

♀ ON OUR WAY

Newsletter of the Women's Center
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TTY and VOICE

excerpts
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CHARTING A NEW COURSE

We know how easy it is to get so caught up in daily activities and details that we lose track of what we're trying to accomplish and whether we're succeeding. This is such a way of life at the Women's Center, that women attending the All Center Meetings decided to add on special 'philosophy' meetings to clarify our goals, priorities and strategies.

An emerging theme in the philosophy meetings is the role of the All Center Meeting. Presently, the All Center Meeting makes decisions about space use, spending, fund-raising, building maintenance, policies, problems that arise, personnel issues. The All Center Meeting has operated 'behind the scenes', trying to run things smoothly but keeping a low profile.

Participants of the philosophy meetings are committed to retaining many aspects of the Center. We want to continue to be a place where women who "fall through the cracks" of other organizations can find support and information. We want to continue putting considerable effort into helping women in crisis. And we want to continue to provide space and assistance to groups started by other women.

And, we want to change, too. We want to formulate and implement some programs which are based on strategy and vision rather than passively waiting for women to start groups which are personally important to them. We want the All Center Meeting to assume more of a leadership role, articulating our beliefs, clarifying our goals and our mission, opening up dialogs with groups, taking stands and expecting the groups to listen and respond to us. We want to more effectively communicate what the Center stands for. Without this leadership, women have very different and individual concepts of the Women's Center.

Our thoughts have led to action. We created a group contract form which clearly delineates the responsibilities of groups and the All Center Meeting, and a Welcome Sheet which describes the Center's history, mission, structure and includes a list of the groups and projects which meet here now.

We want to develop a clearly defined, well-known identity. We want to head into the 90's with a greater sense of community and a common purpose which inspire, strengthen and unite us all.

EXCITING RENOVATIONS

If you were to come to the Women's Center now you would see two women standing on tall ladders with scrapers in hand. The Women's Center is getting a fresh coat of paint! We are pleased to have Helena Ragone and Gail Hanlon on the job. (They want you all to know they give free estimates.)

And have you seen the new patio? The scrubby grass in the back yard has been replaced with flagstones, carefully laid out on some of the hottest summer days by Judy and Diana. The patio is complete with chairs and flowerpots, a great place to meet and chat and enjoy the breeze. Both the house painting and the flagstones were paid for with money raised from our Capital Improvement Grant.

Additionally, many other projects were completed with money from this same grant. Major electrical work including the installation of new outlets, light fixtures, outside spotlights and a bell for the wheelchair lift was completed. New couches, file cabinets and desks were purchased. A new wheelchair lift was installed after our old one stopped working and could not be repaired. And the kitchen now has a new stove for heating up dinner or preparing snacks.

MULTICULTURAL TRAINING

The Women's Center exists for all women, yet participation by minority women is relatively small. We want to do what we can to make the Center more inclusive. In January, Ann Royce, Alexandra Laird and Sarah Buel gave two workshops for Center staff and group members on multicultural awareness and outreach strategies. Our next step will be to have a meeting of facilitators and other group members to discuss how to incorporate multicultural sensitivity into their groups.

We need to decide where to begin and how to enact those changes that are compatible with the Center's purpose and with our limited resources. We welcome your ideas and input in written form (addressed to the All-Center Meeting) and your participation in upcoming meetings.

MEETING OF THE MINDS

The Meeting of the Minds on April 22nd was an exploration of how groups at the Women's Center are alienating to women of different cultures, and what we can do to rectify that. Women from different cultural backgrounds came to the meeting.

Sometimes a woman will come to a group and no one talks to her or responds to things she says to the group as a whole. While such experiences are alienating to everybody, women of color and women with disabilities may well attribute group members' collective failure to interact with them to prejudice. Comments conveying understanding or asking for clarification let the speaker know she's been heard and that her perspective is valued, and provide an opportunity to have discussions that lead to a more meaningful and inclusive understanding. We believe taking steps to insure that all the groups are welcoming to all women will result in a much more receptive environment for women from diverse backgrounds as well as an overall improvement in the Women's Center.

