

♀ ON OUR WAY

Newsletter of the Women's Center
46 Pleasant Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

(617) 354-8807
TTY and VOICE

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DEAR FRIEND OF THE WOMEN'S CENTER

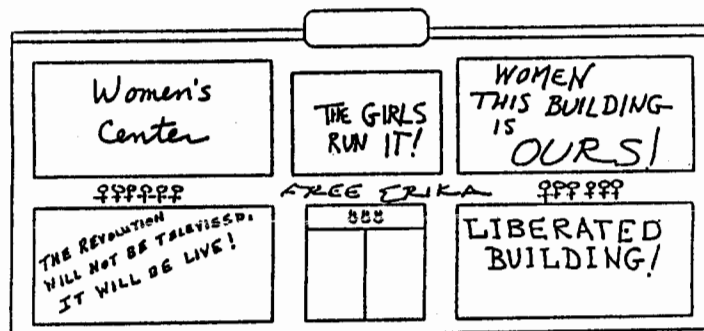
Every year I try to write something that will express the value of the Women's Center and motivate people to contribute. This year, realizing that the Center is about to celebrate its 20th birthday, I decided to look back on our history for inspiration. I'd like to share what I learned with you. I hope your belief in the Women's Center will inspire you to send whatever amount you can to support our work.

I carefully take down the box which holds the Women's Center's first editions of this newsletter, ON OUR WAY, and pour over the hand-typed pages. The idea for a Women's Center occurred to many different women in the area. In 1970, members of Bread and Roses, an early feminist group, wrote: "Many of us have spent long hours locating people and resources, arranging for places to meet and work -- such time might better have been spent on the projects themselves." Women began fundraising and househunting in the summer of 1970, but were unsuccessful in finding a suitable location for a women's center.

Shortly before International Women's Day in 1971, women from Bread and Roses and several other women's groups decided to coordinate their efforts and take over a building. After carefully examining several possible sites, they decided on 888 Memorial Drive, a former knitting mill and a barely-used Harvard-owned building.

Early in the day on March 6, 1971, a few women entered the building and announced that the building was being taken over. Later, hundreds of women participated in an International Women's Day March which proceeded to the building, and many of the participants walked right in. There, women held dances, dinners, consciousness raising groups, self-defense classes, a children's party for kids from the neighborhood, and frequent strategy meetings to discuss dealing with the police and with Harvard University.

Some women stayed the whole time, and hundreds of others came for all kinds of reasons, many bringing food and blankets and other supplies. The place was buzzing with women's exhilarated voices, and spirits were high even though Harvard had turned off the heat, electricity and water and the police glowered ominously outside.



SOME OF THE SLOGANS PAINTED ON 888 MEMORIAL DRIVE BY THE WOMEN WHO TOOK OVER THE BUILDING IN MARCH, 1971

After 10 days, a judge ordered that the police go into the building and arrest the women, using whatever force necessary, "and not listen to those do-gooders who say 'police brutality'. When a woman lawyer attempted to intervene on their behalf, the judge angrily quipped, "Get the bums out."

The women vacated the building before the police arrived, tacking a sign onto the front of the building which said, "Sorry MDC police, we could not wait." In a public statement, the women said that

they decided to leave so that the "love and energy generated" could be "used towards the further creation of a center for women, rather than in the courtroom with legal hassles." (Soon after, Harvard tore down the building, leaving the lot vacant for many years. Now our first Women's Center is the bush and shrub area of Grower's Market.) The building takeover so inspired Boston area feminists that enough money was raised for the downpayment on a building.

Maybe it is the starry-eyed nostalgia that comes over me when I hear a particularly good story, but right now, I would like to have been around then. I wonder what it would feel like to take over a building and paint boldly on the outside: THE GIRLS RUN IT! or WOMEN THIS BUILDING IS OURS! I wonder if I could believe that 10 days and nights of happy chaos, and the newfound sense of personal power and solidarity, would be a solid foundation for a lasting organization.



During the summer of 1971, the Women's Center established itself temporarily at 595 Massachusetts Ave., renting office space from the Women's Law Commune and putting out the first issues of ON OUR WAY.

As I read these early newsletters, I become poignantly aware that I am a generation apart from the women who founded the Center. Then, there were few resources existing for women. There was no rape crisis center, no battered women's shelters, no support groups for incest survivors, and few places for lesbians to go. Women were beginning to passionately challenge the many manifestations of patriarchy. Our early newsletters are sprinkled with articles on internalized oppression, economic inequality, women in prison, non-traditional jobs for women, and the connection between male violence at home and the war in Vietnam. They also have telltale signs that the new

organization was struggling to keep up with its ambitious beginnings, for example: "Office hours are erratic. Keep trying or come be the staff." At the very end of one of the first newsletters, appended as if an afterthought, "P.S. Financial assistance would be appreciated."

