



Interview of the Month

December 2019

Afsaneh Parvizi-Wayne
Founder of Freda



SheCanHeCan: For our readers who have yet to discover Freda, can you please tell us more about yourself and Freda?

I am Affi, the founder of Freda, a new brand of organic and ethical period care. I started Freda for a number of reasons, but for me personally it was a challenge that I took as I wanted, in my small way, to address and challenge taboos around women's health. Women's hormones and physical experiences are so often seen as a source of shame - from the onset of puberty and periods to the transition to the menopause. I believe that brands like Freda- that innovate, respond to modern needs, and create a community of users - can help change that narrative.

What was your inspiration for creating Freda products?

I come from a refugee background and seeing Syrian refugees stranded at various European borders a few years ago got me thinking about how women and girls manage their periods in those situations. As a Persian, I appreciate the cultural mores around menstruation and understood that unless pads were made available to these women, they would not be asking for them. And, needless to say at the time the authorities claimed that 'there was no demand'. This was one of the inspirations for Freda. I wanted to create a startup which would address period care with the same sort of respect and sensitivity we give to other wellbeing necessities. I also wanted a brand that was transparent, sustainable and with purpose.

"I wanted to create a startup which would address period care with the same sort of respect and sensitivity we give to other wellbeing necessities. I also wanted a brand that was transparent, sustainable and with purpose."

What has been Freda's best achievement so far?

When I first started Freda, periods were not, what you might call 'woke' or Instagram friendly. The whole issue of menstruation was shrouded in taboo and euphemisms. This shame and stigma was to a great extent responsible in hiding one of the biggest inequalities in my eyes – lack of access to period products. One of our greatest achievements has been to help break these down, and to build up instead a new business category and model for startups. I have always admired Tom's shoes and their one-for-one pledge and I set out to be "to tampons what Toms are to shoes". Our giveback pledge is an intrinsic part of our business model, and this has led us to connect with and support some amazing initiatives such as The Red Box Project. The project in my view has been the most successful campaign as the UK Government will now provide free period products to all schools. The best charities are those who become defunct in a very short space of time as they have achieved their aim.

I am very proud and privileged to have support the Red Box Project initiative. Pads and tampons have always been considered as fast-moving consumer good, the same as detergents and washing up liquid. With fresh branding and packaging, Freda has dragged sanitary products from the supermarket to users Instagram feeds, influencers blogs, and women's magazines.

When did you first learn about period poverty/inequality? What still shocks you today about it?

Initially, I was contacted by Femme International, a Canadian NGO, who wanted Freda to support one of their initiatives in Tanzania. At the same time a friend of mine had been helping in a refugee drop-in centre and had met Gaby Edlin, who was running an initiative called "Bloody Good Period" from her bedroom. Meeting Gabby opened my eyes to period poverty on my own doorstep not just amongst asylum seekers, but also among school girls from low-income families, the homeless, and other vulnerable demographics in the UK. I decided to focus more time on finding ways to support local advocacy and campaigns to combat period poverty.

Periods have come a long way in the UK over the past few years, and it is quite extraordinary to think how important grass-roots activism has been in highlighting matters relating to period poverty. At the moment, I am thinking a lot about the lack of provision of period care in the workplace. Who makes the decisions about what's an essential product for the workforce? If everyone had periods, wouldn't pads and tampons would be available alongside loo paper?

If you could give advice to your 16 year old self (or any young enthusiastic women reading this), what would it be and why?

Periods are private, but they are not secret. They are normal, and are not shameful. Don't let periods stop you from doing anything you want to do, but at the same time know that it is okay to get want to go to bed with a hot water bottle, if that's what you need. We do not have to live up to false, idealised images of women in white jeans, flicking our shiny hair on our rollerblades whilst on our periods!

If you could choose what happens in the next year for Freda and period poverty, what would that reality look like?

Period poverty would not exist if we change the way our society ranks basic human essentials. My aim is to have period products available in all public bathrooms outside of the home. I want my daughter, and her daughter, to look back on 2019 and be astonished that there were no pads and tampons readily available in bathrooms. This may not happen in next year but we're definitely on the right track.

About Freda

Established in 2017, Freda is a period-care subscription service designed to disrupt the well-established sector dominated by three major conglomerates. Order online and receive your orders monthly or in bulk if you choose, including our attractive display bags that can hang in bathrooms (although some people choose to display loose too). Freda offers 100% certified organic tampons and natural pads, manufactured in eco certified European facilities. They have ensured sustainability throughout our supply chain, from the sourcing of the raw materials to the carbon footprint of our plants. Their products where possible are made from biodegradable and renewable materials. A portion of Freda profits are used to support initiatives providing period products to women and girls tackling period poverty here and abroad.

Find out more about our social purpose here. <https://myfreda.com/social-purpose/>

Freda purchases are tax deductible as an essential office purchase, and because of our giveback initiative, it fulfils a company's CSR.

You can buy Freda products on their website which also includes options for corporate orders too. Head to www.myfreda.com to order your Freda products.



freda