiliated, and unhygienic because of a natural part of being female...I'm also physically disabled, and have witnessed the inequality and apathy towards women's health and bodily functions – which leaves me even more passionate about Irise's goals!"*

Aleena Khan, co-founder and member of the social advocacy campaign PSA: Period, based in Wales. PSA: Period is a group of 21-25 year olds who aim to promote positive, sustainable, accessible periods for all communities. Aleena participated in our One World Period event and took part in a podcast on leading social change. PSA will be a core partner on our Empower Period forum.

Biba Metcalf, Irise social media volunteer, designed fun, up beat social media activities throughout lockdown to keep the Irise community positive including book recommendations, empowering quotes and self-care tips.- *"I am extremely passionate about being part of an organisation that aims to end period stigma by opening up the period conversation and raising awareness...I've had so much fun being part of the organisation that has such a genuine ethos."*

Wumi Fagunwa, is a member of the Women's Advisory Council at Forward UK where she organises engaging events to amplify BAME women's voices and advocate against gender-based violence. Wumi is also the founder of the organisation SHAKE Africa, which aims to empower young people through education and knowledge sharing surrounding issues relating to Sexual and Reproductive health. Wumi hosted a fantastic Instagram Live event with Irise CEO Emily, where they discussed black women's experiences of menstruation and period poverty.

Lizzie Goolden, is part of the Empower Period Committee, she led the development of "The Helping Hand" campaign during lockdown, encouraging the community to post the national domestic abuse helpline number in their windows. She also made a video teaching the movement how to bake her famous, vulva cupcakes as part of our One World Period livestream- a delicious way to break stigma!- *"I'm working with Irise 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."*

Tine Matambanadzo is a menstrual health leader from Zimbabwe and founder of both the As I Am Foundation and [the Zimbabwe Endometriosis Support Network](#). She shared her learning with the Empower Period community as part of our Empower Period podcast.- *"They say there is strength in numbers and I believe that... women can give each other strength to fight for another day."*

Jess Hull is a member of our Empower Period Committee and oversees the development of our "Irregular Periodical" that keeps everyone up to date on all things period.

Molly Fenton, is a 17 year old campaigner who founded the [Love Your Period Campaign](#) in her own school. She spoke on our Agents of Change, One World Period panel event and is receiving mentorship via Empower Period.- *"No matter where life takes me, I will be running this campaign...our ultimate goal will always be to live in a world where periods are accepted for the natural bodily function that they are. My philosophy is 'stand up for what you believe in'. I always have and I always will. No matter how big or small, everyone can make a difference in this world."*

Mandi Tembo is a LSHTM menstrual health researcher based in Zimbabwe and founder of the global period advocacy platform 'the Bleed Read'. Mandi appeared as a guest on an Empower Period podcast, where she shared her learning as a researcher working on the ground in rural communities in Zimbabwe.

Jess Pearson, member of the Empower Period Committee- *"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...sisterhood is and should be global!"*

Izzy King, a volunteer supporting the development of the Empower Period brand and social media messaging- *"With help being harder to access than ever before, I want to inspire change and show how you can help if you have the ability."*

Nky Adeboye, an Agent of Change who ran an online campaign on campus encouraging people to talk about periods. She's now part of Friends of Irise- *"I have been supported in developing skills around fundraising and campaigning. I can contribute to positive change and be vocal about women's issues."*

Josh Goolden created the original One World Period concept and is now working with Irise and a local project supporting homeless women during their periods. In his time with Irise, Josh has organised panel events, packed Empowerment Packs and led Friends of Irise- *"Being able to support Irise has not only empowered myself and people that attend our events but has also allowed me to help tackle a crisis that cannot simply be ignored."*

Rebecca Payton, a longstanding member of our community. Rebecca co-produced the Fundraising From Home pack with network member Moya, encouraging our supporters to continue to fundraise during lockdown - *"That initial step has had a profound impact on my personal and professional life ever since. I have found a community, made friends, lead workshops and discussions and received training that has inspired my career."*

Maria Tomlinson- *"It is so important that academic research has a positive impact on the world around us. The main reason why I am researching period stigma and period poverty is to raise awareness and improve societal attitudes towards periods. For these reasons, I am volunteering my time and expertise to Irise International. I am co-hosting and co-producing podcasts with Acushla Young who is the Advocacy Co-ordinator for Irise. Our podcasts "transform taboo into talk" by openly discussing periods on a public platform. The aim of the podcasts is to break the silence around periods and include a diverse range of experiences. This is a wonderful initiative that encourages young people to take part in ending menstrual stigma."*

Ellie Riches- When Ellie first started volunteering under Empower Period, she said, *"I now volunteer with Irise International, taking on lots of different roles to support their many amazing projects. I'm passionate about women's health and the importance of access for young girls to accurate, sustainable information about their bodies as well as menstrual products. I particularly enjoy writing and editing blog posts for Irise"*. Ellie is now developing a peer-led menstrual education project to be delivered across schools in the UK with other members of the Empower Period community.

Lucy Ambler- Lucy conducts independent menstrual health research and came to Irise looking for opportunities specifically in advocacy and leadership. Following on from attending some Empower Period drop-in sessions, Lucy became the chair of the youth-led panel at our Menstrual Hygiene Day event, One World Period. Lucy led the 'Agents of Change' panel where she engaged 5 other young people from the UK and East Africa in a discussion around inspiring other young people to take action and lead their communities to period freedom.

Isabelle Newton- Member of Friends of Irise- *"Working with Irise has taught me that simply talking openly and positively about periods can create the greatest change. It has forced me to recognise, confront and interrogate my own feelings of shame, and in doing so I've developed a serious passion for making global period poverty and menstrual stigma visible, and encouraging others to do the same. My experiences with Irise have shaped the way I think and the things I do, and most importantly they have given me the courage to keep questioning why we live through period poverty and menstrual stigma, and asking what we can do to change it."*

Sarah Boateng - Sarah is the founder of IGEA (Investing in Girls Education in Africa) and appeared as a guest on an Empower Period podcast where she shared her experience of being a young, black woman leading in the NGO sector. Sarah encouraged the Empower Period audience to not wait for someone else who looks like you/speaks like you/has a similar background to you to do something first, you have the ability to lead the way yourself and be that light for others wanting to achieve similar goals.

Cianne Jones- invited to join the Empower Period Committee as a mentoring co-chair to support its growth and diversification.

Terri Harris- Terri is a sexual health and youth engagement specialist who attended some Empower Period drop-in sessions with a thirst for 'on the ground' advocacy and volunteering. Terri is now leading the Empower Period Christmas appeal with a team of volunteers, and has accepted our invitation to co-chair the Empower Period Forum.

