



The Women's Center

ON OUR WAY

Newsletter of the Women's Center
46 Pleasant Street, Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 354-8807

Spring 2007

VOLUNTEERS: OUR GREATEST STRENGTH

The Women's Center has undergone a transformation over the past eight months. After a long period of increasing financial difficulty, the Center was in an extremely grave financial crisis and drastic steps needed to be taken. And they have been! The Center no longer has paid staff or consultants, *except* for Ming Chang, who keeps the Center running by doing her wonderful and crucial work as Center Coordinator. The budget was trimmed as much as it possibly could be by removing all paid programming, other items such as snow removal and cleaning service, and reducing fuel costs. Some of these decisions were very difficult to make – especially cutting needed staff and valuable programs – but each one was necessary to enable the Center to stay open. With our skeletal budget and a new operating plan, we began the long, slow climb back to solvency.

At the same time, the Board sent out an appeal for help from the community, and you answered! The response has been nothing less than heroic. Volunteers have pitched in to do jobs ranging from cleaning, painting and repairs to bookkeeping and computer and web site maintenance. In addition, individual gifts of money and supplies

(such as paper, toner, toilet paper, and environmentally-friendly cleaning products) have literally kept the Center alive. While we have a very long way to go before the Center is again financially stable, the community response to the crisis has been heartening and invaluable. Volunteers are once again the life blood of the Center, as they were for so many years. The Center is a happy, busy, and well-used place.

Last fall we held two all-volunteer work days on Sundays when the Center is closed, one primarily for cleaning, and another for painting and general repairs. The second day included male allies as well as women. Both were very helpful in improving the physical condition of the Center, but, again, there is still much to do. Anyone interested in participating in this work, with or without experience, should contact Judy Norris at (617) 354-6394. We are holding another Clean-Up & Fix-Up Day on Sunday, June 3, 10am-4pm, lunch provided, open to all. Please come if you can, and let Judy know if you'd like to help with organizing or supervising, or with a specific task.

We would also like to start some volunteer-run committees to get needed work done and involve more women in running the Center, such as Outreach,

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Diversity, Newsletter, Kitchen Oversight, Furnishing and Decorating, Painting, Gardening, and Repairs. If you would like to head up or participate in any of these, please contact Ming, ming@cambridgewomenscenter.org.

Our struggle is by no means over. The Center is operating without a fundraiser for the first time in decades. Our fundraising is now conducted entirely by a hardworking but small Fundraising Committee and some other volunteers, and often we have only enough funds to cover expenses for one to two months. Our situation is still precarious, but we've come this far, and

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WISH LIST



- Air Purifier/Dehumidifier
- Portable CD Player/Radio
- Desktop Computers: Pentium IV or Faster processor, Hard Drive 10GB or larger; Flat Monitors
- Printer for Computer Lab with Toner Cartridges
- Large Coffee Maker
- CD-ROM drives & CD burners
- Good Desk Chairs
- Computer Tables
- Gift Certificates for Home Depot, Staples, Target, and Tags
- Printer Paper
- Paper Towels and Toilet Paper
- Non-Perishable Food in Cans, Bags, or Boxes (Within Expiration Dates)
- Coffee, Tea, Honey, Cream
- Food Containers, Trash Bags and Sandwich Bags
- Tin Foil, Plastic Wrap
- Rugs in Good Condition
- Small Couch for Children's Room
- Lamps
- Eco-Friendly and Unscented Hand Soap and Dishwashing Liquid
- Cell Phones

The Women's Center

46 Pleasant Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 354-8807

Website:

www.cambridgewomenscenter.org
What's up at the Women's Center?
Check out our monthly calendar on
the website.

Email:

info@cambridgewomenscenter.org

Hours:

Monday-Friday: 10am-8pm
Saturday: 10am-3pm
We are closed on major holidays.

Helpline: (617) 354-8807

Business line: (617) 354-6394



Volunteers

*The Women's Center gratefully
acknowledges the ongoing efforts and
contributions of our volunteers.*

*Thank you for giving so generously of
your time and of yourselves.*

The Women's Center relies on the
generosity of the community to
provide a wealth of free
programming.

All donations are tax-deductible.

