

2 college students harness TikTok to collect bras and tampons, combat period poverty

By ZAREEN SYED PIONEER PRESS, FEB 27, 2021

A few months into lockdown, two best friends set out on a simple mission: Donate bras and tampons to women who need them. But with the help of TikTok and a flair for organizing, what started as a pandemic project, like baking bread or tackling home improvement, became a fully functioning nonprofit with volunteers across 42 states.

Alexa Mohsenzadeh and Jenica Baron launched Her Drive in June 2020, a Chicago-based organization that provides bras as well as menstrual care and general hygiene products to combat period and hygiene poverty.

“I think as we looked into period poverty, just hearing about it in high school, how girls would resort to using plastic bags instead of pads or would try to wash their underwear using clean water but wouldn’t be able to, we became really passionate about it,” said Baron, who is a public health student at Tulane University.



Alexa Mohsenzadeh, co-founder of Her Drive, a Chicago-based organization that's working to combat period poverty, sorts through collections after the organization's first drive in July 2020. (Her Drive)

A few years ago, a survey titled [State of the Period](#) found that one in five teenage girls in the U.S. struggled to afford period products or was not able to purchase them at all. More recently, in 2019, [a study of low-income U.S. women](#) found that nearly two-thirds of the women surveyed struggled to afford period products, leading many to use paper towels, rags or even diapers as alternatives when menstruating.

“Early in the pandemic when we started, we recognized that the push for PPE in low-income communities, while absolutely necessary, might have meant that period products were being overlooked even more. It was an issue that we felt was super necessary to address,” said Mohsenzadeh,

a student at Emory University. “It’s not a new issue; there are many organizations working toward the same thing. The unique thing we’re doing is we’re trying to mobilize the youth bracket.”

The social-media-savvy 19-year-olds organized their first Chicagoland drive in July and proceeded as any proper millennial would. To get the word out, Mohsenzadeh creatively clipped together some pictures and videos they’d shot, accompanied by a remix version of the Ritt Momney song “Put Your Records On,” and posted the footage on [Her Drive’s TikTok account](#). In the video, they asked their followers to donate spare bras. The response was spectacular.



A portion of articles received and distributed by Her Drive.

“We offered free shipping labels, and that’s when we started to receive a bunch of shipments from everywhere. And that money to pay for shipping labels was coming out of our pockets because we wanted to have engagement, but then that video blew up to the point where we couldn’t physically fund it anymore,” Mohsenzadeh said, laughing. “But that’s what sparked the idea for the program because we realized there is a big interest.”

That video attracted more than 353,000 views, and since launching Her Drive’s TikTok account in July, they’ve acquired 31,500 followers. According to Mohsenzadeh, several of their TikToks have gone viral, in addition to the first one. And the growing audience meant more exposure for their cause.

“From what we could tell, it was a lot of our followers sending our posts to their friends and their friends, and so on,” Baron said. “Once we had that base, we were able to grow from there.”

During the July drive, they raised \$1,300 for the Brave Space Alliance Trans Relief Fund and collected hundreds of bras and thousands of menstrual care and general hygiene items in Chicagoland, which they donated to various organizations including Deborah’s Place, the Oglala Sioux Tribe and the Navajo Nation COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund.

With an assist from social media algorithms, they’ve tapped into an online community of young people just as inclined to combat period poverty as they are. The organization is now entirely volunteer-led, and

anyone can apply through [HerDrive.org](https://www.herdrive.org) to host a drive. There is a vetting process before the co-founders choose and guide those who are ready to organize, promote and fundraise. At last count, Her Drive is made up of 347 groups all over the states, and their volunteers have held fundraisers in Las Vegas; Santa Monica and Palo Alto, California; and communities in New York, New Jersey and more.

“All the groups, so far, that we worked with have found us through social media, whether that’s Instagram, Reels or TikTok,” Baron said. “We always get so excited when there are groups from Illinois and from neighboring towns. In a way, it’s almost more unreal to know that there are people so close, like from the same area code and have found out about us and want to host a drive as well.”

Just recently, Elizabeth Tabachnikov, 16, from Hinsdale South High School, found Her Drive during a bored afternoon of swiping on Instagram.

“I was just scrolling and somehow found their main organization account,” Tabachnikov said. “I was looking for something proactive to do in my community, and I felt that they were really productive and their mission was something I would support.” In two days, Tabachnikov and her friends collected 280 bras and close to 8,000 period products.

“I have a wall of boxes in my room,” she said, laughing. “We’re still trying to figure out where in the community we want to send them. The majority of our donations will be going to a homeless shelter type of organization and a foster care center.”

Though the organization’s name is *Her Drive*, there is an emphasis on trying to provide menstrual care items to anyone who needs them. “Our name doesn’t limit our mission, and it’s something we really try to communicate,” Mohsenzadeh said. “Gender identity does not influence the people that we serve.”

The group also takes shampoo, conditioner, body wash, soap, deodorant, hair color, lotion, dental-care items, socks, new and unopened makeup, baby wipes, pregnancy tests, masks, hand sanitizer and lots more.



Jenica Baron, co-founder of Her Drive transports through donations in July 2020. (Her Drive)

Since launching eight months ago, Her Drive has collected 7,000 bras, 96,000 period products and more than 50,000 general hygiene items. They've donated to homeless shelters, domestic violence survivor support organizations, reservation communities, Black-led organizations, refugee-support programs and LGBTQ community centers, not to mention the more than 300 drives scheduled for spring.

Although Mohsenzadeh and Baron attend school out of state, they've enlisted helpers to do the sorting at their Chicago "warehouse."

"Our younger brothers help us collect the items, count through everything and make sure the donations are accounted for in our garage. It's funny," Baron said with a laugh.

Aside from their overarching mission of distributing bras and menstrual care items, they're hoping to empower young people and make service work look appealing, which judging from their aesthetically pleasing [Instagram page](#), is something they're on top of.

"Honestly, that's part of what keeps our engagement with younger people, as long as we make this look appealing. I think people have a distorted view of how service can look. That's what we really want to show," Mohsenzadeh said. "It just feels like, 'Oh, it's a little thing, a little project that we've been doing,' but we've been doing it for almost a year now. I don't even know how to explain!"

For more information about Her Drive and how you can get involved, visit HerDrive.org. If you are interested in donating funds, you can [do so here](#).

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