

Washington Area
Women's Center



NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN	(202) 387-6895
WOMEN'S LEGAL DEFENSE FUND (WLDF)	(202) 232-5293
RAPE CRISIS CENTER	(202) 333-RAPE
WOMEN'S HEALTH AND ABORTION PROJECT	
ABORTION COUNSELING	(202) 483-4632
WOMEN'S CLINIC	(202) 965-5476
DOMESTIC RELATIONS PROJECT	(202) 232-5145
FEMINIST COUNSELING COLLECTIVE	”
EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION COUNSELING PROJECT	”
CREDIT COUNSELING PROJECT	”
SOJOURNER TRUTH SCHOOL FOR WOMEN	”
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SOPHIE'S PARLOR	”

(All quotes in this brochure were made by women working with that particular project group.)

WELCOME TO THE WOMEN'S CENTER!

The Washington Area Women's Center is a non-partisan organization whose primary purpose is to serve all women of the Washington area. The concept of the Center is women defining and serving their own needs. We are creating an environment in which women can define themselves outside the male-defined structures which prevail in our society. Women are capable of making and carrying out decisions about their lives. Through alternative support services, all women can realize their potential strength and self-determination. The Women's Movement has been weak in providing for the real daily needs of women. The Movement has produced a lot of analysis about how women are oppressed, but very little as to how to end that oppression. The project groups listed in detail in this brochure were created to begin to work toward meeting some of these needs. The structure and guidelines to the Women's Center enable all of us to participate and direct what happens here, an important step in all women learning to take control of their own lives.

The Women's Center is located at 1736 R Street N.W., Washington, D.C., 20009, and is open seven days a week from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.. During this time the phones are staffed by women involved in the Center. The Women's Center can be reached at (202) 232-5145 and 232-7533.



WELCOME TO THE
WOMEN'S CENTER

General History of the Women's Center

The idea of a Women's Center in the Washington area was initially discussed at the first meeting of the Washington Feminists in September, 1971. This grew out of an attempt to determine what needs were for women in the area and what could be done to meet them. As a result of this discussion, a project group of the Feminists was started to explore the possibility of a Women's Center and to consider what form that might take. They discussed various means of funding such a center, facilities necessary, projected costs and activities.

By the end of this time, the group decided that more input was required, and arranged for a large community meeting. A massive mailing was used to contact Women's groups in the area - in February, 1972, the first open meeting for the Women's Center was held.

Women responded with overwhelming enthusiasm. It was decided to organize into smaller groups to investigate housing and potential means of funding; other women met to consider what projects should operate out of the Center. Project groups were organized around meeting specific daily needs of women, and other existing groups and organizations also participated in the evolvement of the Center. Also during this time discussions were held to examine the structure, theory and politics of a Women's Center.

By August, a house for the Center was found. The building was in a state of total disrepair; women worked together sharing skills to improve its condition. Project groups began to move into the Center in September of 1972, and as of October, 1972, the Women's Center was finally a going concern.

Organizations Affiliated with the Women's Center

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN (NOW)

In June, 1966, women met at a conference in Washington on the status of women. When neither resolution nor action was passed by the conference these women decided to form a civil rights organization which would speak for women. In October of that year, the National Organization for Women (NOW) was established.

Since then, NOW has worked for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, the repeal of abortion laws, the end to sex discrimination in education and employment, the expansion of child care centers, the end to the vicious cycle of women in poverty and the end to the socialization of sex roles.

The National Capitol Area Chapter of NOW has its general meeting the second Saturday of every month. Everyone is welcome. There are also other meetings throughout the month. For times, places and further information, contact its office at (202) 387-6895 or write in care of the Women's Center.

WOMEN'S LEGAL DEFENSE FUND (WLDF)

WLDF is an organization concerned with the equality of women under the law. WLDF has an office at the Center and provides legal assistance and counseling to Washington area women in cases involving feminist issues. A Screening Committee selects cases in the areas of employment and credit discrimination, abortion, domestic relations and child care facilities - cases which will help establish important precedents in the fight for equal rights. The investigative and legal work is done by WLDF members - volunteer lawyers, law students and women from all areas who want to lend a hand. Women needing legal assistance or counseling or interested in joining WLDF should call (202) 232-5293.

Project Groups of the Women's Center

RAPE CRISIS CENTER

"Some women have said that they suffered more from post-rape treatment at the hands of hospitals, police and the courts than from the actual rape itself. We try to get humane treatment for rape victims, see that they are treated as patients rather than pieces of evidence."



The Rape Crisis Center is staffed by a voluntary group of women, many of whom have been raped. The Center currently provides a phone service operating from 7:30 a.m. until midnight, legal and medical information, psychological support, escorts to police, hospitals and courts, if needed. The Center is trying to educate the community, especially women, on the problems of rape. For information on programs and publications please contact the Center at (202) 333-RAPE or write P.O. Box 21005, Kalorama Station, Washington, D.C., 20009.

WOMEN'S HEALTH AND ABORTION PROJECT

"Naturally we're interested in the medical treatment an abortion patient receives and how clean a place is, but what we're most concerned with is the human treatment; the dignity of a woman comes first."