For further information about
various volunteering opportunities
and arrangement for donations,
contact the Center Coordinator Ming
at :
(617) 354-6394
ming@cambridgewomenscenter.org

SURVIVOR STUFFED ANIMAL ADOPTION

New to the Women's Center is a collection of donated new and gently-used stuffed animals. They are to be taken freely by adult survivors of abuse and kept for their own. Many survivors, especially those who endured abuse as children, find that cuddling a soft toy helps in their healing. Some find that the difficult nighttime hours are eased by the company of a fuzzy friend and protector. Survivors may visit the large meeting room on the 3rd floor, and take the stuffed friend of their choice. If you think you may be an abuse survivor, you qualify. Anyone may donate stuffed animals in good condition to replenish the supply. Please contact the Women's Center for information about donating.

The Women's Center accepted this program this February, when the organization that founded it, The Healing and Arts Studio, closed its doors due to staffing and funding constraints after 11 years of serving the survivor community. (www.healingandarts.org)

We, the members of the Healing and Arts community, are so pleased that the program will continue in the Women's Center!

*Janice St. Clair
Board Member
Healing and Arts Studio*

WORDS FROM THE VOLUNTEERS

Volunteering at The Women's Center for the past few months has been a pretty interesting experience. Never before have I been in the presence of such a dedicated staff and such a variety of women in general. The range of perspectives and backgrounds I have encountered has opened my eyes not only to some of the harsh realities facing women but also to the strength of community and the possibilities of hope. For some women, the Women's Center is a place to relax, work, and socialize. For others, it is a place of refuge and escape; a place where understanding is expected and provided without hesitation. I've spoken to women about health, sexuality, religion, race, culture, art, politics, and dating. I've heard horror stories, anecdotes, and the kind of blunt honesty that knocks you back on your heels. But no matter how different my interactions are, the general consensus is one of fondness for the Center. I am honored to be a part of something that has made such a lasting and positive impression.

~ Cami

I have been volunteering at the Women's Center for six months. I wasn't sure what to expect when I first walked through the doors at 46 Pleasant Street last summer, but any preconceived notions of what a "Center" might be were quickly dispelled. Instead of a clinical setting, I found cozy rooms painted in warm colors. No impersonal receptionist, but a friendly welcoming staff member. The art on the walls, the laughter from the living room, even the creaky floorboards gave a sense that this place was different; this place had character.

Since that time, I have met women from all walks of life and with very different stories to tell. I have helped a woman write her resume and successfully apply for a new job. I have found emergency shelter for a woman with no place to go, and I have acted as a sounding board for a caller who just needed someone to listen. I suppose it makes sense that the Women's Center does not feel like an office. Because it offers the kind of help and advice one would expect to find at home.

~ Sage

VOLUNTEERS : Our Greatest Strength
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we ask your further help. *Anything* you can do – asking friends and family to donate, asking your company to provide a matching gift, sending us leads about relevant grants or other funding opportunities, joining the Fundraising Committee to contribute your energy – will help keep our Center going. Please email board@cambridgewomenscenter.org if you are interested in participating in this effort in any way.

As a member of the very small, very new, all-volunteer Board of Trustees that is now riveted on raising money for the Center’s future, I want to say how grateful I am to everyone who has pitched in with time, skills, donations, and other gifts from the heart. Everyone working at and for the Center has a deep commitment both to the Center’s survival and to ensuring that all women feel welcome at this special place. We are inspired by the women we see at the Center every day and by the legacies left behind by so many. Each woman who visits the Center adds a piece of her spirit to our endeavor. This may be hard to capture in statistics, but it gives our organization its unique power and has kept it going for 36 years.

Please, if you can, become involved in rescuing and rebuilding the Women’s Center, contributing your energy, help and/or funds. And again, thanks to all who have stepped up, recently and over the years.

In sisterhood, solidarity, and hope,
Laura Cherry
Women’s Center Board of Trustees

Join Our e-Community!

The Women’s Center invites you to become part of our newly enhanced e-community. Submit your name and email address to us and you will receive monthly calendar mailings, the newsletter, and announcements. This is a great opportunity to connect with the latest programs and happenings at the Center, and to learn new ways to support our community.

To join, go to: www.cambridgewomenscenter.org and click on the link *Join Our e-Community*. Thank you for being a part of this wonderful community.



The Women’s Center invites you to the first
Gardening Committee Meeting

If you are interested in being responsible for
creating a nice garden for the Women’s Center,
please join us on

Saturday, May 5, 1pm

Ideas on how to work together on developing
the dream garden will be discussed.

Call Ming at 617-354-6394 if you have any
questions. Hope to see you here.



INCEST SURVIVOR QUILT



How can we share, for public viewing, a representation of incest that includes beauty, hope, creativity, and the reality of how incest exists and impacts families?