Finally, in January, 1972, the Women's Center moved into its present location at 46 Pleasant St. In preparation for this event, there was a 1 1/2 day long, open community meeting to decide how to run the Women's Center. The goal was to create an organization that was non-hierarchical and operated by consensus.

The first year in this building was especially rocky. While many women had participated in determining how decisions would be made, attendance at ongoing meetings was sparse. Sometimes, no one was here to answer the phone. Women who needed a place to "crash" started living here. Neighborhood youth harassed women entering the building. And after a fire was started by vandals, cutting off the gas and electricity, morale was especially low. At a general meeting on October 5, 1972, several women proposed that the building be sold.

But those women did pull the Center through its turbulent beginnings. An autumn, 1972 issue of ON OUR WAY reports that the house was getting painted, women were working together to fix up the building after the fire, and it was decided that someone should move in for stability and security. There were 'introductory meetings' (which helped new women learn about the Center), business meetings, and lesbian meetings. The Women's School, which began in April, 1971, was organizing their fall term. The Emotional Counseling Group and Women Against Rape would get started in the following months. The Women's Center was on its way.

I wouldn't want you to think that it was clear sailing from then on. Many women's centers have started; far fewer have survived. And the women who kept plugging on learned that the world was going to change not all at once, but one woman at a time.

If my peers and I missed out on some of the exuberance of starting a new organization, we also escaped the headaches. Unlike my sisters back then, I don't have to attend countless meetings to work out a system of governing a new organization. And, my peers and I can

benefit from the resources that hundreds of women worked to create. Some of these, like the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, started at the Women's Center, and several others started with the active assistance of the Center, including two shelters for battered women, Transition House and Finex House, and an alternative mental health organization, Elizabeth Stone House. Incest Resources, which facilitated drop in discussion groups for incest survivors beginning in 1983, was the first of many groups and organizations for survivors at the Center.

Throughout the years, thousands of women have worked to create what the Women's Center is today. What was erected with so many hands and so much care must never be taken for granted. If the Women's Center has touched your life in any way, please give to make sure it is here for the next woman who needs it. All contributions, large and small, are needed. It's up to all of us to keep the Women's Center alive. Remember, WOMEN, THIS BUILDING IS OURS!

Here's to the next 20 years!

In the beginning, it was very clear that something new was being created. Now, a lot of time is spent caring for what we have: up-to-date referral information, about 40 groups and projects, and the house itself. For me, and others too, it may be harder to see that we are still creating this Women's Center and this Women's Liberation Movement. It's going to take a lot more struggling, plugging on, great ideas, rolls of toilet paper, and peak experiences. Like our sisters 20 years ago, we must believe that we can make a difference.

In Sisterhood, Alice Poberge

HOW TO BE 20
MARCH 15, 1971 - MARCH 15, 1991

How to celebrate the Women's Center's 20th birthday is the question. Many answers were suggested at the first planning meeting: a party, skits enacting the building takeover, a panel discussion about our early history, or about what we've learned and what we want to do in the next 20 years, an open mike for women to say how/when they were connected to the Women's Center and what they are doing now. . .

We talked about making a short video celebrating the Women's Center, a time line of all the groups that have met at the Center, and a special newsletter.

Nothing is settled yet, including when and where the event(s) would happen. There will undoubtedly be committees for the skit, advertising, putting together a panel, finding a moderator, decorations, sound system, refreshments, finding a wheelchair accessible space, etc. If you want to help with any aspect, please call Judy or Alice at 354-8807.

Let's add another memorable event to our history!



BE IN A VIDEO

Would you like to talk a bit about what the Women's Center means or has meant to you as part of a short video celebrating the Center's 20th anniversary? Or do you have any suggestions about what to include in the video? If the answer is YES, call 354-8807 and leave a message for Kristin. Thanks!

CWIC VIDEO SHOWS

Cambridge Women in Cable, commonly referred to as CWIC, is a women's video production group that produces one TV show every month. In the two years that CWIC has been producing, they have created shows about self-defense, homophobia, midwifery, housing, and many other compelling women's issues. Their programs are cablecast every Wednesday at 9pm on channel 19 in Cambridge.

Now you can see CWIC's videos at the Women's Center! At 8:30pm, on the last Wednesday of every month, CWIC will show their previous month's production in the Center's living room. The show will be followed by a lively discussion.

This month, come see a show about local women politicians and hear about the personal side of running for and being in office on Wed, Dec. 26th, 8:30-10pm.

