

NEWS FEATURE

Mum's bid to ease daughter's



A St Albans mum who wanted to make the beginning of her daughter's adult life easier has come up with an idea which helps to prepare girls for puberty. **Angela Knight** reports

BUDDING entrepreneur Robyn West has developed an all-in-one period kit and website to support girls entering puberty.

The mother-of-one came up with the idea after being concerned about the possibility of her daughter starting her period while she was holidaying abroad with friends.

Robyn, of Kimberley Road, St Albans, said: "I wanted to ensure my daughter was prepared in case her periods started unexpectedly while she was away from home. So off I went to the shops, thinking I could get it sorted quite easily.

"I was surprised to discover there wasn't an all-in-one kit in the shops. In fact, the vast number of products on display was overwhelming. I was confronted with a wall of sanitary pads – all in different shapes, sizes, absorbencies, thicknesses, with or without wings, plus a host of other options.

"The choice was totally confusing. I realised there was a need for something specifically designed for girls – both practical and portable – and I was sure other mums like me would appreciate it."

Although her daughter, who currently attends St Albans School for Girls, had already sat in on talks about puberty at school, Robyn felt it was important to explain what to do if her periods did start and how to use the various pads she had bought her.

Robyn said: "A girlfriend helped me to realise that what I'd created for my daughter was potentially a great idea that, if more widely available, could really help parents and their daughters deal with this important event."

Within 48 hours, Robyn had come up with a brand name – The PoGo Pack (The Period Pack for Girls on the Go). With some helpful input from her friends, family and a school nurse, she set about developing a pack that contained everything a girl needs to manage her periods.

The pack, which was recently launched nationally, contains a mixture of small pads specially selected to fit young girls, disposal bags, tissues and a notebook and pen so girls can record their emotions.

Most importantly, the pack con-



The PoGo Pack, which can help young girls cope with the onset of puberty.

tains reassuring information for girls about periods and how to use the products, as well as a period planner so that girls can track their monthly cycle.

During Robyn's research, she learnt that while the average age for a girl's first period is around 12, some can start as young as eight, a finding that was endorsed by the

national School and Public Health Nurses Association (SAPHNA), which believes the PoGo Pack is addressing a real need.

She said: "Some schools invited me in to talk to the girls while others invited me in to talk to the girls and their parents. I had a fantastic response. The mums appreciated the all-in-one kit and the fact that

they didn't have to think about what to buy for their daughters."

Scores of schools across Hertfordshire have already made the pack available to their female pupils in Years 5 to 9. Head of St Albans Girls School Christine Murrell said that the product was not only practical, but also supportive of youngsters' changing needs.

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monthly fears

Garden Fields School headteacher Terri Clift said: "I've been a teacher for 25 years and it is becoming increasingly obvious that girls are menstruating at an earlier age.

"Many parents assuming their daughters know all they need to know about managing periods from talking to friends in the playground or watching soaps on TV.

"As a headteacher I felt it was really important to get both mothers and daughters along to information sessions with our school nurse in Year 5 and again in Year 6 to hear first hand about menstruation and to see the products available to help deal with a potentially embarrassing situation for a young girl.

"However, not all parents are able to do this and not all schools offer these opportunities. The PoGo Pack provides not only the factual information and the products, but also the reassurance needed by young girls and busy parents for dealing sensitively with this first sign of womanhood."

Robyn, who previously co-ordinated Herts Open Studios, in St Albans, said she hoped PoGo would make it easier for mums, dads and daughters to

communicate about periods, especially those who find the subject particularly difficult or embarrassing to talk about.

She added: "I have a lot of confidence in what I have created and have big plans to make it very successful, but its not just about making money, it's the whole social issue. There is a huge amount of stigma around the subject, if PoGo helps bridge the gap between mums and daughters then so much the better.

"I spoke to one school nurse who said that a Year 9 girl thought she was dying when she started her period. She had no idea what was happening to her.

"It's so important for girls to have an understanding about how their bodies work and how to take care of themselves in a way that's safe and informed."

For further information, girls can also visit the website - www.pogopack.co.uk - where they can find answers to frequently asked questions, links to educational websites about periods and recommended books on puberty. If you have any questions email info@pogopack.co.uk or call 01727 762443.

FACT BOX

Period pains – it is perfectly normal to get a dull pain below your tummy or in your lower back just before or during your period.

If it gets too painful, PoGo has come up with a few suggestions of things you can try:

■ Ask an adult for a mild painkiller, like paracetamol.

■ Put a hot water bottle over the area in pain – and make sure it's covered so you don't scald yourself

■ A heated lavender pack will also give nice pain relief and it smells nice too

■ Take a warm bath.

■ Get some gentle exercise. Believe it or not, getting your body moving is one of the best things to do.



Robyn West with a pack.