Women who attended the meeting are putting together a questionnaire to get feedback on how women attending meetings here feel about them. We are also writing up suggestions for good ways to facilitate or conduct meetings, which will be distributed to all Women's Center groups for their feedback, and then general guidelines will be drawn up. Our goal is to make our groups more comfortable for newcomers, and thus more accountable to all women who want to participate.

GROUP EVALUATION RESULTS

We received 115 evaluation forms from 9 groups which meet regularly at the Women's Center. The forms were distributed to groups during the summer.

The results were overwhelmingly positive. For example, 84 women said they received what they wanted from their group; only 3 said they did not. Ninety-nine women said they felt welcomed by the group; only 4 did not.

When asked what they wanted from the group, most women (79) said a supportive network, followed closely by making friends (74) and emotional support (73). While responses were varied to the question, "What do you like about the group?" the item most commonly checked off was "content of discussion" (81) followed by "gain insight" (75) and "feeling less isolated" (73).

The most common complaints about the groups were: there was an insufficient opportunity to express oneself (9); some group members were intolerant of others (8); and few women participate in the discussion (8).

There was some marked differences between groups. For example, incest survivors were much more likely to want "emotional healing" than were women who attend more general discussion groups who were more apt to be seeking friendships and a "supportive network." And survivors most valued "feeling safe" and "less isolated," while women who attend rap groups valued the "content of the discussion" and an opportunity to "gain insight."

Here are some things that women had to say about the groups:

"It seems like one of the incredible oases on this earth -- it magically 'works.'"

"The group seems so accepting and inclusive of all individual group members"

"This forum is sacred and precious to me."

"I feel that others are listening, accepting me."

"The facilitator . . . is excellent. (She) helped me to stop feeling like a victim and learn a tremendous amount about myself."

. . . "welcoming, confidential, safe, participatory atmosphere."

"Since I'm here, I am not isolated."

"Can't imagine where I'd be without this place."

FUNDRAISING REVIEW

We want to give you an update of our fundraising progress during the last fiscal year which ran from July 1, 1988 to June 30, 1989. During that period, the Women's Center received \$41,535 from foundations, corporations and small businesses: \$36,035 was for general operating expenses and \$5,500 was for community outreach. Additionally, we received \$7,483 from individual donations.

The Women's Center relies exclusively on private donations; we receive no government funding. The generosity of donors makes it possible for any woman to make use of the Women's Center. This is crucial because many of the women who call or come to the Women's Center can not afford to pay for services.

The Women's Center is able to offer so much on such a low budget because over 100 women volunteer in various capacities, answering the phone, updating referrals, facilitating groups, working on projects, putting the newsletter together . . . These donations of time and energy are essential. Without volunteers, there would be no Women's Center.

Below is a list of foundations and corporations which gave grants to the Women's Center in the past fiscal year. Their generosity keeps the doors of this Women's Center open.

Bank of Boston Corporation
Bank of New England
Bioran Medical Lab
Boston Globe Foundation
Cambridge Community Foundation
Cambridge Trust Company
Camp Dresser & McKee
Central Surplus
Joyce Chen Restaurant
Lillian & Harry Cowan Foundation Corp
Digital Equipment Corporation
Dole Publishing Company
Alice Willard Dorr Foundation
East Cambridge Savings Bank
Evans Medical, Inc.
Fabreeka Products
First American Title Insurance Company
Gillette Company
Goldberg Charitable Trust
GTE Government Systems
GTE Laboratories
Hartford Insurance Group
Harvard Cooperative Society
Harvard University
Houghton Chemical Company

IBM Corporation
John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Co.
Kirkland Construction Company
Arthur D. Little, Inc.
Loomis Sayles & Company
New Words Bookstore
New World Bank
Amelia Peabody Charitable Fund
Rabb Charitable Trust
Raytheon Company
Savitz & Wainger Medical Association
Standard Thomson
C.B. Stein Builders & Associates, Inc.
Superior Brands, Inc.
Tapestry, Inc.
University Bank and Trust Company
US Trust Middlesex
Watertown Eye Associates
Frederick E. Weber Charities Corporation
Women's Mental Health Collective

MOVIE MAKING

On Thursday, May 18th, the Women's Center metamorphosed into a chaotic mixture of males, machinery & a few women. This shocking turn of events occurred because a homey place was needed for a film about the life of a battered woman who now volunteers at Transition House. The shelter's address had to remain secret (the Women's Center is their 'public' address), so we were asked to let the Center masquerade as a shelter for one day.

