



ON OUR WAY

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

Summer 2014

Embracing Change

When I arrived for my first day of work at the Women's Center earlier this summer, I was notified of some troubling news. Katie, the Center's Coordinator, had been attacked by a visitor. In response to this incident, the Board of Trustees temporarily suspended drop-in programming at the Women's Center.

Upon hearing this news, I was heartbroken. Though Katie thankfully made a full physical recovery, I was dismayed that something like this could happen at the Women's Center. I was aware of the critical role that the Women's Center has played—and continues to play—in the community as an open, inclusive space that welcomes women from diverse backgrounds. For more than 40 years, the Women's Center has served as a sanctuary for women in need. I worried that the Women's Center would not be able to wholly fulfill its mission without the drop-in programming.

However, in the past month, I have come to realize that in spite of the many challenges facing us, this is a hopeful time for the Women's Center.

Many of the Center's programs are thriving. Every day, helpline volunteers have been hard at work providing women with emotional support and resources. The Center has continued to broaden and ramp up our programming to ensure that there are workshops and groups to address the diverse needs and interests of women in our community. Women have come together at the Center to participate in community conversations, improve their language and job skills, investigate resources, make beautiful crafts, and try their hand at cooking, creative writing, improvisational acting, yoga, and more! After months of recess, the Teen Group is up and running again, bringing a fresh, youthful energy to the Center. The computer labs now have daytime and evening drop-in hours several days a week, and the Center continues to look for ways to increase accessibility while maintaining safety. The helpline, groups and workshops are continuing, and women can make appointments to get assistance from volunteers.

Behind the scenes, the Board of Trustees has been working to put in place new measures to better ensure the safety of our community. The Center has formed new partnerships with local organizations including Rosie's Place, On the Rise, Heading Home, Ruby Rogers Center and others, to learn about their strategies and security measures and to gain insight as it develops new safety protocols. A very promising development is a newly forged relationship with the Cambridge Police Department who are supporting our ongoing efforts to maintain safety through de-escalation, self-defense and other trainings meant to empower staff members and volunteers.

Local groups such as the Samaritans, the Asian Task Force

on Domestic Violence, and the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center are facilitating volunteer trainings on suicide/crisis calls, domestic violence in immigrant communities, and responding to disclosures. We have been encouraged by initial feedback on these trainings. One of our helpline volunteers, Irene, told us that the trainings "gave me the confidence to know that I have the tools I need to provide support to any woman in difficult situations, whether it's an abusive relationship or someone who may be contemplating suicide." Targeted education, increased awareness and better protocols will enable us to further expand our services to support marginalized women. Planning for this expansion is in the works.

Additionally, I have noticed a greater sense of ownership of the Center within our community. In the past two months, more than fifty visitors to the Center have expressed their reactions, thoughts, and suggestions for the future of the Center in two community meetings, and we look forward to continuing this open dialogue. Furthermore, a number of our volunteers have enthusiastically offered to start new groups and workshops, using their diverse skill sets and interests to bring women in our community together. In 1971, The Women's Center was founded on the values of community participation and empowerment, and it is exciting to see these principles still in play at the Center today.

I believe that the year to come holds much promise for the Women's Center as it continues to strengthen its role and visibility in the community, as well as build on its mission to support, educate, and empower women.

Thank you for your continued support of the Women's Center as we move through this time of transition. We truly appreciate your commitment to the Center and your passion for helping us fulfill our mission to expand social and economic justice for women.

With hope,
Sara Allan, Board of Trustees Intern



Teens at the Women's Center hard at work on a creative project involving feminist role models

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Rhonda Phillips, New Board Member

Hello! My name is Rhonda Phillips, and I joined the Women’s Center Board of Trustees in February during the annual meeting. I have been volunteering at the Center for two and a half years, and I wanted to have a bigger role and take on more responsibility at the Center.

I started as a computer support volunteer in January of 2012. I was looking for an opportunity to use my computer expertise to help and empower women. Technology is intimidating for everyone, and I think sometimes it is especially intimidating to women. There are so few women in technical fields that I felt obligated to help as one of the few with my skillset. I wanted to show others that using a computer is not actually that difficult -- it just seems that way until you learn and feel comfortable trying things without fear of failure.