DIFFERENT WAYS TO VOLUNTEER AT THE CENTER

There are many ways you could help out here at the Center. You could take on a staff position which involves talking to women who call and visit the Center, directing women to groups, tracking down referral information, etc. You could work on a project like the Women's Community Cancer Project, the Incest Survivors Network, or the Library.

You could start a group. Women tell us they would like to have groups for women who were physically and/or emotionally abused as children, for women who have had abortions, and for mothers. These groups don't exist at the Center because no one has come forward and volunteered to start the group, be there at each meeting, and hang in there even if no one shows up at first.

But there's plenty more you could do for the Center. We especially need people who can take responsibility for doing any of the following tasks, reliably and independently.

Pick up 100 copies of the new issue of Sojourner and bring it to the Center each month.

Purchase supplies like tea, coffee, garbage bags, toilet paper, tampons, cat food and cat litter, etc. (we would reimburse you if you want).

Volunteer to do child care for mothers attending groups at the Center (day or night times).

Revise referral information which involves taking a section (such as abortion, adoption, birth control, housing or employment) and expand, update and organize it.

Assimilate information we receive into relevant sections in our referral notebooks.

Recycle returnable cans & bottles.

Volunteer to be a "friend in need" for a woman who needs someone to talk to periodically, either to get through a hard time, or for a one-time event like a court appearance.

Type new information into our computer.

Offer to be on a phone list of women we can call for help when a woman needs services we can't provide, like a ride to the doctor or to court.

Come by and shovel the snow off the front walk.

Volunteer to make new curtains, do other sewing projects or repair furniture.

Xerox forms and flyers.

Help with spring, fall and winter cleaning such as washing windows and woodwork.

Be a person we could call when we need an extra hand, for whatever task comes up, such as errands, finding specialized services for a woman in need, or a newsletter mailing.

If you see something that needs doing at the Center, ask if you can take care of it yourself rather than waiting for someone else to do it.



APPRECIATION

The Women's Center would like to thank the following foundations and corporations for their generous support in the past fiscal year. We wish we could list each and every individual donor, but the list would be much too long. We need and sincerely appreciate all donations, large and small.

FOUNDATION/CORPORATION DONORS

Badger Engineers, Inc.
Bank of New England, N.A.
The Boston Foundation
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New Words
Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College
George and Beatrice Sherman Family
Charitable Trust
Standard-Thomson Corporation
University Bank
Uno Restaurants, Inc.
US Trust Middlesex

CORRECTION

In our last newsletter, we said that the Women's Cancer Support Group was floundering. Happily, we were mistaken about this and we apologize to the group and to the Women's Community Cancer Project. Please read the attached article about the wonderful work being done by this group.

WOMEN'S COMMUNITY CANCER PROJECT

The Women's Community Cancer Project was founded in September, 1989 and is a volunteer organization created to make changes in the current medical, social, and political approaches to cancer, particularly as they affect women. One of our main goals is to provide support services for women with cancer. During the past year we have had a general project meeting the first Thursday of every month. The support group for women with cancer or cancer histories, and lovers and friends of people with cancer has met the second and fourth Thursday of every month.

Several sub-committees have been meeting: Direct Service - created the Support Group and continues to work on other support services; Resource Directory Group - which has been working to create a directory; Political Action - has been meeting often and inspired us to do what the Boston Globe called an "informational picket" outside of the International Breast Disease Congress, held at the Hynes Auditorium. We also have a Co-ordinating Committee which meets one to two times a month. The Co-ordinating Committee's purpose is to know what is going on throughout the Project, within the sub-committees, to be a general clearinghouse, and to take care of everyday business.

We have had a lot of coverage; in Sojourner and the Boston Globe several times, as well as in Gay Community News, New Directions for Women, and the Boston Herald. We were consulted and mentioned on a Channel 5 newscast. Channel 7's Boston Common Show had members from the Project, MIT's WMBR "Say It Sister" did a show and Cambridge Cable did a video on the Project and women with cancer.

We participated in the Audre Lorde conference and recently members of the Project were in Washington, D.C. to attend the conference sponsored by the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship. While

there, they met with a representative of the National Institutes of Health. They also met with members from the Mautner Project for Lesbians with Cancer.

We have many things planned, including a Same Diagnosis Registry.

We actively encourage all interested women to participate in our Project. If you are interested, please call us at 354-9888. Please tell everyone you know about the Project. Our meetings are open to all women.

MULTIPLE PERSONALITIES SUPPORT GROUP

Closed Support Group for Women with Multiple Personalities has openings for a few new members. The group, which has a self help model, meets every other Saturday at the Women's Center. For more information on how to join, leave your name with the Women's Center and a group member will contact you.