The woman who was featured in the film endured frequent and brutal attacks by her husband, a prominent and respected member of the community.

The film is about her successful flight from violence. She was 61 when she managed to escape, buy a bus ticket from New York to Boston with money she had hidden in the lining of her purse, call information and ask for a battered women's hotline. She now has built a new life here and spends a lot of time doing public speaking on battering. Filming which occurred from 7:30am-7:30pm included a volunteer answering the crisis hotline the first time the woman called the shelter, and a battered women's support group, with children in the background.

The film is being made by United Way, and will be distributed across the country. Workplaces will agree to show it, and require their employees to attend. Thus, both battered women and batterers will be exposed to it.

In the past year, several women from different countries have visited the Women's Center. Some of these women dropped in unannounced. They gaped at the large selection of resource information available in the sitting room, eagerly read our newsletter and calendar, asked questions, and walked around in a kind of blissful daze muttering, "How did you do it?" and "This is incredible." Some women even photographed our sitting room so they could show friends back home.

At times, our interactions with international visitors were scheduled and more formal. Ms. Yesuko Vtaugi, the director of the Women's Bureau for the Japanese Socialist Party, Amanda Centeno Espinoza, from the Nicaraguan ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, and Rina Sen Gupta from the Rural Employment Sector Programme in Bangladesh met with Women's Center staff during the last year.

Violence against women, poverty, blaming the victim, and men treating women as possessions are common in all of our countries. Within each country, women's struggle against patriarchal abuses occurs within a social, economic and political context. The form of women's struggle for freedom arises out of this context and is partially determined by it. What is common to us all is that women are rallying for justice in every part of the world. In Bangladesh, a woman participates in creating theatrical performances designed to change sexism. In Nicaragua, women confront their Sandinista brothers with their machismo attitudes.

Behind each international visitor, there are thousands of women in her country who are fighting against sexism with courage, wit and endurance. The Women's Liberation Movement consists of these all too often unsung heroes. Our international visitors gave us a glimpse of the magnitude of the struggle. We are left with a powerful sense of connection with women in different countries, and the knowledge that each of us has a part to play in the unfolding of a world where justice, equality and respect prevail.

MAKING THE NEWS

The Women's Center has received media attention from both the Boston Herald (August 1) and the Boston Globe magazine (October 1) in the last several months. The focus of the Herald article was on the local plethora of support groups for women, many of which meet at the Women's Center. The Globe Magazine article was about healing from child sexual abuse and mentioned the Women's Center's referral services and the group Healing through Art which meets at the Center. The Women's Center was also featured in the Boston Foundation's summer newsletter which focused on women's organizations. And at the close of a program on incest, Channel 4's People are Talking broadcast the Center's name and phone number for anyone seeking additional information.

The Women's Center makes the news in other, more hidden ways, too. For example, Women Center staff were instrumental in linking up survivors and Globe reporters for the magazine article on healing from sexual abuse. With increasing frequency, reporters who are writing articles on a wide variety of topics -- sexual abuse by physicians to lesbian parenting -- call the Women's Center asking who they can interview for a story. Center staff make many phone calls until we locate appropriate women who are willing to contribute to the news story or television program. And then we wait to see the news we helped to make.

GETTING WHAT YOU WANT

Women's Center staff are constantly asked to locate resources on a wide range of topics. You can call and ask us about a specific support group, a job training program, a therapist, a woman electrician, a shelter . . . We are continually updating, expanding and organizing referral information. Several volunteers have worked tirelessly on updating our referrals. They have made countless phone calls, sent out letters, and entered information on our computer to help us keep our referral information up to date. This is an ongoing task since we have referrals on what seems like every conceivable subjects, from AIDS resources to shelters for runaway youth. If you have a who, where, when or what question, call us!