I joined the board to help us (the Women’s Center) make informed decisions about technology and be sure we could offer the best services to our community through our computer lab, web site, online calendar, social networking sites, etc. I’m excited to work with all of you to strengthen our community and empower women. I look forward to doing my part as a volunteer and a board member to ensure that the Women’s Center continues to provide a sanctuary to women who are looking for help, support, and like me, looking for friendship with other strong and empowered women.

- Rhonda Phillips

Hello from Katie Heimer, New Center Coordinator

As a lifelong feminist and believer in the power of women to support and sustain each other, I took over the position of Center Coordinator here at the Women’s Center in early February filled with excitement and a sense of possibility. Coming from a background in non-profit education and outreach work, I was excited to apply those skills to such a unique organization whose mission I believe so strongly in. I was ready to work hard, and in the past six months since I took over the role of Center Coordinator, I’ve never worked harder. There is so much to be done here at the Center—I certainly have my work cut out for me. Luckily, the Women’s Center’s amazing group of volunteers and interns are here right alongside me each step of the way, working hard to make the Center the best, most welcoming and inclusive space it possibly can be. They inspire me every day.

The past few months have been a time of transition at the Center. Change is never easy, and while there have been many difficult moments for all of us who devote our time and energy here on a regular basis, there are many reasons to be hopeful and excited about the future of the Center. Every day, we see new faces and hear new voices, in the Center and on the helpline. We also see and hear from women who have been a part of the Women’s Center community for many years. We witness new connections being formed and old connections being sustained and expanded upon. In the past three months, more than a dozen of our existing volunteers as well as other community members have stepped up to volunteer their time to expand our group offerings as well as run other workshops and events. In those three months, we’ve added almost 30 new groups and events to our calendar. These include a discussion group for mothers, an immigrant women’s discussion group, a body image group, a stress reduction series, a job skills workshop series, a “craftnoons” crafting series, a Saturday morning breakfast club and much more.

It’s been a privilege for me to work with and get to know the many amazing women who are a part of the Women’s Center community over the past six months, and I look forward to continuing to do so moving forward. I welcome suggestions for new programming or ideas about how we can continue to move the Center forward. To those of you who’ve welcomed me into this community and helped to make my job as Center Coordinator easier and more fulfilling in these first six months, thank you. And to those of you I have yet to meet, I look forward to the opportunity!

-Katie Heimer, M.A.

Welcome Aboard, Katie & Rhonda!

A warm welcome to Katie Heimer, our new Women’s Center Coordinator, and Rhonda Phillips, the newest member of our Board of Trustees. In her six months here, Katie has had a big impact. Her diligent efforts have generated a host of new groups and workshops, brought in many new volunteers, and greatly improved volunteer trainings. Rhonda’s is a great addition to the Board in the many ways she contributes both in the meetings and through taking on other work. She is also making great improvements to the computer labs with her hands on expertise. We look forward to reveling in the many ways Katie and Rhonda’s efforts will benefit the Women’s Center

- Judy, Susan, and Laura, Board of Trustees

The Women’s Center
46 Pleasant Street
Cambridge, MA 02139

Helpline:
(617) 354-8807

Business line:
(617) 354-6394

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.

Volunteers

We gratefully acknowledge the ongoing efforts and contributions of our volunteers. Thank you for giving so generously of your time and of yourselves.

For further information about various volunteer opportunities or to offer in-kind donations, contact Katie,
Women’s Center Coordinator:
katie@cambridgewomenscenter.org
(617) 354-6394

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

All donations are tax-deductible.
The Women’s Center is a tax-exempt non-profit organization.