Bee Hughes- Bee is a lecturer in media, culture and communications at Liverpool John Moores University, whose PhD focused on menstruation in art. Bee appeared as guest on an Empower Period Podcast, where she shared her personal experience of menstruation as a non-binary person and shared advice on how to get into the academic menstrual world.

Carley Timerick, co-organised our Art for Action event with Moya, including a great interview with Clit Bait about why periods matter-*"I think that the shame attached to periods is derived from generations of womxn being viewed as "second class citizens". Female health was and is not taken seriously, as Gloria Steinem states, "What would happen... if suddenly...men could menstruate and women could not? The answer is clear—menstruation would become an enviable, boast-worthy, masculine event". It is a characteristic of those considered "powerless", and feeds into the narrative to keep them so."*

Livy and Christy- Both young women received pilot PSHE sessions in school delivered by young women in the Empower Period network that focused on period poverty and advocacy. Livy and Christy decided to sell jewellery made by some of the women we work with in our projects in Uganda, to raise money to support Empower Period and its work.

Acushla Young is our wonderful Advocacy Coordinator who started her Irise journey as a volunteer in both the UK and Uganda.- *"When reflecting on my experiences of working with young people across East Africa and in the UK as part of Empower Period, I have learnt two important lessons that will serve me well throughout my personal and professional journey within the charity sector. Firstly, young people, their power, and their ability to make real social change should not be underestimated, we must empower more young people to take up space at the leadership table. Secondly, although our cultures and contexts may vary, the menstrual experiences of girls and women across the world see far more similarities than differences, and it is in our collective experience that will empower girls and women to be heard, responded to, and lead change from the front."*

Charlotte Abercrombie- 17 year old Charlotte is the founder of the Period Cycle 2020, an initiative that encourages people to cycle 3km, donate £3 to period-poverty services and tag 3 friends to do the same. Charlotte has been receiving one-to-one mentorship to support her to reach her goal of ensuring vulnerable women and girls across the UK have access to products during the coronavirus crisis.

Miriam- Miriam is a documentary photographer based in Uganda who is passionate about amplifying the voices and stories of vulnerable and marginalised girls and women, she said *"my dream in life is simply to present people's truths through story telling"*. Miriam was featured as one of the fantastic young feminists at our International Day of the Girl celebration, where she shared her experiences of advocating for girls and women's rights with young feminists in the UK.

Isabella Rubins- Co-chair of Friends of Irise for two years running, she took their Moon Rise club night to new stigma smashing levels. *"Being involved...has not only connected me to a network of students committed to ending period poverty but has also connected me to a wider network of those working towards the same cause. I've really loved this as it's allowed me to feel much more connected...My involvement with Irise has hugely*

helped improve my confidence. Though I often feel very anxious before events, seeing the success of each has given me the confidence I need."

Mia Asante- Mia began her journey with Irise when she attended the first official Empower Period event, a sponsored march through London on International Women's Day. Mia produced an excellent video recording the happenings of the day and continued to attend Empower Period social events. Mia is now co-leading on the Empower Period Christmas campaign with a group of other network members, working to bring the Empower Period community together through craft and design.

Georgina Diaz- Georgina rebooted the Irise newsletter 'The Irregular Periodical' at the beginning of the year to reflect the new, edgier vibe of the Empower Period network.

Nisha Toppins- Nisha attended Empower Period drop-in sessions and received one-to-one mentorship and support to lead her own menstrual health education classes in schools.

Rhiannon Lee-Murray- Attended Empower Period drop-in sessions and worked through some training with the Empower Period team.

Moya Marshall- Moya co-led on the development of a 'Fundraising from Home' pack for the Empower Period community, to encourage them to keep fundraising during lockdown! She then went on to co-lead the Art for Action community event, where she invited over 10 minority artists from across the world to donate pieces of their feminist art and share their stories behind their work, which were then raffled to the Empower Period network, engaging over 100 network members!

Sophie Hunter- Sophie is on the Empower Period Committee where she governs the advocacy work of Empower Period. Sophie also created an educational video about the menstrual cycle as part of our Menstrual Hygiene Day celebration, One World Period.

Molly Finnigan- Molly has designed so many Empower Period resources using her graphic design skills, including the menstrual education booklet and women's support pack for our emergency response Empowerment Packs, as well as working with Empower Period member Eleanor on designing training resources for the Empower Period student ambassador program Eleanor is leading on.

Tony Ricketts- Tony works alongside Acushla and Maria to edit and deliver the Empower Period podcasts, ensuring our community can access the resources as easily as possible.

Kristen Murray- joined the Empower Period emergency response team and co-developed fun community engagement events and fundraisers for our network.

India Lawrence- one of the editors of the Irregular Periodical newsletter that keeps our network up to date on previous achievements and upcoming events, as well as providing space for young women's voices and concerns to be documented and amplified.

Olivia Byrne- Olivia was part of the Empower Period Emergency Response Team who delivered many fun and engaging events to encourage our community to interact and support vulnerable people with periods. Olivia commented on why she has chosen to join the Empower Period movement, she said *"The price of periods is rarely discussed, and its part in poverty is forgotten about. If we deal with this face on and talk about periods openly, we can help end the part that menstruating has in maintaining poverty"*.

The Red Cloud Project (Maria, Safiya, Bristy and Anna)- The wonderful women at the Red Cloud Project have appeared on an Empower Period podcast, discussing their perceptions of menstruation in the media and sharing their learning from their process of creating an online period book for girls across the world. The Red Cloud project also produced informative and fun resources for One World Period, where they discussed menstrual taboos and stigma and how to dismantle them.

Rebecca Foster- led on the development of a 'period stigma game' to be included in the Empower Period online support page for young people to access accurate information, learn about their bodies and processes, whilst dismantling menstrual shame.

Ilaria Albani- *"I have heard of Irise from my friend Mia Asante. There is still so much stigma around periods, and it is time to educate and empower women and young girls to know about and be proud of this wonderfully natural and healthy process our bodies go through monthly. It is so important to start changing the narrative around periods, so that social change can follow suit, and I love to use my creativity and events experience to contribute to the causes of Irise"*

Jodie Nevin- Jodie is on the Empower Period Christmas Event team where she is designing a wonderful campaign and event to engage the Empower Period community in art and togetherness, as well as reflection over the past year and motivations behind our next steps.

Anna Renfrew- attended the Emergency Response consultation to provide her insight into what vulnerable people with periods need right now and how we can best deliver support as a community.

Aisha Mahal- Lead with Jessica on the development of a woman's support booklet and leaflet for the Empower Period online support page and emergency response Empowerment Packs.

Lilly Marshall- Attended UK emergency response consultation meetings to share her ideas and thoughts on how Empower Period could best support vulnerable people with periods during COVID-19.

Hania Zakaria- Hania identifies as a menstrual health advocate and produced a lovely video of her recipe to make flourless brownies for our One World Period event, encouraging our community to bake even when flour is scarce!

