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Help a Girl Out collects hygiene products for Children's Home and Opportunity House

Products can be dropped off through February at Be Mine Boutique in West Reading and other locations.



Suzanne Cody, co-organizer of the feminine hygiene product drive Help a Girl Out, places a donation in a drop box at Be Mine Boutique in West Reading while Jane McQuire, a project manager for Opportunity House, Victoria Griffis, a member of the Junior League of Reading, and Jill Troutman, vice president of development for the Children's Home of Reading look on. The monthlong female hygiene product drive will benefit the three organizations. (MICHELLE LYNCH – READING EAGLE)

By **MICHELLE LYNCH** | mlynch@readingeagle.com | Reading Eagle
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There is a sometimes hidden health issue affecting girls and women in the U.S.



The problem, which particularly affects those in lower-income families, includes lack of access to sanitary products, washing facilities and waste management.

“Women and girls are using things like shoe insoles, balled up toilet paper, socks and other things, like cardboard, that are not designed for this issue,” Suzanne Cody said. “That creates problems. It causes emotional duress, health problems, hygiene issues, infection and disease.”

That’s why Cody, director of business development for Muhlenberg Greene Architects, joined with Alison Pakradooni, owner of Be Mine Boutique in West Reading, to rally other area businesswomen in a grassroots effort to help local girls and women.

The campaign, called Help a Girl Out, is in its second year and is part awareness crusade and part product drive.

This year’s drive will benefit the girls and women served by the Children’s Home of Reading and Opportunity House, in addition to teens attending the Junior League of Reading’s annual Young Women’s Summit, a two-day leadership development workshop for area middle school aged girls.

Cody and Pakradooni, both members of the Junior League, kicked off the monthlong campaign with a reception Wednesday night at Be Mine, 637 Penn Ave.



A monthlong feminine hygiene product drive, Help a Girl Out, will benefit the Junior League of Reading’s Youth Summit, the Children’s Home of Reading and Opportunity House. Products can be dropped off at Be Mine Boutique in West Reading and other participating businesses. (MICHELLE LYNCH – READING EAGLE)

The pair invited fellow members of the league and area businesswomen to drop in and participate by taking one of the brightly wrapped drop boxes decorated by Pakradooni or making their own.

Though the campaign is not a project of the league, many of its members support the effort, Cody said.

“This issue of period poverty goes across all strata and demographics,” she said, “and it prevents women and girls from participating in everyday activities with basic dignity.”

According to a 2014 [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization \(UNESCO\) report](#), cited by CHOP, one of every 10 menstruating youths miss school during their cycles due to lack of access to hygiene products.

For people living in poverty in the U.S., menstrual experiences are similar to those in low- and middle-income countries, CHOP

“That is 20% of our future workforce that is missing an educational opportunity,” she said.

Up to 32% of menstruating girls in the U.S., Cody said, are unable to participate in team sports due to a lack of hygiene products. And the same number avoids socializing and visiting friends while having their periods for the same reason, she added.

Further, Cody noted, 25% are teased or bullied because it is obvious that they don't have access to products.

For those women and girls who are homeless or living in a shelter, the problem is exacerbated by an often-limited wardrobe and lack of access to laundry facilities, said Jane McQuire, a project manager for Opportunity House, which operates a shelter at 430 N. Second St.

“For a long time,” she said, “menstrual health has been a taboo subject and something women and girls are sometimes embarrassed about.”

That makes it even more difficult for many girls and women in need to ask for help, McQuire said.

Getting a monthly period is normal and natural for nonpregnant girls and women of menstruating age, said Victoria Griffis, community liaison for Comfort Keepers and a member of the Junior League. It is nothing to be ashamed of, she said.

“I look forward to the day when we don't stick it (a hygiene product) in our sleeve,” Griffis said. “We will carry it proudly with us, and if anybody gives us any stink-eye, we will look at them and say, ‘It's normal.’”

Pads, tampons and washable period underwear can be dropped off at participating locations, including Be Mine Boutique and Muhlenberg Greene Architects, 955 Berkshire Blvd., Suite 101, Wyomissing, throughout February.

Baby diapers for CHOR and Opportunity House also are being collected.



Michelle Lynch | Reporter

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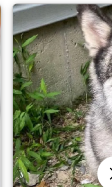
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