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## Helping Women Period: "We Struck a Nerve" <sup>[1]</sup>

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**By:**

Ann Nichols



Amy Mercier Stephenson and Lysne Beckwith Tait are walking the walk. They saw a problem, they brainstormed a solution, and the result is Helping Women Period, an organization dedicated to ensuring that all women have the products they need, when they need them by supplying shelters and other places with feminine hygiene items.

It all started with an article on Huffington Post <sup>[2]</sup> about how hard it was for homeless women to deal with menstrual periods without sufficient (or any) feminine hygiene products and without predictable access to toilets or showers. One night about a month ago, Stephenson recalls Lysne and I were on-line at the same time reading it, and she posted it to her Feed and I replied. We basically said, "This is awful, we should do something." Unable to sleep, Stephenson thought about what it would be like to be in a gas station bathroom trying to deal, all while hungry and probably freezing.

Since she was awake anyway, Stephenson got out of bed and looked up industrial case sizes of

products and thought, 'if we just had a small fundraiser we could buy some stuff.' She and Tait discussed it, and within less than a month they had created a local movement. 'We have two target audiences,' says Stephenson, 'homeless women and those in shelters/transitional housing/low income.' The women consulted with Hannah's House, Eve's House, Haven House, Greater Lansing Housing Coalition, The Homeless Angels, The Lansing Women's Center, and Advent House about the best way to reach as many women as possible.

Once their mission was clear, Tait and Stephenson (a professional event planner) planned and booked a March 24<sup>th</sup> breakfast fundraiser at The Soup Spoon Café, and they have had such a large response that the venue has had to be changed to the Cadillac Room in REO Town. (The Soupspoon Café is still catering the event.) At press time, the event had 226 confirmed attendees, 139 'maybes,' and is still accepting RSVPs.

Within a week, according to Stephenson 'our event went live on Sunday, on Tuesday we changed the venue to the Cadillac Room, on Thursday we incorporated our non-profit, and on Friday we had a Facebook Group page.' Since then, the pair has set up a PayPal account for donations and talked with vendors about getting the best discount on products. (Both Michco and HelloFlo offered to help.)

In addition to money donations, which are used to buy products in bulk, in response to a Facebook request for local quilters/sewers to make small bags for discreet distribution, 13 people responded within an hour saying they'd make 5-10 bags each.

Neither Tait nor Stephenson, by the way, was sitting around waiting for something to do. Both are mothers of active kids, and both have a tradition of volunteering in their respective communities (Okemos for Stephenson and Dewitt for Tait) and elsewhere. Both women volunteer at the annual Thanksgiving Dinner at Cristo Rey Community Center, and Tait is an active participant in The Firecracker Foundation and The Dewitt Public Library. Rather than 'one more thing,' they saw creating Helping Women Period as the *right* thing.

'You know,' muses Tait, 'I've read many of the woo-woo books and I have heard talks on 'manifesting your destiny' and all that. I didn't know what I wanted to do next. I am a 'professional volunteer'?' I work with many events and charities in the area?' and I am profoundly grateful that I am able to do so. My kids are getting older, and don't need me in the same ways as they did in elementary school, but I wasn't planning on this! The universe just took over, and I'm holding on tightly and enjoying the ride.'

'Apparently,' Tait concludes, 'we struck a nerve, and hopefully this will be something really, really helpful. This is a recurring need. It costs \$70 per year for one woman's supplies.' Both Stephenson and Tait are making long-range plans so that Helping Women Period can continue to support local women in need for years to come.

If you want to help, there are many options. At this time all the details of the March 24<sup>th</sup> breakfast are on the group's Event page [3] and Group page [4] on Facebook. (The organization does not yet have its own website.) You can still RSVP, and it's free to attend the event. Although a donor has covered the use of the Cadillac Club, sponsors are still needed to cover the (ever-increasing) cost of the meal itself since all donations are used to purchase product. Donations and/or sponsor inquiries may be sent to Helping Women Period, c/o Willingham & Cote, PC, 333 Albert

Avenue, Suite 500. East Lansing, MI 48823, Attention: Amy Stephenson. Donations may also be made through Paypal <sup>[5]</sup>, and the group may also be contacted at [helpingwomenperiod@gmail.com](mailto:helpingwomenperiod@gmail.com) <sup>[6]</sup>.

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[2] [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/01/14/homeless-women-tampons\\_n\\_6465230.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/01/14/homeless-women-tampons_n_6465230.html)

[3] <https://www.facebook.com/events/540864469390006/>

[4] <https://www.facebook.com/helpingwomenperiod>

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