Tiff Chan- one of the incredible artists from around the world who donated their art to Moya and Carley's Art for Action event to be won by a lucky member of the Empower Period community, whilst sharing their experiences as a female artist and supporting vulnerable people with periods during the pandemic. Tiff is now volunteering on the Empower Period Christmas Appeal team, where she is reengaging the Empower Period community through artistic means, in response to our network's relishing in the previous Art for Action event.

Jessica Bates- Lead with Aisha on the development of a woman's support booklet and leaflet for the Empower Period online support page and emergency response Empowerment Packs.

Kenya Grace- performed her favourite 'female empowerment' songs as part of our Menstrual Hygiene Day celebration, One World Period.

Harriet Black- Accountant manager Harriet appeared as a guest on an Empower Period podcast, sharing her experience of being a young, black woman in a heavily white male dominated working environment and advice to other young women looking to enter STEM fields.

Tamsin Fox- one of the incredible artists who donated their art to Moya and Carley's Art for Action event to be won by a lucky member of the Empower Period community, whilst sharing their experiences as a female artist and supporting vulnerable people with periods during the pandemic

Ella Podmore- Lead Materials Engineer at McLaren, Ella joined an Empower Period podcast to share with our community how she manages being a female boss in a predominantly male dominated environment, as well as sharing her experience of having an ovary removed and how that impacted her confidence and lived experience as a woman.

Lily Grieve- performed her favourite 'female empowerment' songs as part of our Menstrual Hygiene Day celebration, One World Period.

Nilupa Yasmin- one of the incredible artists who donated their art to Moya and Carley's Art for Action event to be won by a lucky member of the Empower Period community, whilst sharing their experiences as a female artist and supporting vulnerable people with periods during the pandemic

Nicole Chui- one of the incredible artists who donated their art to Moya and Carley's Art for Action event to be won by a lucky member of the Empower Period community, whilst sharing their experiences as a female artist and supporting vulnerable people with periods during the pandemic

Francesca De Bassa- one of the incredible artists who donated their art to Moya and Carley's Art for Action event to be won by a lucky member of the Empower Period community, whilst sharing their experiences as a female artist and supporting vulnerable people with periods during the pandemic. Francesca is a longstanding member of our community, participating regularly in events and meetings.

Lucy Marsden- Friends of Irise committee member Lucy created a range of stickers for Irise to promote our work and share our branding amongst university student populations.

Sharitah Nakimuli- Sharitah is the founder of the Girls Menarche Initiative that seeks to provide sustainable menstrual health solutions to those in Jinja, Uganda. Sharitah joined with Empower Period to celebrate the International Day of the Girl and shared her advocacy learning with younger feminists in the UK, inspiring them to take action in their communities now to end period poverty and shame. Sharitah said *"I love my work and I am obsessed by girl empowerment because I believe that girls are magical, have super powers because no matter what challenges we face, we still raise up. Our voices should/ MUST be heard"*

Joan and Clare- two inspiring youth activists from Uganda who march in the streets of Kampala, advocating for women and girl's basic human rights. In response to collaborating with Irise to celebrate International Day of the Girl, Joan and Clare said *"through collaboration across the world, we are able to get a range of solutions to the challenges that the girl child has been experiencing. By working together, different voices are able to be heard, we are able to advocate for equal representation globally using the enormous skills brought in through worldwide participation"*

Hai Ling Tan- newly joined committee member of Friends of Irise, Hai Ling hopes to engage the Empower Period community in online events and socials this coming year, ensuring the mental wellness of the Empower Period student community.

Mia Rushton - painted a wonderful postcard to represent peace and unity as part of the Empower Period 2020 advocacy piece, she said *"I put those things on the postcard (the ying and yang sign and LGBTQA+ flag) because I thought that the most important factor of collective power is love and acceptance for everyone, whether you're a different culture, ethnicity, different sexuality. I think the main thing about power is all coming together and accepting each other and that's where collective power comes from because you've got to work together, and you can't work together efficiently if you don't accept each other and if you don't love each other"*.

Sumia Din - for the Empower Period advocacy piece 2020, Sumia painted an inspiring image of hands holding each other with the words 'individually we are one drop, together we are an ocean' written beneath. Sumia said *"many things inspired me whilst designing the postcard but the main point is the idea of community makes it more powerful. Unity in the sense of if there is no racism of the colour, ethnicity, or religions make the community more powerful and united"*.

Eshia Garcha - created a beautiful female superhero postcard for the Empower Period 2020 advocacy piece, she said *"All women, no matter our differences, such as ethnicity, age, ability and more, we are all powerful and wonderful. My hopes for women and girls is to have and show compassion not only to each other, but to ourselves"*.

Summary

Despite a disrupted year the Empower Period community has rallied together to take action for a more equal world for young women and girls. A stronger, more diverse movement has been created and our focus for 2021 is on enabling advocates and youth-led groups to build a shared advocacy agenda to push for progress towards the government's target of ending period poverty and shame by 2021. The coronavirus crisis has shown us how fragile progress has been and we are also refocusing our efforts on how to address the power imbalance that perpetuates period inequality through putting more power in the hands of young women through our new Empower Period forum and urging others to do the same.

<p>1. How many young people are involved in your funded project?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct (those who are leading and helping to shape the movement, known as Agents of Change) - 84 • Indirect (estimate of those who are engaging in the movement e.g. podcast listeners, instagram live viewers, participants at events, reached by activism) - 7440
<p>2. What age range of young people are involved?</p>	<p>The majority of young people are aged 16-25, however we chose not to exclude on the basis of age and have involved activists as young as 10 and up to the age of 30.</p> <p>(As part of our One World Period event young advocates even organised intergenerational period chat where daughters spoke with their mothers about their menstrual experiences.)</p>
<p>3. What group(s) of young people, or categories of young people, are involved in leading your project? Please reference as many as you feel are relevant.</p>	<p>Groups of young people involved in leadership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Empower Period Committee (a group of young women aged 17-25 who oversee Empower Period) • Agents of Change- passionate individuals that Empower Period supports to lead their own projects (advocacy, fundraising, emergency response) • Young people with lived experience of period poverty (those engaged in our emergency response, refugees, asylum seekers) • Empower Period Core Volunteers (young people who work with the team regularly and lead on aspects of Empower Period e.g. student ambassador programme) • Friends of Irise (University student body of advocates leading their own projects and initiatives) • The Empower Period Forum (an initiative launching this month to bring together individual advocates and youth led groups to focus their efforts on national period equality advocacy) • Existing youth-led period equality advocacy groups coming together under the umbrella of Empower Period. <p>Individuals involved in leadership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sophie Rowson, Empower Period Trustee and chair of the Empower Period Committee

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Acushla Young, Empower Period Project Lead ● Gunita Cheema, Empower Period support
<p>4. What is the issue(s) they are tackling through your project?</p>	<p>The issues Empower Period Agents of Change are tackling include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Period Poverty and Shame</i>- young people want to replace menstrual stigma with a positive narrative about girls and their bodies. They want to empower all those who have periods to reach their full potential and realise period equality across the UK ● <i>The gendered effects of Covid-19</i>- young people want to ensure that the disproportionate effects of COVID-19 on young women and girls are addressed and that response and recovery plans are gender sensitive and ideally build back more equal. ● <i>The power imbalance and lack of diverse leadership that creates and perpetuates gender and period inequality</i>- young people want a more diverse leadership table that can identify and address the needs and rights of everyone.