Over 2 years ago, The Faith Quilt Project sponsored and Incest Resources, Inc. and the Women’s Center supported the making of the Incest Survivor Quilt. In making the quilt, several incest survivors met regularly for over a year. In that time we decided to honor all parts of ourselves, the parts that are strong as well as the parts of ourselves that have been struggling and are more difficult to claim. The quilt-making process felt transformative as we realized that we are complex and honorable people and that it is possible to talk about being an incest survivor with a sense of dignity.

We depict in the quilt a series of women, each honored as aspects of ourselves both as incest survivors and as members of the broader community. They are: Invisible Woman, Fragmented Woman, Nurturing Woman, Righteous Anger Woman, Woman of Sexuality, Woman of Shame, and Celebration Woman. Our bodies are so crucial in our stories and experience and so, while creating imagery about our perceptions with beautiful fabric, we naturally began making representations of our own bodies as part of the composition. The center of the quilt is made of concentric rings of color and quilting lines symbolizing the wholeness of each of us individually and as part of a unified world – a hopeful vision we all share.

On February 25, 2007, after several exhibits, the quilt finally came home to the Women’s Center. Over 20 women gathered to share and receive the story of the quilt at its unveiling and dedication. We want to thank all the women who created this quilt and all who came to celebrate and welcome it as a work of art in the community. Please come visit the quilt on the third floor and join the circle of women with dignity and compassion.

We realized success with the quilt. The proof? When people gather around it, there exists beauty and celebration alongside a public discussion regarding incest.

~ Michelle Harris

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Women's Center is an attractive, multi-storied Victorian house. Set along a quiet street in Cambridge, the unique aspect of this building is not necessarily apparent from the outside. Upon entering the house, however, one realizes that this place is actually a haven.

One might wonder why women would need a safe place to repose. The staff at the Women's Center already knows the answer to this question: domestic violence. A horrible scourge in our society, it touches more people in this country than we care to contemplate. Domestic violence is the continuous physical assault (or attempt at which) of one family or household member by another member of the same family or household. Victims generally feel powerless or even guilty. Nevertheless, the law in Massachusetts is clear: No one should accept or expect such abuse as an inevitable part of their lives. This idea is the essence of *Chapter 209A*.

This law permits the victim to take out a protection order (a restraining order) against the abuser, a civil procedure. While a number of women might be aware of this option, they might fear repercussions. But the law also provides recourse for victims in the event that the abuser violates the order. Indeed, the matter then becomes a criminal one¹.

Additionally, the *Anti-SLAPP* statute² can protect the victim. Occasionally, an abuser might engage in legal intimidation in order to silence the victim. Such a lawsuit, however, cannot proceed without a "substantial basis"³. The abuser cannot simply file a suit claiming that the restraining order is harassment and that no abuse ever took place. Hence, this Statute acts as a bulwark against abuse of the legal system and further abuse of the victim.

Women who have suffered such abuse can obtain this information or access to it at the Women's Center. Although the staff at the Center recognizes the extreme importance in making these facts readily available, they also realize that their support for battered women needs to extend beyond the legal sphere. To that end, the staff at the Women's Center helps women find a place in a shelter if they need a safe place to go. The Center equally runs Moving on: Support for Abused Women. This program acts as an umbrella for many activities such as support groups, crisis and peer counseling and also a 55-hour per week helpline. All of these services are free of charge and are operated by licensed psychologists and social workers, experienced group facilitators and trained volunteers.

The staff at the Women's Center would like to do more. Despite a raised awareness of domestic violence, it is still a problem in our society. This explains the Center's current and future efforts to strengthen its relationships with similar-minded organizations, thereby aiding more vulnerable women. With its dedicated staff and help from the community, the Women's Center will continue to serve as a consistent, non-judgmental voice of support and encouragement for abused women.

~Rachel Miselman

1. If the matter does become a criminal one, the *Massachusetts Victim Bill of Rights* offers the victim additional protection. This Bill of Rights is found in State law in Chapter 258B of the Massachusetts General Laws, March 1998.

COMMUNITY MATTERS

You come to the Women's Center for a support group, to use a computer, to staff the helpline, to find a warm space to rest. You may wonder what it's really for, or you may have many ideas about that, or you may not give it a thought.

Because you come or call, you are a part of the Women's Center community, and the Women's Center was founded to be a community resource, used and contributed to by as many women as possible. What's here is here because someone wanted or needed it for herself, or someone responded to a need she saw. And because thousands of dedicated women have put so much energy into keeping it going. And because foundations, corporations and individuals have seen its value and given financial support.

