

## **A four-woman effort graduates to a community-wide one**

Not a lot of high school juniors have succession plans. But Dana Clark, Ryann Mescher, Claire Parker and Zoe Waller do. The founders of the Femme Aid Collaborative collect and distribute period supplies in their hometown of Dayton, Ohio. The foursome has been working on an Ambassadors Program to recruit more leaders to the organization. That's because it takes a board base of volunteers to sustain any nonprofit and because this particular nonprofit's founding leaders will be off to college soon.

The Femme Aid Collaborative got its start when the Claire and Ryann were in the grocery store and the woman ahead of them in the checkout line asked for a running total of her order. Before all the groceries were scanned, the woman's money had run out. She went to be some items back, including pads. Ryann's mother chipped in so that the woman did not have to do without period supplies.

"That opened our eyes to this problem," Ryann remembered.

The friends discussed their ideas for action at a sleepover and then began researching #periodpoverty by talking with leaders at a domestic violence shelter and a homeless shelter. The homeless shelter had a total of six tampons in the storage room and reported always needing tampons and pads. They met a woman who had used paper bags and socks to soak up her flow. While they were investigating, a woman was arrested for shoplifting period supplies from a local store. "She had to go to jail. Even there, she didn't get the products she needed," Ryann said.

With the help of Ryann's mother, April Mescher, the four high school students began organizing. They've run fundraisers, gotten the mayor to talk about #periodpoverty and talked with their high school principal about providing products on campus. Most gratifyingly, they began distributing period supplies to the very organizations that told them how badly those items are needed.

"Our biggest challenge has been the Ambassadors Program," said Ryann.

Initially Ambassadors were people who committed to collecting 200 products or \$200. But that model wasn't working to build passion and ongoing commitment. So the founders are participating in Up Dayton, an incubator program for nonprofits in the city. The process will give them access to expert and peer advice on enhancing the Ambassadors Program.

Even if they weren't close to leaving for college, getting more widespread participation in the work of ending #periodpoverty would be a priority.

"It's not just Femme Aid's problem," Ryann said. "It's our community's."