Progress and Delivery:

Outcome 1: A movement of young people is established who can talk about menstruation without shame, resulting in improved self-esteem and self-efficacy to break the stigma with others

Outcome 2: The movement of young people build a positive narrative about menstruation in their own communities and schools and use their learning to shape national dialogue

Phase 1 January-March: Laying the foundations

1.1 Developing the plans

We invested time in collaboratively developing the vision and values for the project, including team meetings, Empower Period Committee meetings and meetings between the young trustee leading on Empower Period and other team members. Together we agreed the values and vision for the project with a focus on enabling disruptive, diverse, young female leadership that can change the status quo for everyone.

We worked with young people to develop the branding and messaging for the project and redeveloped our website into a more interactive space to facilitate wider engagement. We also recruited a group of core volunteers to help us run it and developed a plan for engaging new partners working with groups affected by period poverty and shame but who had been marginalised in the national conversation.

During this time we also worked as a Co-convenor on the UK government's period poverty taskforce helping to develop plans for a series of events that would engage and amplify the voices of young advocates.



1.2 Bringing the Irise community together

We brought the existing network and community together for a meeting and social to review plans and mobilise everyone behind Empower Period. Some of the network combined it with a quick International Women's Day protest en route!



Phase 2 March- September: Standing in Solidarity

2.1 Emergency Response

When the coronavirus crisis began we held rapid consultations with our community. We agreed that period equality is about power, not just pads and that the current crisis was jeopardising the most vulnerable young women and girls in our wider network because they lack the power to make their voices heard. We decided that we could best live the original values and vision of the project by using our insight and experience to restore power and voice to the most vulnerable young people.

We launched a three-pronged strategy:

Provision: ensuring provision to gender specific products and services. Plan UK found 1 in 3 girls were struggling to access menstrual products during lockdown. In our community this was 1 in 8 at end of August and 1 in 4 hadn't been able to access sexual and reproductive health services.

Protection: protecting young women from the harmful social norms that lead to discrimination and physical, mental and sexual harm. Plan UK found 25% of girls have experienced online abuse during lockdown. A third of our community felt they hadn't been able to adequately self-care during lockdown. Half had provided unpaid care, 15% had struggled to provide for their dependents and 1 in 5 had struggled to pay their bills.

Power: restoring the voice of young women and girls, whose needs were quickly side-lined in the crisis.¹ Half of our community feel that women's voices are missing from the national conversation about coronavirus and 64% think that the gender gap is going to get worse.

Here's what we did:

Provision:

Our Empower Period community raised funds to supply 4,600 vulnerable young women and girls with Empowerment Packs including information, gender specific products and a message of solidarity. Our Agents of Change are working with staff to design and develop the initiative, fundraise, design the packs including securing a donation of 300 LUSH products, design paper based and online education and support materials for young women, pack the packs and deliver them. Groups receiving the packs include; local foodbanks- serving homeless women and vulnerable girls, a BAME women's network, Barnsley Rape Centre, a local service for young asylum seekers and refugees, a women's refuge and The Snowdrop Project- supporting women living on benefits with complex social problems and menstrual health issues (such as heavy bleeding due to fibroids).

Irise International
PERSONAL SUPPORT

What is this leaflet for?
The last few months have been an especially difficult time for many people - this leaflet provides information on what free services are currently available in Sheffield to support you.

Who are Irise International?
Irise are a Sheffield based charity dedicated to empowering women and people who have periods.

Where can I access free period products and information?
Go to www.irise.org.uk/support to gain access to our menstrual education resources, and find out where you can get free period products in Sheffield.

Scan this QR code with your phone camera to access our Online Support Page of visit www.irise.org.uk/support

WHO MADE THIS BOOKLET?

Irise International is a menstrual health research and advocacy platform.

At the heart of our organisation is the vision of a world where everyone can realise their potential, unlimited by their periods. Based here in Sheffield, we work for you and all those who menstruate to create lasting social change and to support those most in need during the current pandemic.

¹ A report by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation analysing stories across 6 countries found that women's voices have been "worryingly marginalised" in reporting of coronavirus. The UK was the worst performing country analysed.



Act Now Support vulnerable women and girls

Our Support Page

Visit our online support page to find out what services are currently available to support your needs. Whatever it is you are going through, you are not alone and help is available to you.

[Visit our Support Page](#)



My Body

Your body is yours and yours alone. Click the icon above to find out more from Brook about your body, its parts and processes and how to take care of it.



My Sexual and Reproductive Health

To find out more about your sexual health and what services are currently available to you, click the icon above to be directed to NHS resources.



My Family and Relationships

Abuse can happen to anyone. To find out what the signs of abuse are and how to get support, click the icon above to access the NHS domestic abuse support.



My Wellbeing

Click the icon above to find out more from Brook on how you can nurture your physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

Call the National Domestic Abuse Helpline to get free support **0808 2000 247**

If you are in an existing emergency and/or at risk of immediate abuse, call **999**

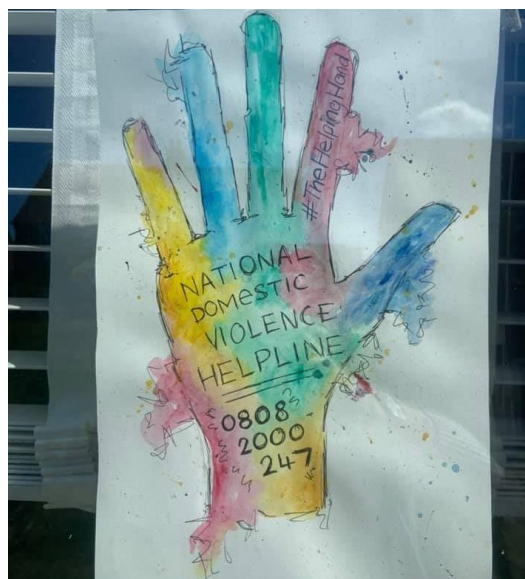
Agents of Change, Aisha, Jessica and Ellie, worked with the team to design this leaflet and collate online resources.



Some of the products and materials prepared for Empowerment Packs. Packs are tailored to the specific group of women or girls they were intended for.