Painting & Drawing Group

Every Tuesday morning for the past few months, I have had the pleasure of facilitating the Painting and Drawing Group at the Women's Center. We have a diverse group of women from different backgrounds with various interests including the study of shadow and light, ink and watercolor caricature work, and multi-media affirmation projects. The women either work independently or join the group project set for that week. Suggested group projects may include "Self Boxes," a study in collage of social presentation: old shoe boxes are covered in images and words that represent the self that we show the world (exterior of box) and then aspects of ourselves we may keep hidden or protected (box interior). Other group projects' themes include "What are you looking forward to?" and our on-going "Gratitude Journals."

I strive for an atmosphere that is calm, welcoming and supportive as some women are beginners while others are more experienced artists who, in some way or another, have become "blocked" in their creative process. As one of the group attendees put it, "I was blocked, but now I am able to create more freely in the Center and at home." The women in our group cheer each other to "keep going," reminding one another that there really are no "mistakes" in art and that "the process is key." We continually "take the temperature" of the group to maintain safety and comfort of all, and encourage members to speak up if they feel challenged in any way.

I am proud that our small group has grown via word of mouth and grateful that the Women's Center provides such a sanctuary for our creative expression. In the words of an attendee, the group is a "warm, safe and relaxing environment in which to make art. I plan on it every week."
-Karen Carter

What the Women's Center Means to Me

I first came to the Women's Center in April of 2013, looking for a 600 hour internship for Clinical Mental Health Counseling. I talked with Ming, the Coordinator at the time, and we discussed feminism, therapy, and relationships. She offered me a 20 hours/week internship for September to May. I signed aboard, with the warning of "you will be tired once April comes." I laughed and said to myself, "clearly she doesn't know what I can handle."

My first day, I was intimidated by a visitor, rejected by a helpline caller, and completed my first shift. My first day was heartbreaking, but I got up the next day and I got on the T and headed to the Center. I was determined to make what I could of this experience. I learned about the Center and what it had to offer the women who used it daily. Helpline callers began to ask for me personally and visitors began to share their stories. I started to find my place within the Center, but Ming was right, I would grow tired. Only a few callers are truly thankful. Some women will call you names, and tell you that you are not worth anything. There are days when I wondered if I made the right career choice. But for every one of those heartbreaking experiences, I reminded myself, I was there for them when the world might not have been. I listened without judgment. I think about the caller who calls me to tell me that I helped. Or ends the conversation with complete gratitude. The woman who walks into the Center and smiles because I am there. The woman having a cup of coffee and telling her story. There were a lot of stories—stories of strong, beautiful women. I heard (and felt) pain, loneliness, fear, and sadness. I eventually heard the story of the woman who intimidated me, the woman who rejected me, and I got to write a little more of my own story.

As I write my thoughts on my last day, I feel different than I thought I would. I am sad. As my internship comes to an end and I get ready to say goodbye, I know that I will miss walking in the door and feeling the stories surround me. The Women's Center is now part of my story.
- Jess

New Resource! Survivors Making Connections

Incest Resources' 2013-2014 series marks the 30th anniversary of the Drop-In Discussion Group for Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse! To commemorate the history and success of the group, a new survivor resource, Survivors Making Connections: Introductions from the Drop-In Group, has been created. The title speaks to both the empowering personal connections survivors make with each other in the group, and the often surprising connections between the past and the present survivors discover through the group.

Members of the Drop-In Group over the years have found the topic introductions "validating," "reassuring," "thought-provoking," "compassionate," "enlightening," and "change-making." They've asked for copies to take home with them after the group and have used them to reflect on their lives and themselves with new hope and understanding. They've used them for individual healing, developing journal pieces around them, and shared them with partners and friends for more meaningful conversation and support. Group members have also long suggested that a compilation of the topic introductions be made available to them - and survivors everywhere - and so it finally has!

To order a copy of the collection, send a \$30.00 check payable to Incest Resources, Inc. to Incest Resources, 46 Pleasant Street, Cambridge, MA 02139. Please be sure your name and complete mailing address are legibly printed, and please allow 2-4 weeks for delivery. Postage and handling are included, and all proceeds benefit Incest Resources, which has been providing free survivor services at the Women's Center since 1980.
- Elaine Westerlund

Pro-survivor Mothers' Group Forming

Are you the mother of an adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse?

