

Ending #periodpoverty Is Beautiful

How do you go from being an esthetician with her own makeup line to someone who talks constantly about dirty laundry, unshampooed hair and – most of all – #periodpoverty?

“I believe it all works together, because I always want to help people feel good,” said Ashley Eubanks, founder of The Beauty Initiative in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

She had been using her skills to give makeovers to women in workforce training. One day she saw a woman panhandling in blood-stained pants. “Why would she be bleeding through her clothes? Surely they provide that at shelters,” Ashley thought.

But when she spoke with organizations that served homeless people, she found that though they all reported a tremendous need for period supplies, they almost never received donations of those items.

With a birthday approaching, Ashley decided to throw herself a party where all the guests were asked to bring pads or tampons in lieu of a gift. Powered by a big turnout and a contribution from Walgreens, she collected 15,000 products. Ashley didn’t stop there. In a year, she collected and donated 275,000 products. Her second year, the total went to 333,000. Today, in 2019, she’s on track to distribute 600,000 period products, a boost that she attributes to becoming an Alliance for Period Supplies allied program and getting a large donation of U by Kotex products.

“We were running very low when we got the U by Kotex donation.” Ashley said. “When the truck came in, I think I cried like a baby.” The donation will help her expand her work in schools. Now working as a community liaison with Broward County Schools, Ashley sees firsthand how #periodpoverty and access to other hygiene supplies affects students. A girl without supplies bled through to her clothes and spent the remainder of the day in the bathroom. One boy told her that he had to share a toothbrush with his siblings. Along with distributing period supplies, the Beauty Initiative now gives out a variety of hygiene products, like toothbrushes and soap, and sponsors free laundry days at a local laundromat – a direct response to Ashley learning about a student being bullied because the only clothes he had to wear to school were not laundered.

The period supplies program remains the nonprofit’s biggest endeavor. Since that birthday launch there have been many parties for both the donation and packing of period products for recipients. Tickets to these events tend to sell out because Ashley guarantees “a lit party environment” with food, fun and music.

Ashley believes that her organization has survived and thrived in large part because she keeps talking about #periodpoverty whenever and

wherever she gets the chance. When she saw the woman with bloody pants three years ago, it changed her life, she said, and gave her an obligation to work to get people period supplies they need to reach their full potential.

“When I speak at a panel, a lot of people have never heard of #periodpoverty. But by the time they leave, they have. So now they have an obligation to do something too,” Ashley said.