Protection:

Our Empower Period Committee developed and launched #TheHelpingHand campaign encouraging members of our wider network to place the number for the domestic abuse hotline in their windows. This was adopted by others, including West End Women and Girls and Professor Liz Yardley.



We also worked to create safe spaces for our community to connect and access support including:

- A What's App group where people could stay in touch- our Empower Period Coordinator shared daily questions to encourage people to share e.g. share the view outside your window?
- Online advocacy training sessions detailing how to support vulnerable people with periods during the pandemic- people joined and shared their concerns and what they were doing in their own areas.
- Empower Period drop-in sessions where anyone could come with any idea and receive tailored support from our team.

Through this support Agents of Change developed their own initiatives to help each other and their wider communities including:

- Social events such as Trivia Quizzes developed by our community for our community- and engaging 80 people.
- A Fundraising from Home Pack with infographics about why we needed to keep taking action.
- #SitUpForSisters where members of the community challenged each other to 10 sit ups and shared an advocacy message and video of themselves completing the challenge on social media.
- The Art for Action event which showcased work from 13 female artists from the Irise community, including those from minority backgrounds. A social media campaign amplified the stories and voices behind the art pieces and attracted interest from the local media and an article on Clit bait. 108 members of our community brought raffle tickets, raising funds to support our emergency response and enjoyed discussing the artwork online.



“We are raffling artwork from artists who use their work to explore and challenge the stigma around menstruation, the representation of culture and self-identity, human rights , and the perceptions and struggles associated with being a woman. The idea is to empower people through sharing these thought provoking narratives about individual relationships with social and cultural ideas, whilst simultaneously transforming this into tangible action raising funds to support vulnerable people with periods.”

Power:

Although this theme runs throughout everything we do and is the most important part of our response, we also took some specific actions to amplify our voice and influence the agenda. We signed a joint statement with over 50 women sector organisations in the UK, calling for the government to make women visible in the Coronavirus response. We also spoke at a global webinar hosted at Columbia University to help people include periods in their response to the pandemic and inputted into a UNICEF briefing.

Two masters students in the Empower Period community decided to dedicate their dissertations to understanding and amplifying the voices of young women and girls in our community.

Eleanor undertook a survey to help us understand changing need in our wider community, the key stats (quoted above) include:

- 64% think the gender gap will be worse as a result of lockdown
- 1 in 8 are struggling to access menstrual products
- 1 in 4 are struggling to access sexual and reproductive health services

Chloe consulted with our advocates to understand their advocacy priorities so we could adapt our strategy. She summarises her findings below.

“Women's voices have been crowded out in favour of male-dominated rhetoric about fighting a war. There is marginalisation of women's voices in national planning - both around the pandemic and Brexit. Hasty decisions are being taken, often behind closed doors, by predominantly men. These decisions will shape our country and society for years to come. They must include and work for women and girls too. We need to re-establish the Period Poverty Taskforce to ensure these issues are discussed at the heart of Government, and both Parliament and Whitehall take some visible responsibility for them.”

2.2 Supporting the Movement

2.2.1 One World Period

With the Period Poverty Taskforce suspended and many individuals and groups in our community facing new challenges we knew we had to support everyone to keep going. We decided to bring our global community together for Menstrual Hygiene Day, engaging and bringing together our professional network, our Empower Period network and our East African counterpart to ensure momentum was not lost. The One World Period 12 hour live stream was born, bringing together over 100 people and reached over 1,000. We collaborated with visual artist, Jenny Leonard, to capture each part of the day.

2.2.1.1 Period Fun

Our advocates made videos focused around period fun and education including:

- How to make a menstrual activism badge by Bee Hughes
- How to bake Vulva cupcakes by Lizzie Goolden
- A whirlwind tour of the female anatomy by qualified nurse, Sophie Hunter
- Top Ten Period Memes by Mariah Tomlinson
- Intergenerational period chat between Agents of Change and their mums (the most popular feature of the day)



2.2.1.2 Agents of Change in the Spotlight

Agents of Change from our network and beyond exchanged learning and experience including:

- A session on Religion and Menstruation with The Red Cloud Project.
- A panel discussion and exchange of learning between young advocates in the UK and East Africa including: Alfred Muli - [Ruby Cup](#), Molly Fenton - [Love Your Period Campaign](#), Debora Maboya and Ian Tarimo - [Tai Tanzania](#), Sophie Rowson - [Irise](#), Lucy Athieno - [Eco-Pads Africa](#), Lucy Ambler - Independent menstrual researcher and advocate



2.2.1.3 Period Learning

We brought together national stakeholders in the UK's Period Poverty Taskforce and international menstrual health actors to reaffirm that Periods matter, even in a pandemic.

Participants included:

Professor Helen Weiss - London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

Florence Schechter - Director of The Vagina Museum

Puleng Letsie, Regional Coordinator - African Coalition for MHM

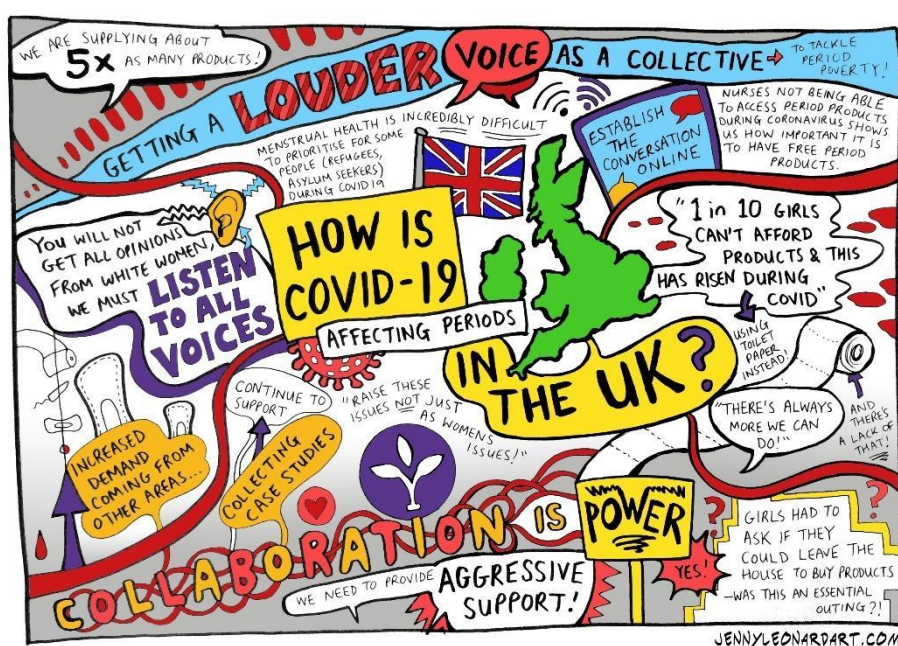
Gerda Larsson - Co-founder and Managing Director at The Case For Her

