JUSTTRANSITION
PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING FUND

Year 3

Periods, Confidence, and Climate: A Youth-Led Shift in Mindsets and Materials

The Period Project was a youth-led initiative to help girls and young women talk about periods, whilst promoting and distributing sustainable menstrual products in schools in Moray. And while the project had sustainability at its heart, it turned out to be so much more; as it worked to break taboos, end stigma and shift culture.

Just Transition Development Officer Rekha Kahila sat down with the Project's co-ordinator Tracey Robbie to find out how the Just Transition PB funding of the project acted as a catalyst for further change.



Tracy Robbie is a youth worker who primarily works in the Lossiemouth area. She supports a group of young people called the **Yadie's** - (Youth Activism: diversity, inclusion & equity), who were keen to get involved with the Period Project. Tracy submitted a proposal to the JTPB Youth Fund and was successful in receiving funding.

Tracy encountered difficulties in getting the project off the ground. Key lessons emerged:

Importance of Individual Relationships in Schools

Getting started had its challenges. Despite existing organisational links with schools, Tracy discovered that access wasn't guaranteed. Where connections were strong, the project thrived. Where they weren't, it didn't go ahead. Tracy says the project might have needed longer embedding in that initial phase, especially as some youth workers were new in post.

Communication and Stigma

Another more surprising and unexpected challenge, however, came from the young people who were involved themselves. Initially enthusiastic and open about the project within their own peer groups, they struggled to speak about it to strangers or adults. Tracy observed they even hesitated to say the word "period" in public settings. This revealed the depth of stigma and the confidence needed to speak about menstruation openly. 'There needs to be a level of confidence, even around the word', says Tracy, which indicates the need for longer-term support and capacity building for the project's work.

Yet, despite challenges, and having to adapt, the project made considerable impact.

Conversations Started

The simple act of distributing the period products sparked conversations—with parents, teachers and community members, both in schools and the wider community. Parents were overwhelmingly supportive of continuing the initiative.

Some conversations took place in traditionally male-dominated sports environments where menstruation had rarely, if ever, been discussed. This opened space for girls to express themselves and helped normalise discussion around female bodies in those settings.

Product Impact

One of the biggest successes was the reusable period pants. Parents loved them. Because these pants can be typically expensive, Tracy says being able to try samples addressed a key obstacle and encouraged uptake. People can be reluctant to buy the products when there was the risk they wouldn't like them and the money would be wasted. 'They can be £15.00 for a pair in Tesco, and cost is massive...this way you could try a pair'.

Feedback from young people highlighted several benefits:

- Discretion: One girl shared that she no longer had to open a crinkly pad wrapper in the toilet, which would have alerted others she was menstruating. 'No Faff'.
- Confidence in Sport: Many felt more able to participate in physical activity, knowing they wouldn't leak.
- Privacy: The pants looked like ordinary underwear, which protected their privacy and reduced the risk of bullying or negative comments.

These benefits encouraged participation in school and sports and may even have helped reduce absenteeism at school among girls with heavy periods.

Hidden Barriers and Wider Implications

As Tracy worked to deliver and embed the Period Project, she wasn't just distributing products or facilitating conversations—she was indirectly challenging mindsets too. Rehka and Tracy took this time to reflect on the case that discussions about periods and female anatomy sometimes triggered mixed reactions from some adults, including hostility. This could be due to deeply entrenched beliefs or discomfort about these beliefs, which the project indirectly challenged. It brought attention to unconscious attitudes around gender, the body, and when such topics are considered appropriate for discussion. This may be something that affected the delivery of the project and may have contributed to some of the barriers Tracy has encountered in this work. It reveals that the work of normalising menstruation is not just practical—it's deeply social and political.

Project Legacy

Although the project evolved differently from the initial vision, it has had a far-reaching impact, including influencing policy and language.

Policy and Funding Changes

- Evidence gathered from this project has informed the decision to allocate a proportion of the funding the local authority receive to enable compliance with the Free Period Products (Scotland) Act towards purchasing of period pants and other re-usable sustainable products where previously it was largely disposable products that were supplied across Moray. A recent order included 400 pairs of period pants. Funding has also been allocated for related period education initiatives.

Partnerships and Structural Change

- The project is now linked with Active Schools, the Period Working Group, and Parent Councils.
- It has contributed to updated guidance for head teachers. Specifically, the term "sanitaryware" (which implies periods are unhygienic) is being phased out in favour of more appropriate language.



Tracy continues on with her work with Active Schools and the Moray Community Sports Hub, packing up free Wellbeing (Period Plus) Bags to all Moray Sports Clubs. Photo by Robin Patterson, Moray Community Sports Hub. This latest initiative was funded by NHS Grampian Public Health.

Tracy is very appreciative of the JTPB funding and what it helped achieve. 'This funding got the ball rolling' and kickstarted action. 'The whole of Moray is going to do this now...the funding was a mechanism to do engagement and to make a start...progress would have been a lot slower if we hadn't had the money'. And with Tracy's thanks, we extend our thanks too, to her and for her resolve, and to the young people in **Yadies**, for making real change where it's hard to do so.