Is there a way you can feel more involved in the Women's Center? What about helping figure out what needs to be changed, and how, to make the Women's Center a place where women of different cultures, life styles, incomes, ages, and abilities all feel welcome, supported, and enthusiastic? That's always the goal and always the challenge of the Center. If you are interested in thinking more about this, come to the next Community Meeting on Tuesday, May 29 at 6:30pm. Let's brainstorm and discuss what needs to be done, and how we can get it done, to make our Women's Center stronger, better, more inclusive, and sustainable.

Whether you come to the meeting or not, think about whether you might want to participate in other ways. We are hoping women will join or create committees to help move the Center forward and to get involved in different aspects of running it. A top priority is any kind of help with fundraising. Here are some other possibilities:

- Kitchen oversight: Make sure there are supplies (right now, coffee, tea, milk, or cream, sugar (real and no-cal); checking there are some staples (such as oil, spices, rice...) and possibly picking up fresh fruit, vegetables and other foods from Food for Free on Inman Street, if it can be arranged with them.
- Diversity: Consider how to make the Women's Center more responsive and appealing to women from different cultures, such as adding new groups and workshops, trainings on diversity and anti-racism, and so on.
- Outreach: Get more (free and attention-grabbing) publicity through articles in local papers, interviews, public service announcements, etc.
- Gardening: Plan, plant and oversee vegetables where possible; tend to the rest of the garden, weeding, pruning, etc.

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2. *Anti-SLAPP* (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) Statute- The Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts cited c.231, sec.59H of this Statute when delivering the decision in the below case, *Fabre v. Walton* (2002).

This piece of legislation was enacted in December 1994.

3. *Fabre v. Walton*, 436 Mass. 517, 781 NE2d 780 (2002)

What It Means to Be A Muslim Woman

Who are Muslims and what is Islam all about? This is the central question which leads one to the controversial topic of Muslim women. Before and after 9/11, Muslims have been wrongly labeled with many negative stereotypes from the media and the government. I strongly believe it is the job of the average Muslim, like myself, to represent Islam and get rid of these stereotypes. The public must be educated and aware of who their Muslim neighbors are.

This is the purpose of these workshops at the Women's Center. Women need to know about other women's lives and beliefs in order to connect with each other as women. As a Muslim American woman I want to do just that, allow women of all shades and backgrounds be able to understand each other. So far, the response from the attendees at the workshop has been positively enthusiastic. I am definitely conducting more workshops because this is more than necessary to allow people to know the truth about Muslim women and our lives.

Here are the upcoming scheduled dates of this workshop: Saturday, April 21, 1-2:30pm, and Friday, May 4, 6-7:30pm.

~ Reem Al Zaim, Presenter

White Women Examining Privilege

In the spring of 2006 the Cambridge Women's Center ran a workshop titled "White Women Examining Privilege." After this workshop, a small group of us have continued to meet monthly to support one another in our continued examination of ourselves and the society in which we live. We focus on our feelings, our experiences, and ways to take action to challenge the systemic racism that we see in our daily lives. We would like to extend an invitation to other white women interested in examining privilege and challenging racism in ourselves and the world around us. If you are interested in joining us and would like to hear more, e-mail Nancy at zeek2946@yahoo.com. Our meetings are scheduled for the third Sunday of every month from 2 - 4pm.

Women of Color Reading Group

Women of Color Reading Group (WOC) meets monthly (the second Friday of each month) at the Cambridge Women's Center to discuss issues that affect women of color in America as related in the books we read. The objective of this group is to provide a supportive environment for women of color living in the Greater Boston area. The group is open to all who are interested; participants do not need to be women of color. Occasionally, authors will join us for discussion.

For more information about the group, please contact us at awocreadinggroup@gmail.com.

Explore Weighty Issues

In 4 sessions, you will explore the meaning of your weight problem in your life, set a goal and write an action plan, and use and share your inner wisdom and get support to make changes of your choice. Contact Gloria Dickerson to register at fitnesg11@yahoo.com.

The group takes place on 4 consecutive Tuesdays, starting April 24, 5-7pm.