Nikki Giant- UK Girls' Rights Strategy and Development Manager, Plan UK

Gabby Edlin- Founder and CEO of Bloody Good Period

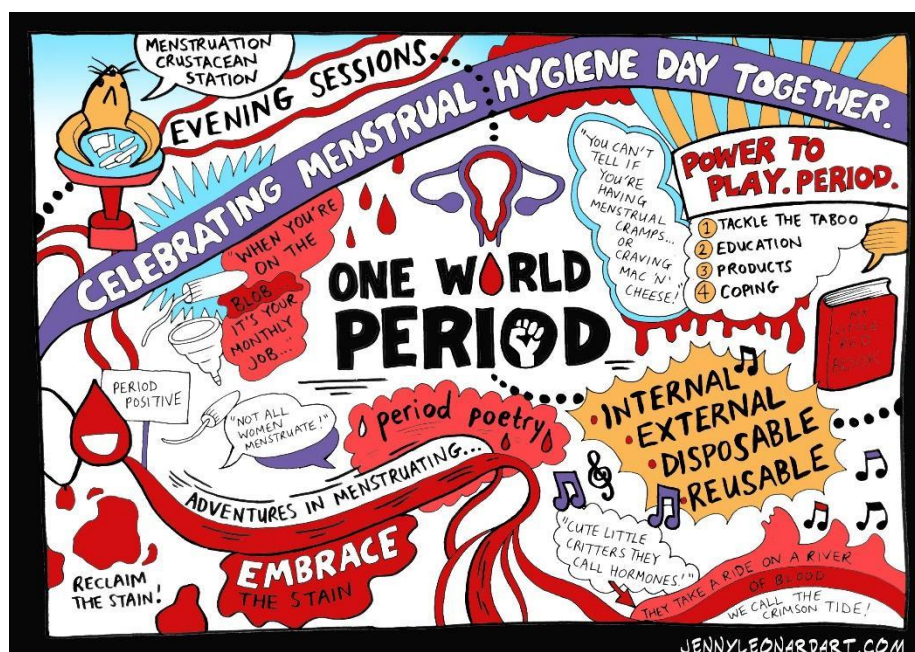
Manjit Gill - CEO of Binti International

Clare Roberts- Molloy Chair of The Homeless Period Wolverhampton



2.2.1.4 Period Fun

In the evening musicians in our network (amateur and professional) performed for the community and period comedian, Chella Quint, pre-recorded a special set for us.



2.3 Diversifying and strengthening Empower Period

One World Period enabled us to expand and diversify the groups and individuals with a stake in Empower Period. As a result, we were able to diversify our Empower Period committee, inviting representatives of our more diverse network to have a seat at the table.

2.4 Reassessing need

We worked with Gemma Williams at Birmingham City University to develop a proposal called “Periods in Pandemics” that aims to assess how period inequality is being affected by coronavirus. The proposal has received funding and Irise is now sitting on the Advisory Committee for this piece of work. Our CEO also took part in a Critical Reflections panel discussion on Covid-19 has changed the lives of women and girls around the world hosted by The Circle NGO. We also plan to do our own needs assessment/consultation with the organisations who have received empowerment packs to understand how vulnerable girls and young women’s lives are changing so we can adjust our priorities accordingly.

2.4.1 Empower Period Podcasts

The Empower Period Podcasts were created as a platform for young menstrual health activists to amplify their work and encourage other young advocates to join the movement. Topics covered to date include Menstruation and Invisible Disability, Menstruation in the Media, How private is your period?, Leading the Change and Women in Leadership.



Phase 3 September onwards: Coming Together for Change

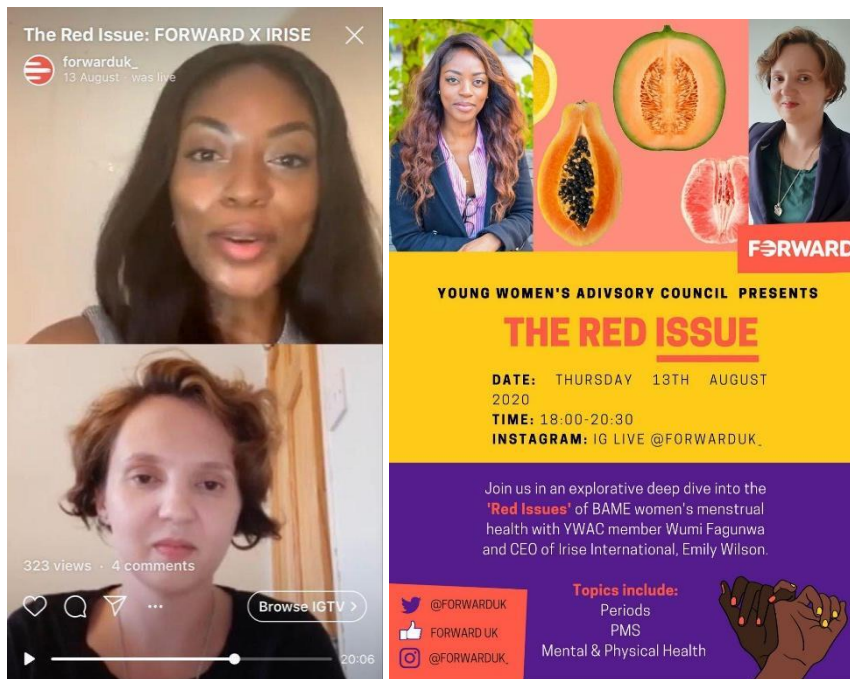
3.1 Building Back Better

This month we launch our Empower Period Forum. The forum will bring together activists and youth-led groups with the vision to realise period equality in line with the government's original target of 2025. The forum will have three working areas and will commission a report and social media campaign that Irise will deliver. The forum will become the hub of the Empower Period project, creating engagement events for the whole community and channelling everyone's efforts towards national advocacy.

3.2 Reaching the hard to reach

Irise continues to pursue partners to reach marginalised groups affected by the issues. These include:

- FORWARD UK; Irise supported young advocates within FORWARD with their Red Issue event focused on black women's experiences of menstruation and period poverty in the UK. We are discussing ways to provide more support to BAME activists working with FORWARD who are passionate about this issue and want to reach more girls in their communities.
- Red Cross; Irise is exploring offering some virtual workshops to young refugees to capture their experiences and priorities.
- ISRAAC; Irise is also working with the local Somali Community Hub to understand how to support young women and girls in their communities.
- Girl Guiding; Irise is discussing offering Period Packs to girl guides who have missed out on vital puberty education during lockdown.



Emily and Wumi doing an Instagram live chat.

