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LAUREN DUGGAN

We are Riley



A common every-day occurrence led Lauren Duggan and her two lifelong friends to set up We are Riley.

It was December 2020 and Lauren and her co-founders, Aine Kilkenny and Fiona Parfrey, were having a post-lockdown glass of wine at Aine's house in London. One of them got their period and they had no tampons in the house. The night came to an abrupt end.

“This is something that happens to us every month yet we are never prepared for it. We started talking about setting up a subscription service for sanitary products. But this led us down a rabbit hole of discovery,” says Lauren.

When the friends started researching, they were horrified to learn how much plastic was in the sanitary items they had been using for years.

“We decided we wanted to make our own. We completely pivoted the business and are now providing eco-friendly options for period products. We did a lot of market research and found out the average woman uses the equivalent of 5,500 plastic bags over her lifetime using sanitary products.”

A sanitary pad contains 90pc plastic and takes up to 1,000 years to break down. Riley's sanitary pads are 100% organic cotton, and the pad and wrapper are compostable, taking only 12 months to break down.

“The compounded problem is so large. There is also a whole education piece here, as we don't think most women realise this. So many people are now choosing eco options in their daily lives – such as using electric cars and keep cups – so we wanted to provide that same option for period products.”

Lauren, who is from Ballintemple in Cork, studied Business and Marketing in UL, before starting her career at Microsoft in Dublin. After two years, she joined a technology start-up called Smartology in London. She was there for seven years before setting up We are Riley, which launched in April 2021.

We are Riley was born during the pandemic, so the three founders worked remotely with Lauren in London, Fiona in Dublin and Aine in West Cork, with fulfilment managed from Northern Ireland. Lauren moved home to Ballintemple in July 2021, and it is their intention to eventually open an office in either Cork or Dublin.

Lauren said the hardest part of the journey was taking the first step; that initial 'leap of faith' and just going for it! She found Back for Business helped her with practical challenges.

“I really got so much out of the programme. It was great to meet like-minded people who understood the challenges I was facing and shared contacts, tips and advice. The Back for Business network is so valuable to me,” says Lauren.

The business had an incredible launch with all boxes selling out in the first two weeks. They also secured two large contacts from multinationals to stock their offices with sanitary products for their staff.

“It is really encouraging to see that these large multinationals are choosing to work with a small eco-business like us. It's demonstrating their desire to move towards a more eco-friendly and sustainable workplace.”

The company's current plans include creating new products and expanding the B2B side of their business. While they are currently focussed on the Irish market, they have their sights set on the UK and Europe in the medium term.



POSITION

Co-founder

WHAT WE DO

We are a subscription service for eco-friendly female sanitary products.

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