Are you struggling with family fall-out related to your allegiance and loyalty to the survivor?

Do you feel isolated and alone in your efforts to heal and grow as the survivor heals and grows?

Facilitated by a pro-survivor mother, this discussion group will provide a safe space for like-minded mothers to share common feelings of shock, sorrow, betrayal, rage, grief, and self-blame, and will offer mutual support in moving forward. Meeting once a month on a Tuesday evening.

Our first meeting: Tuesday, September 23, 6-7:30pm

THIS GROUP IS FREE OF CHARGE!

For more information and to sign up for the group: prosurvivorsgroup@gmail.com or 508-446-1852.

Sponsored by Incest Resources and the Women's Center.

Incest Resources' Drop-In Discussion Group for Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse

3rd Fridays, 6-7:30pm, September—June

Upcoming Dates and Topics:

September 19	Identifying as a Survivor
October 17	Disclosure and Confrontation
November 21	Rebuilding our Lives
December 19	Coping – Then and Now

No one will be admitted after 6:15pm so that the group process will not be disrupted

Coming Home

Like many newcomers, I walked into the Women's Center for the first time with little idea about what to expect from the cozy house tucked away in Cambridgeport. I was immediately struck by the colorful walls, worn, mismatched furniture, and smell of coffee--like many, I was surprised to find that I had walked into a place that felt like home. As I learned over the following months, this was an accurate first impression. For the women that use the center, the old building has become a home of sorts--for some, their only home during a time of transition. It is this sense that distinguishes the Women's Center from other agencies. The building is not only a place for services to be delivered, but a safe space. It gives members of the community a place to cook, to use a computer, to attend a group, to explore a skill - and much more. Like a home, it does not cost anything to be a part of the community. It relies on trust in the women that use the space, and runs on the time and energy of a team of volunteers. It creates an environment of equality, and out of this, a sense of community.

Women come to the Center from all walks of life, often with little in common other than the fact that they identify as female. In any other situation, they would remain separate. It is a testimony to the space created by the Center that within its walls, this diverse group is able to build a community. In my time at the Center, I have listened to folk tales told by a woman from Tanzania and applied for shelter stays with a woman born and raised in Boston. I have watched friendships develop, and built them myself. I have been witness to a host of problems often hidden from the general public, including homelessness, domestic violence and mental illness. In the Center, it has been an honor to be able to talk openly about these issues, and to begin to work towards solutions. As a volunteer, the Women's Center has given me the opportunity to help create a space for my community to come home to.

- Casey

Wish List

- Coffee machine
- Unscented hand and dish soap
- Paper towels and toilet paper
- Sturdy brooms and mops
- USB sticks/flash drives
- Can opener
- Kitchen towels
- Food containers
- Food storage bags
- Coffee, tea, hot chocolate, sugar, honey, cream, milk, butter, cooking oil
- Art Supplies
- Pens
- Headphones (for computer use)
- Printer & copier paper, white and colored 8½" x 11" and 11" x 17"
- Postage stamps
- Mailing labels (30/page, eg: Avery 5160)
- Envelopes—regular (#10), or small (#6¾)
- Rugs/carpets (in good condition)
- Gift certificates for Target, Tags, Staples, Office Max, Drug Stores, Supermarkets, Home Depot, Best Buy, Sears...

Thank you!

We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give."

Support the Women's Center Online!

Go to www.cambridgewomenscenter.org and click on "Support Us" and then "Donate Now."
You will be contributing through "Network for Good"

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

___ \$2,000 ___ \$1,000 ___ \$500 ___ \$250 ___ \$100 ___ \$50 ___ \$25 ___ other \$ _____

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

___ My gift will be matched by my employer _____

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

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone _____ Email _____

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

- I/We would like to become a regular **monthly sustainer**, with a pledge of \$ _____/per month.
- I'd like to include the Women's Center in my retirement or other future plans.
- Please send me a volunteer application.
- If you'd prefer to be taken off our mailing list, please check this box and return this slip, or email us at info@cambridgewomenscenter.org