

INTRODUCTION TO THE FOUNDING OF THE MENSTRUAL HYGIENE COUNCIL

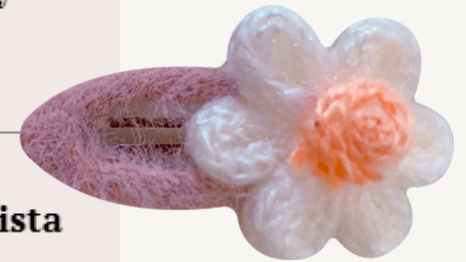
Hi, my name is Ahana Raghavan, and I am a junior at Vista del Lago High School. I have been deeply passionate about the intersection between health and gender equity for a long time, and it has fueled my passion for STEM and advocacy throughout high school. I founded my small business Woolf's Torn Pages to combat period poverty by working in Africa to improve the quality of reusable menstrual products for women living in the Kiboga municipality of Uganda. I was able to donate the reusable equivalent of over 63,000 pads. But my focus began to shift locally as I realized the problem of period poverty was just as prevalent in my own neck of the woods.

So, I founded the Menstrual Hygiene Council to serve as a school-based chapter of my small business in order to promote local change without doing "helicopter advocacy" (taking action without working with organizations and people in the area to better understand the root of the issue). Here is all of the work we have done so far and our future goals/missions-in-progress!

WHAT HAS THE MENSTRUAL HYGIENE COUNCIL ACCOMPLISHED SO FAR AND WHAT ARE WE WORKING ON?

Adequately Supplying Bathrooms in 2025 Under the Menstrual Equity For All Act of 2023 - A.K.A The Bathroom Box Project

Goal: To bring the community together to combat period poverty experienced in Vista del lago High School and to ultimately promote public health.



THE BATHROOM BOX PROJECT:

The goal of this project is to restructure our school bathrooms to install a discrete series of distributors in each bathroom stall of Vista del Lago High School bathrooms to improve the quality of menstrual supplies for female students at school who typically have to resort to borrowing from a peer or walking all the way from class to the nurse's office. Only some teachers choose to keep products in their rooms, as we learned from our All-Staff Meeting presentation (which I will elaborate on).

After writing a proposal to the PTSO, District Office, FCUSD Board of Education, and VDLHS Administration, our project was approved, but we needed a source of funding.

So, we presented at a PTSO meeting and **acquired a \$600 grant** to install the mini distributors A.K.A “Bathroom Boxes” in the bathroom and purchase a sustainable supply of menstrual products. We worked with Aunt Flow, the largest period supply company in the country, to get a discounted quote for 1000 menstrual products and we are actively working with our school staff to get the boxes fully installed before Spring Break 2025.

This project means a lot because it was initially difficult for the school to acknowledge the true scope of this issue and the fact that they were willing to allow us to make meaningful changes it says a lot about the environment cultivated by FCUSD for students to step up and challenge previously established precedents.

FCUSD Board of Education/District Office/PTSO
Spring Semester 2025

THE CARE TO SHARE PROGRAM:

I learned when I was first organizing our region's first school-wide Hygiene Drive that food banks do not accept and distribute menstrual products in the same way that other sanitary products are made available in their distributor sites. So, I worked with the manager of the El Dorado Food Bank to make a **public policy change** that allowed for menstrual products to be made available in their 30-40 distributor sites. These sites include homeless shelter, women's shelters, and SAFE parking lots for women.



So, we ran a Hygiene Drive, our region's first school-wide one of its kind, during Vista del Lago's Spirit of Giving Week. Many Vista students were excited about the new opportunity to help women who needed it the most and we have thus collected products for the past 2 years working in conjunction with our school administration and staff.

This allowed us to donate around 1800 menstrual products to the food bank and 200 products to the Wellspring Women's Center, which was also a part of our Care to Share Program. The Wellspring Women's Center works to help women and children with free meals, social worker appointments, and daily access to provisions.



“The drive collects basic hygiene products as well as sanitary products such as pads and tampons, which will be going to the El Dorado food bank...The bank’s 30 different distributor sites, spanning hundreds of women in need will be impacted,” explained Raghavan.

When asked why she started this drive, Raghavan said, “...period poverty is a big issue, especially in California... 1 in 4 girls in California miss school because they don’t have adequate period supplies...I think taking action on it right now is the best way to address it.”

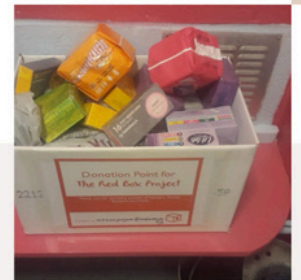
Due to our creation of a new drive in our community, the work we did was highlighted in our school newspaper, The Vista Voice. This was a testament to our dedication to the local community as well as our school itself.

ALL-STAFF MEETING AT VISTA DEL LAGO HIGH SCHOOL

We understand that teachers can play a significant role in alleviating period poverty in the community. So, we presented at a Vista All-Staff Meeting on the goals of the Menstrual Hygiene Council and the significance of period poverty in the community.

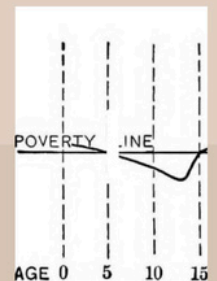
At this meeting, we were able to explain the spillover effects period poverty can have on the quality of education and how teachers can better help struggling students. We also packed around 200 products into goody bags so that teachers could keep products in their room in a discrete manner. However, not all male teachers were comfortable with stocking their rooms with products for students, so there is more work to be done on the stigma of menstruation! This is ultimately why we created the Bathroom Box Project, to create an effective and efficient system independent of human bias and stigmas/taboo.

Menstrual Hygiene Council Staff Meeting Presentation Slides



Mission of the MHC

How do we work to help our school, our community, and beyond, and why do we do it in the first place?



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The Menstrual Hygiene Council strives to promote menstrual equity, reduce period poverty, and dismantle stigmas surrounding menstruation through sustainable initiatives, education, and advocacy. Our goal is to provide accessible menstrual products and foster a supportive environment by raising awareness, collaborating with organizations, and encouraging open discussions on menstrual health within the school and the broader community.

LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS:

Working with local organizations gives us a bit of insight into how we can improve our donation and advocacy infrastructure. For instance, we worked with Julie's Purse Project, a local organization that aims to help women in need, whether they are homeless, refugees, or just struggling. So, on November 2nd, 2024, we helped package around 15,000 products into over 1000 purses.

This experience was incredibly valuable and showed us the importance of involving the community in the work we do and raising awareness about why it matters.



THE FLOW FORUM:

I never realized the true lack of awareness about what makes periods irregular until I was discussing it with some members of the council and found out that many students do not know the common symptoms or conditions associated with abnormal menstruation.

So, we reached out to local middle schools and asked if they felt students knew enough about their own periods or if they needed help in answering anonymous questions. Folsom Middle School agreed to pilot the Flow Forum, which is a series of posters designed to have embedded QR codes linked to an anonymous Google Form where students can ask questions about their cycle. We are currently working to find a physician advisor to vet our responses and ensure accuracy. Our goal is to ensure that students who do not have proper education on their menstrual health can get answers to their questions without being put in an uncomfortable position.

A group of female high schoolers will answer any questions you may have about your menstrual and reproductive health. No need to be embarrassed about your body, but we understand that it happens. This form is anonymous and the only info needed is your email so we can email you your answers!
