

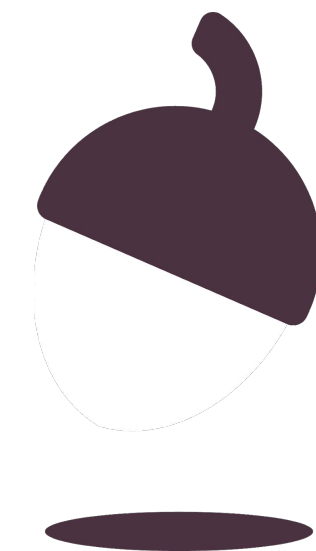
Citizenship

# How can citizens get involved in community change?

Lesson 4 of 6

Downloadable Resource

Mrs K White



**OAK**  
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# How can citizens get involved in community change?

## Case Study - Amika George #FreePeriods

### Occupation:

Student.

### Issues fought for:

Free sanitary products for schoolgirls from low-income families and ending shame about periods.

### Methods Used:

Research, online petition, emails, lobbying politicians, public speaking, peaceful demonstration, media interviews, writing articles.



# Motivation

Seventeen-year-old Amika was eating breakfast at her home in north London in March 2017 when she heard something on the news that made her jaw drop. A teacher in Leeds had contacted Freedom4Girls – a local charity that provides sanitary products to women and girls in Kenya – asking for supplies. The teacher was worried that girls were missing school regularly because they did not have the money to buy pads or tampons. Sometimes they used toilet paper, or even socks. According to Plan International, one in ten girls in the UK suffers from ‘period poverty’.

Amika was shocked to hear that girls in the UK were missing out on education because they were too worried or embarrassed to go to school without proper sanitary protection. The next day the House of Lords held its first ever debate on the subject. Referring to the news story, Baroness Burt of Solihull suggested that the government could give sanitary towels to girls who qualify for free school meals. The day after, MP Greg Mulholland proposed a similar idea, initially supported by 13 other MPs. Justine Greening, then Secretary of State for Education, promised to look at the issue carefully.



## Online petition

Determined to keep up the pressure, Amika researched into the subject then launched an online petition called #FreePeriods, calling on the government to provide free menstrual products to all girls on free school meals and for the taboo around periods to end. 'We need to escort period shame out of the door and mobilise the government so that children from the lowest income backgrounds are not marginalised,' she wrote.



## Lobbying MPs and spreading the word

In between revising for her AS exams, she emailed as many people, companies, charities and universities as she could think of and persuaded her parents to send the petition around their workplaces. To her surprise, within two weeks more than 2,000 people had signed it. Some girls contacted her to tell her about their struggles without enough pads or tampons, which made her want to fight all the harder. When the general election was announced, Amika emailed every political party about her cause. The Green Party and the Women's Equality Party both responded and included a pledge on free sanitary protection in their manifestos. After the election, both the Liberal Democrat Party and, later, the Labour Party announced that they would fund schemes to end period poverty in schools. In November 2017, Amika gave a TEDx talk in London. The reaction to her campaign had been 'incredible,' she said. 'I've been contacted by MPs, Lords, journalists and others in the public eye... real change is happening but there is still more to be done.'



## Taking to the streets

Amika decided to organise a peaceful demonstration opposite Downing Street, with the help of an activist group called Pink Protest. Hundreds of women and girls turned up with banners and a number of speakers addressed the crowd, including Amika herself. 'Everyone should get an education and if something like periods are holding us back we have a serious, serious problem,' she told the crowd. 'Also, why are we embarrassed about periods? They are completely normal, completely natural – half the world's population has a period... please talk about your periods, tell everyone about your periods!'



## In the spotlight

By 2018, Amika was juggling media interviews, meetings and speaking events with her homework, A-level revision and university applications. In early March, she flew to Washington DC to speak at Facebook's Global Safety Summit. A week later she was back in London, addressing an audience at City Hall during an event to mark the centenary of women's suffrage.



## Success!

She was thrilled when later that same month the government announced that it would put aside £1.5m of the tampon tax fund for ending period poverty. Nearly 157,000 people had signed her petition, well over her original target.

## The future

Amika continues to campaign for free sanitary products for all students as well as refugees, asylum seekers and women around the world who can't afford them. She also wants to normalise conversations about menstruation. 'Social media is a very powerful tool, and it makes us realise that it's not only adults or politicians who can engineer change, but young people with a vision and a dream,' she told Sister Magazine.





## Questions to consider:

- Who or what inspired Amika George to become a changemaker?
- What campaigning strategies has she used?
- What tools is Amika George able to use that weren't available when the suffragettes were campaigning?
- What was the role of politicians in Amika's campaign?
- What difference does getting political support make?
- What difference do you think Amika's campaigns have made?