Approach to working with young people:

Power not participation

Young people's leadership is needed now. The coronavirus crisis only makes this more urgent. Young people are disproportionately affected and politically disenfranchised, particularly girls and young women. Their voices and priorities are not represented but they pay a disproportionate price for political decisions. It has become clear that participation is not enough. Young women don't want to just advise or be invited to participate because as soon as it no longer convenient to listen, those with power will side line them and their causes. The UNDP's gender social norm index released this year has shows big progress in more basic areas of participation but when we get to women leading we "hit a wall." Globally women hold just 24% of leadership and representation rapidly shrinks when we factor in age, economic status and ethnic backgrounds. Young women are sick of being called "young" leaders when they are just leaders. They are ready to lead now and build a better world for everyone.

At Irise, our Empower Period Committee have been thinking about what this growing sense of frustration means for them. Irise has always been "by young women, for young women" but now we are exploring how we can develop approaches that facilitate young women taking more power within Irise so that we can advocate for this in the wider world. This includes exploring non-hierarchical power structures, co-leadership and consensus-based decision making as methods of creating environments where non-traditional leadership can flourish.

Meaningful Mentorship

We've been working to build a community where everybody mentors somebody else. We found that informal mentorship often works best but that formal mentorship helps people connect who would never ordinarily have a chance to speak and can help those low in confidence to access support. We

also found that mentoring relationships were more sustained and meaningful when they were practically focused on achieving something and when mentorship was perceived as a two-way relationship. In particular, we do not feel that a top down mentoring relationship, where a more experienced person mentors a less experienced person, is as empowering as a relationship where two people recognise that they have things to learn from each other. We are now trying to provide horizontal mentorship where both parties explicitly bring some unique insight or experience to the other.

We're exploring how we integrate this learning into our everyday practice, perhaps through co-leadership roles where a more technically experienced professional is paired with a younger advocate with more first-hand experience of the issues we work to address. We have recently recruited a new co-chair of the Empower Period Committee, who will also join our board of trustees, to put some of this into practice.

Impact:

We are seeing 5 emerging areas of impact:

- **Capacity and conviction building for individual activists and their allies, empowering them to take action**

Individuals are feeling more able to take action through becoming part of Empower Period. They are able to dismantle internal barriers to action and become passionate about change.

"My involvement with Irise has hugely helped improve my confidence."

"To me, it was just a fact of life that, as a woman, I had to internalise, accept, and silently carry with me. This feeling of shame is so universal and systematic that it's difficult to even notice how it impacts your life and psychology, let alone understand the global gender injustice that it is symptomatic of. I quickly realised how important the work that Irise do is, and I wanted to be a part of the movement they were pioneering."

"Being able to support irise has not only empowered myself and people that attend our events but also allowed me to help tackle a crises that cannot simply be ignored."

"With help being harder to access than ever before, I want to inspire change and show how you can help if you have the ability."

- **Connecting grassroots groups to form consensus and community**

Groups are able to come together to share learning and experiences- this makes everyone stronger.

"The generations of shame have fed a global stigma surrounding menstruation on every level – within healthcare, government and society. Menstruation has not been considered a serious issue, an attitude which has become internalised by people who menstruate – creating a barrier for open discussion. This has been compounded by the fact that many decision makers do not have first-hand experience of menstruation, or if they do, their experience is not representative of all people with periods. This creates a vicious cycle of silence – which is now being broken by people all over the world, from all walks of life starting to share their experiences."

"Being involved...has not only connected me to a network of students committed to ending period poverty but has also connected me to a wider network of those working towards the same cause. I've really loved this as it's allowed me to feel much more connected."

“They say there is strength in numbers and I believe that... women can give each other strength to fight for another day.”

- **Cross cultural learning catalysing innovation**

Exchange of learning across divides is feeding innovation and is a source of strength and solidarity.

“Although our cultures and contexts may vary, the menstrual experiences of girls and women across the world see far more similarities than differences, and it is in our collective experience that will empower girls and women to be heard, responded to, and lead change from the front.”

“through collaboration across the world, we are able to get a range of solutions to the challenges that the girl child has been experiencing. By working together, different voices are able to be heard, we are able to advocate for equal representation globally using the enormous skills brought in through worldwide participation.”

- **Capturing voices and experience to lobby for change**

As groups and individuals come together their separate voices and experiences can become a coherent and powerful manifesto for change.

“It is so important to start changing the narrative around periods, so that social change can follow suit.”

“It[menstrual stigma] is a characteristic of those considered “powerless”, and feeds into the narrative to keep them so.”

- **Co-creating a shared advocacy agenda**

Our next emerging step is to enable our movement to co-create a shared Empower Period advocacy agenda that everyone can unit behind.

“Young people, their power, and their ability to make real social change should not be underestimated, we must empower more young people to take up space at the leadership table.”

Organisational Development:

The coronavirus crisis has refined our values and vision and demonstrated our resilience. Together, Irise has remained opening throughout the crisis, raising over £100,000 to support our emergency response in the UK and East Africa. We are now refining our strategic priorities through a community consultation to ensure we remain relevant and responsive to the needs of our community and wider network.

We are fortunate to be in a strong financial position, attracting additional funds and new funders to our cause. We have secured or are in the process of finalising 164k of restricted funds for 2021 and have another 105k pending with a strong chance of success in our pipeline. We believe this is because we were and continue to be led by our values.

Our work and team have received external recognition this year. We were shortlisted for a Charity Governance Award in the Diversity and Inclusion Category. Our CEO was shortlisted for the DEFY Award out of over 100 nominations- the award recognises exceptional leaders from around the world. Irise was also named as one of the eight most effective organisations working to end period poverty and shame in the world in a new report by the Kulczyk Foundation and Founder’s Pledge, who assessed 80 organisations from around the world.

Learning:

We are developing our theory of change for youth-led social change, informed by individual and community level behaviour change theory. Our theory was that within every society there are “positive deviants” who already think more positively about a particular issue than the dominant social norm. If you connect these positive deviants together, they create a new community within wider society with their own social norm. This strengthens their “positive deviance” until they are able to reach out to wider society, expanding their community and winning allies until eventually the dominant social norm has shifted. We believe young people are uniquely positioned to lead social change because they are naturally predisposed to “positive deviance” - they are often encountering established systems and ways of doing things for the first time and they have less vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Social media has exponentially increased their ability to use this positive deviance to create social change because they are able to form communities across cultural, geographical and socioeconomic divides.

In our own work we have seen a stronger more diverse community form around our cause. This has strengthened individual conviction and passion. The next twelve months will focus more intensely on how we use that to create a permanent change in social norms within wider society.

