

Give Days Back to Girls

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Imagine you are ready to go to school, or work, and your period starts. Women have all been there. Living in Canada, you have tons of options at your disposal... cups, pads, tampons and special underwear. You can even regulate or disrupt your period. But if you lived in the developing world instead, you would likely have access to nothing. You would have to improvise with leaves, grass, corn husks, scraps of fabric—even rocks. If you didn't improvise, you would be stuck at home, missing out on valuable class or work time and falling behind your peers. You would miss a week each month, which is equal to 25% of your time for opportunity.

Why is being forced to stay home so important? Educating girls is one of the most significant factors in international development. When girls are educated, they lead healthier and more productive lives. They gain the skills, knowledge and

confidence to break the cycle of poverty and help strengthen their societies. Girls have the power to change the world, however, millions of girls and women have no access to feminine hygiene supplies.

This is the moment Days for Girls steps in.

Through almost 800 teams worldwide, Days for Girls International is providing access to quality, sustainable feminine hygiene kits, vital health knowledge and income generation opportunities where possible. Kits are given out by a health educator, and they are given directly to each girl who attends sessions. Days for Girls has distributed over 600,000 kits to six continents since its creation in 2008.

Each feminine hygiene kit consists of the following eight elements:

- Two gallon (large) Ziploc® brand freezer bags for storing soiled pads and washing
- One drawstring bag to carry the kit to school
- One washcloth
- One travel-sized bar of soap
- Two pairs of girls briefs (size 10–14)
- Two moisture barrier shields that snap around the briefs and hold the liners
- Eight absorbent tri-fold liners that go into the shields and can be layered if needed
- One visual instruction sheet.

Each Days for Girls kit lasts two to four years because of the high quality fabric and sewing standards, which is equal to hundreds of days for each girl who receives one. The kit costs about \$15 in supplies to make, which is an amazing return on investment. Plus,



Days for Girls requests feedback from girls, parents and teachers and has gone through almost 30 redesigns to get to their current, more efficient product.

All of these points inspired me to start my own Days for Girls team in March 2016. I heard about the charity while visiting home in Nova Scotia and couldn't believe I hadn't thought of this issue for girls before. I am a high school teacher, so education is very important to me. As a woman, I have plenty of period experience and can't imagine lacking supplies for it. As a quilter, I have enough sewing skills to make the kits. Also, with two girls of my own, I am even more sensitive to the struggles girls face in other parts of the world and would like to help out. With family and friends encouraging me to start the team, it came to fruition.

Our first sewing day was in May at the Oakville Sewing Centre. The response was great! Linda, the owner, donated loads of fabric and the session filled up quickly. All of the chairs were occupied and many pads and liners were made. The learning curve to make the kits is lengthy because expectations are high, but all the ladies were keen to learn. The first sewing day was encouraging.

At *Creativ Festival*, Toronto, in October, hundreds of sewers, quilters and crafters stopped to hear about Days for Girls and were very responsive. Once people hear the reason behind Days for Girls, it is easy to connect to the cause. It was very exciting to think of more people joining.

In November 2016, we hosted two kit preparation days. What was going to be a small gathering exploded quickly after the local paper posted a need for volunteers. It



was heart-warming to see all these women working together to help girls and women in other parts of the world.

Starting a team was not as hard as running it daily—I'm trying my best to get the word out, find new volunteers and donations of fabric and money, and keep up-to-date on social media. The team is meeting monthly now, so hopefully we can get even more kits produced. As a team, we have no quota to meet, but I want to get things really rolling.

Without donated items, each kit costs about \$15 to produce. We use high quality fabric, including PUL (Polyurethane Laminate), 100% cotton flannel, 100% quilter's cotton, cotton or poly/cotton blends. I feel quilters and Days for Girls are a good match. I'm so happy to have Days for Girls featured in this magazine, which is distributed to generous quilters across Canada.

My team and I extend an invitation... if you have a stash of quilter's cotton, we can use pieces as small as 4.5" x 5" inches. If you have good quality flannel, we can use the same small pieces. There are a few fabric rules in terms of colours and patterns, but that information can be easily shared. Quilters... if you have time to volunteer, your sewing skills are perfect, since we use 1/4-inch and 1/8-inch seams in all of our sewing. Your attention to detail is needed!

I am simply one team leader in a family of more than 70 teams across Canada. If you want to help your local team, you can find the list at www.daysforgirls.org/canada-chapters-and-teams. If you have any questions about starting your own team or about Days for Girls in general, I'd love to hear from you! Thank you. ♦



FACING PAGE, TOP Days For Girls Kit

FACING PAGE, BOTTOM Adriane Franklin

ABOVE Sewing Day at Oakville Sewing Centre