Community Matters Continued from Page 4

- **Furnishing and Decorating:** Discuss and determine ways to enhance the Center. Request donations of furnishings, such as a small couch for the Children's Room, rugs, bookshelves, computer tables, office chairs, and computers!
- **Newsletter:** Plan and produce it in conjunction with Ming and the Board, and possibly ask business to purchase ads in it to support its production.
- **Painting:** Plan, prep and paint various rooms and areas, possibly including a few murals.
- **Repairs:** Do repairs and renovations; possibly plan and/or participate in Fix-Up Days.
- **Fundraising Event Planning:** Plan different aspects of an event, get (free) performers and space, (possibly create a program and contact organizations that would pay for ads in the program), advertise, staff the event (and/or oversee volunteers helping with various tasks). Proceeds would need to cover expenses and then some.

Please contact board@cambridgewomenscenter.org or call Ming at 617-354-6394 to discuss.

Judy Norris, Board of Trustees

Women's Center Community Meeting

Tuesday, May 29 at 6:30pm.

Let's pool our ideas on how we, working together, can make our Center stronger, more inclusive, and sustainable.

Please help revitalize the Women's Center!

Clean It, Fix It, or Paint It Day

Sunday, June 3

10am-4pm

Lunch included

Come for all or any part of the day!

All women and supportive men are welcome.
(A great opportunity for helpful fellas to pitch in!)

Feel free to bring a bucket or some tools.

Question? Contact Judy at 617-354-6394

Judy@cambridgewomenscenter.org

The Breaths I Take at the Women's Center

She comes in the night while he's at work. Working hard to keep her family together. She dials the helpline number, after dropping the kids off to school and arriving to her second job. She comes in the afternoon for a quick bite to eat. She works diligently on the computer to complete scholarship applications for her children, what a mother, oh what a dedicated mother.

She enters the front door, then quickly makes her way to the third floor, where she can finally shut out the shelter noise and enjoy some peace offered by the visiting sunlight. Her son was shot and killed sixteen years ago to the day. Some days she whispers into the phone so as not to wake her abusive boyfriend, and when he picks up on the other line, I pretend to be her co-worker, asking if she can cover my shift tomorrow. Tomorrow she will come in just after six o'clock in the evening, with her life weighing on her back, in a duffle bag. And the next day she will quit her job, she has assured me that it is not a healthy environment and she knows she must leave. She calls on this house, this house so full of life history, second chances, and friendships long lasting that the roof shall surely fly off any day now.

In this house, she seeks refuge from the bleak outlook the world seems to project, and then she takes that hate deep inside her, she shapes it into something more calm, more direct, and less fatal; she slowly takes that anger and fear and loneliness, and forms all of this ugliness she carries with her into a ball, then she throws it out far beyond forever. She tells me she throws up at least five times a day. Daily she asks herself when will she get a break. She has called for the third time today, breaking down, unraveling, and then joyously picking herself up with the strength of her roots, she puts herself back together, a more balanced version. She waits for the woman of her dreams to come knocking at her door, she is afraid that day will never come, so she has started knocking on the Center's door for some friendship and support with this journey of love.

This woman, this inspiring woman who tells me all her secrets and keeps all of her secrets hidden from me behind the comfort of the receiver...this woman who has endured ten thousand tragedies still comes back fully alive and ready to heal....this woman defeated and searching for a hand to hold...this woman who has earned her respect and found pride in her mind, body, and soul...she, she is my experience, she is the reason I so desperately want the doors of the Women's Center to stay wide open. She is the struggle within me and the struggle of so many. She is the lowest point any one person has traveled and the most heart warming success story any one person can fathom. She is you, she is me, she is all of us. She is deep inside my being and represents a truth that cannot be learned by seeing. She is alive, and she will continue breathing.

~Amanda, Volunteer

Yes, I want to support the Women's Center!

By going to www.cambridgewomenscenter.org and clicking on "support us" and then "Donate Now"

Yes, I want to support the Women's Center!

___ \$2,000 ___ \$1,500 ___ \$1,000 ___ \$500 ___ \$250 ___ \$100 ___ \$50 ___ other \$ _____

Please make your tax-deductible check payable to The Women's Center.

For a donation of \$125 or more, you can receive a free poster from the Women Activist Series by Betsy Warrior.

For more info or to choose one of the seven full-color, matted posters, check our website: www.cambridgewomenscenter.org.

___ My gift will be matched by my employer _____

___ My donation is in honor of: (name) _____

(address) _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone _____ Email _____

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Thank You!
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Checks payable to **The Women's Center**. Mail to: Women's Center, 46 Pleasant Street, Cambridge MA 02139

If you'd prefer to be taken off of our mailing list, please check this box and return this slip, or email us at info@cambridgewomenscenter.org.

Spring 2007