Future Plans:

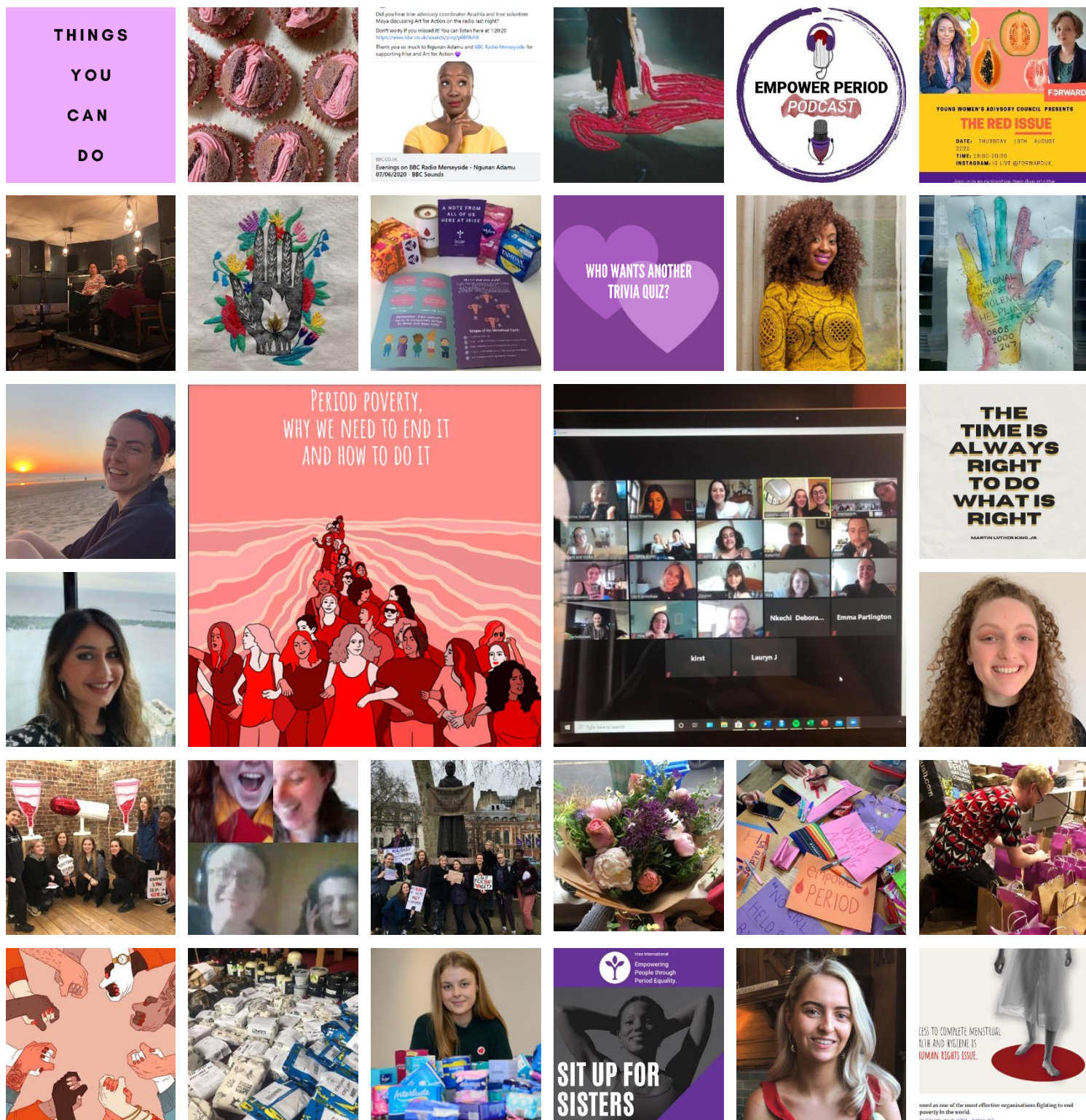
Irise is an institution that belongs to young women and which they can use to connect and drive the social change towards a more gender equal world. Empower Period belongs to them and is only the beginning.

Period inequality is both a symptom and driver of broader gender injustice. By investing in the period equality movement we put ourselves behind a growing grassroots community of young women and their allies using periods to change society’s narratives about the choice and control people have over their bodies. So much progress has already been made but it needs to be integrated and institutionalized to achieve long term impact- through doing this not only will we transform girls’ experience of periods from shame to freedom, we will also fundamentally change the system to one that enables girls’ power and leadership. This investment and structural change will support the growth of a long-term community of changemakers committed to realising gender equality throughout their lives and careers and generate the learning to turn this passion into political change.

The covid-19 emergency and delivery of our interim strategy to ensure provision, provide protection and restore power to the most vulnerable young women and girls has strengthened our community and our focus. Girls’ rights are in crisis and we have a critical window of opportunity to build back better and stronger. The only way to make more resilient progress is to address the power imbalance by empowering young women to lead. Investing in the period equality movement is an investment in young women, their allies and the issues they care about. It will be a catalyst for broader social change over the next two decades.

We are in this for the long haul and we are now looking for further investment to continue to develop Irise and Empower Period into a long term community where positive deviance can thrive and where an ever growing, powerful network around this community can leverage social change. The system has not been built for them so young women must make a space where they and their

allies can dismantle false narratives about themselves, convert their individual frustrations into a shared manifesto for change and use the privilege and power of the new community to improve the status quo for everyone and build back a better system.



Our Year

From left to right, top to bottom, an Instagram post helping our community focus on what they can do to help during lockdown, vulva cupcakes baked as part of our One World Period Event, our Empower Period Co-ordinator, Acushla, joins local radio presenter Nagunan Adamu, Bloody Period by Nicole Chui raffled in Art for Action, the Empower Period Podcast logo, our CEO, Emily joins a livestream organised by FORWARD UK for BAME young women activists, Acushla speaks at a panel organised by Irise Agents of Change just before the coronavirus crisis, “Bloom like a Rose, be beautiful” by Francesca De Bassa and Helene Dedieu raffled as part of Art for Action, an Empowerment Pack created by Irise Agents of Change, an Instagram post, Tine Matambanadzo from Zimbabwe shares her learning with UK advocates, a “Helping Hand” in someone’s

window, Irise volunteer Ellie persevered online throughout lockdown, Co-Founder of PSA Periods features in a blog celebrating young leaders in the period movement, the cover of a report naming Irise has one of the most effective organisations working to end period poverty and shame in the world, one of many Empower Period zoom meetings, an Instagram post from the start of lockdown, volunteer Izzy, advocates visit The Vagina Museum just before lockdown, the winners of our first online Trivia Quiz celebrate, of advocates at a protest just before lockdown, flowers for Acushla for organising One World Period, advocacy signs from just before lockdown, packing Empower Packs, an Instagram post that says it all credit Julia Bernhard Illustration, 300 LUSH products donated to Irise, Molly Fenton- 17 year old founder of Love Your Period, Sit up For Sisters Instagram post, social media volunteer Biba, menstrual health is a human right.