EXPECTANT LESBIAN PARENTS

We are four months pregnant and are interested in a support group for expectant lesbian parents - couples and singles. Let's get together for mutual support now as well as for future friendships for our babies. Call Andrea or Libby at 491-8285.

LESBIANS CHOOSING CHILDREN NETWORK

On December 13th, the final meeting of the Lesbians Choosing Children Network will be held - unless we get some help.

Hundreds of women have received information and support through the Network. But for those lesbians contemplating motherhood, and looking for answers to their questions, there will soon no longer be a Network to turn to.

The Network is in desperate need of someone to help facilitate meetings. There is still a great need to reach those lesbians "choosing children", but we need input from lesbian parents. We need to hear from women with experience in alternative insemination, adoption, or any phase of motherhood and parenting.

If you are a parent, or just thinking about parenting, and can help the Network continue, please contact the Women's Center, or call Michelle at 508-458-0740.

ONGOING GROUPS AT THE WOMEN'S CENTER

MONDAY

- Support for Battered Women.....7:30-9pm
- Women's NA 12 step.....7:30-9pm
- Lesbian Rap.....8-10pm
- Boston Bisexual Women's Network-Intro
(1st Mon, even #'d months)...7:30-9:30pm
- All Center Meeting (biweekly).....6-8pm
- Reproductive Rights National
Network R2N2 (Dec 10 & 17th)....7-9:45pm
- Lesbian Partners & Ex-Partners of Incest
Survivors (1st & 3rd Mon.).....7-8:30pm
- Coming Out As Disabled (3rd Mon).7:30-9pm

TUESDAY

- Bisexual Women's Rap.....7:30-9:30pm
- 30+ Lesbian Rap.....7-8:30pm
- Other Mothers (2nd Tues., monthly)...7-9pm
(lesbian non-biological co-parents)

WEDNESDAY

- Lesbian Al-Anon (childcare).....6:30-8pm
- Writing Support Group.....7:30-9:30pm
- Battered Women's Support Group (Weekly
except 3rd Wed. of month).....7-8:30pm
- Video show and discussion
(last Wed., monthly).....8:30-10pm

THURSDAY

- Incest Survivors Discussion
Group (weekly).....7:30-9:30pm
(facilitated 3rd Thursday, Sept.-June)
- Women's Community Cancer Project
(1st Thurs., monthly).....7-9pm
- Cancer Support Group
(2nd & 4th Thurs monthly).....7-9pm
- Lesbians Choosing Children Network
(2nd Thurs, monthly).....7:30-10pm

FRIDAY

- Birthmothers (1st & 3rd Fri).... 7-9:30pm
- Incest Survivors Anonymous.....6:30-8pm

SATURDAY

- Women's Writing Group
(biweekly).....noon-2pm
- Open discussion on Coming Out for Women
of All Ages(monthly, 1st Sat)...11am-1pm
- Support Group for Women with Chronic
Illness (3rd Sat).....12 noon-1:30pm

CENTER HOURS

Monday - Thursday	10am - 10pm
Friday	10am - 8pm
Saturday	11am - 2pm

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

LESBIAN RAP

Mondays, 8-10pm

- Dec 17 Women's Spirituality
- 24 & 31 NO RAP
- Jan 7 Being gay & suicide
- 14 How to get re-established
in a new place
- 21 NO RAP
- 28 Night Out (call for info)

BISEXUAL WOMEN'S RAP

Tuesdays, 7:30-9:30pm

- Dec 18 Political Correctness
- Dec 25 & Jan 1 NO RAP
- Jan 8 Sex
- 15 Family Relationships
- 22 Erotic Writing
- 29 '2 in 20' Film Showing
(with potluck)

30+ LESBIAN RAP

Tuesdays, 7-8:30pm

- Dec 18 Relocating Together
- Dec 25 & Jan 1 NO RAP
- Jan 8 Issues Around Food
- 15 Women's Spirituality
- 22 Lesbians with Disabilities
- 29 Lesbian Sex Secrets
(start at 6:30pm)

SPECIAL EVENT

Wednesday, December 26, 8:30-10pm -- Come watch a video, "Local Women Politicians: The personal side of running for office and being in office," followed by discussion. Produced by Cambridge Women in Cable.

FACILITATED OPEN DISCUSSION FOR INCEST SURVIVORS

Third Thursday, 7:30-9:15pm

- Dec 20 The Little Girl/s Within
- Jan 17 Anger
- Feb 21 Taking Care of Ourselves
- March 21 Sexuality

