

As I See It: For girls, basic needs require more than just toilet paper

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When COVID-19 became known as a pandemic, people started panicking about having enough toilet paper. What came next — hoarding, price-gouging, and of course the funny memes and jokes all over the internet — became a news-worthy source of comedy relief.

Toilet paper is not the only scarce resource: period products and necessary feminine hygiene items are also difficult to find. More significantly, they are difficult to afford during these cash strapped times. Some families are able to stock up on products, leaving the shelves bare in places. For the many girls who rely on school nurses or after-school programs for their supplies, the COVID-19 pandemic presents a unique struggle, where girls are unable to meet their own basic human needs.

This pandemic has shined a spotlight on what many people already knew: when families need to choose between buying food or buying period products, girls have to improvise on their hygiene.

A survey of 1,000 U.S. students published in October 2019 by the period equity organization, Period. Inc., in collaboration with period underwear company, Thinx, found that one in five teens have struggled to afford and were unable to purchase period products. 25% of teen girls have missed class because of lack of access of monthly supplies. One student reported, “Having to stuff my underwear with toilet paper and worrying about it caused me so much more stress in my everyday life.”

Locally, there are 4,200 economically disadvantaged girls ages 10 and up attending Worcester Public Schools. That’s potentially more than 4,000 girls who suffer from feelings of shame, self-consciousness, and/or embarrassment every month due to their need for menstrual supplies.

Recognizing this problem, Girls Inc. of Worcester came up with an immediate solution. Until school resumes and girls have access to free products through school nurses, Girls Inc. of Worcester has stepped up to help fill this need in our community. Through the support of many concerned leaders, “GirlPad - Grab & Go Free Period Products” was created to distribute products discreetly and safely following CDC guidelines at Girls Inc.’s center.



GirlPad has since expanded to provide products directly to community collaborators such as YouthConnect, Investing in Girls Alliance, United Service Executives, and Worcester Public School nurses. Girls Inc. of Worcester has collected enough products to provide a free one month supply to more than 1,500 girls, thanks to many donors such as Women’s Initiative of United Way of Central Massachusetts, Women’s Aid of Central Massachusetts, Fallon Health, Vannessa T. Marcotte Foundation, and distributors such as CVS Pharmacy, Imperial Distributors, Nannocare, Tops, Joyja, and I Support the Girls.

To pick up free period products, stop by Girls Inc. of Worcester, 125 Providence St., at our weekly GirlPad Grab & Go events, 3:30-4:30 p.m. Tuesdays and noon-1 p.m. Thursdays. Parents and caregivers can pick up products without girls

present. Or reach out to one of our many community partners for their distribution times and locations.

To learn more about supporting GirlPad or attending the virtual programs being offered for free to girls in the community, visit <https://www.girlsincworchester.org> or email info@girlsincworchester.org.

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