The Women's Health and Abortion Project provides counseling in birth control and an information and referral service for obstetrics and gynecology, pre-natal care and venereal disease. They also do pregnancy and RH negative testing. The emphasis is on women controlling their own bodies. This is done by education, information gathering and sharing about common problems, such as vaginitis, as well as defining what constitutes a thorough gynecological examination. The group also visits hospitals and clinics acting as advocates for women patients. The Women's Health and Abortion Project is involved in the operation of a Women's Clinic on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. This is located at the Washington Area Free Clinic, 1556 Wisconsin Avenue. Call (202) 965-5476 for information concerning the Clinic. The Women's Health and Abortion Project see themselves as a direct challenge to the male dominated and controlled, uneducative, paternalistic medical hierarchy. The number for Abortion Counseling is (202) 483-4632. For further information on the Project, contact the Women's Center.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS PROJECT

"We believe women must begin challenging a court system which traditionally has disregarded women's needs and which concentrates knowledge, which is power, in the hands of a few professional men."

There are countless women who lack access to basic legal aid and who are therefore unable to act in their own best interests - in initiating or contesting a divorce, separation or annulment, in obtaining just decisions in matters of support, property and

child custody. The Domestic Relation Project is helping women meet their own needs by: 1) providing information about domestic relations law 2) teaching women to act as their own attorney in divorce actions (pro se divorce) 3) providing referrals 4) organizing support groups for women in transition. Members of the group will also accompany a woman in court throughout the divorce process if she wishes. The Domestic Relations Project provides emergency housing for women to stay temporarily during their crisis period. For further information call or write in care of the Women's Center.

FEMINIST COUNSELING COLLECTIVE

"The oppression that is outside in society is a part of ourselves. We've internalized our oppression as women. We see everything in an oppressor-oppressed role. We have to learn to relate to each other on different levels or else we will repeat the same things in the Women's Movement, relating on personal terms only instead of being able to relate on political terms free of internalization."

The Feminist Counseling Collective has been operating since July of 1972, conducting problem-solving groups, individual crisis counseling and organizing consciousness-raising groups at the Center and in the suburbs, all with a view to helping women gain control over their own lives. Through peer counseling, women get a chance to share experiences, support each other and give each other honest feedback to help each women grow towards greater self-sufficiency in every area of her life. The Collective is training new members to be able to expand its services, both in number of groups and counselors, and special-focus groups for gay women, career-oriented women, women who want to explore alternative life-styles, etc. All women who want to work on self-growth in a supportive context are invited to join - open rap sessions are held the first Tuesday and third Wednesday of each month.

WLDF and NOW members work together in two special legal counseling projects. They are:

EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION COUNSELING PROJECT

"Women are not accepting second-rate jobs at second-rate salaries anymore. They're recognizing their worth and are fighting for their rights."

The Employment Discrimination group is concerned with counseling women about how to recognize sex discrimination in employment and in discriminatory laws and how to fight it then through the legal channels available. The Employment Discrimination group consists of women from a variety of backgrounds and professions, mainly non-lawyers, who bring their own expertise in some training in employment discrimination laws to the effort of counseling other women to recognize and fight such discrimination. Services include provision of information on local, state and federal anti-discrimination laws and the process for filing sex discrimination charges.

CREDIT COUNSELING PROJECT

The Credit Project fights discrimination against women due to sex or marital status in attempting to obtain credit accounts, personal loans and mortgages. Project activities include counseling and legal services for women denied credit cards, loans or mortgages on the basis of sex; communication with store credit managers to obtain written non-discriminatory credit policies; criticism of credit application formats; petitions to government agencies for better regulation and policies on credit discrimination, and organization of discussion groups to sensitize women to sex discrimination issues in credit matters. Women needing assistance or interested in helping in counseling, call WLDF at (202) 232-5293 or the Women's Center for details.

SOJOURNER TRUTH SCHOOL FOR WOMEN

"We see the Sojourner Truth School as a place where both professional and non-professional women can share their skills and knowledge, and as a place where women can develop their skills and then teach them to other women."

Women long have been denied recognition of the importance of what they are capable of doing. Thus many became dependent on figures of authority, be they car mechanics, plumbers, professors or realtors. With space and time women will recognize and utilize their skills and share them with other women, building self-determination for and with each other. Types of courses offered thus far have been skills techniques (auto mechanics, public speaking, home repair, self-defense), visual media (silkscreening), informational discussion groups (feminist arts workshop, women in history) and strategy and tactics of the Women's Movement (organizing women in the workplace, feminist socialism). Anyone wishing to teach or take a course should call the Women's Center.

LIBRARY PROJECT

"We're hoping that women will donate their books and files and collections of feminist materials so that we can have available a history of the Women's Movement both locally and nationally."

The Library is an essential part of the Women's Center. It is a room where women can read about other women and our history and where women's writings may be circulated. The members of the Project hope that the Library will become a resource for women interested in getting information and statistics for everything from term papers to private research. For more information on the Library contact the Women's Center.

CHILD CARE COLLECTIVE

"Women and children are the two most oppressed groups in our society."

The Children's Liberation Collective is a group of women involved in the organization of a cooperative child care room at the Women's Center. At present, the use of the facility is open only to women participating in the Center's activities. The group is investigating various child care operations in the Washington metropolitan area. Through this, an extensive list of referrals will be compiled. The Collective also is discussing personal and political problems of child rearing and other related issues. For further information, contact the Women's Center.

NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

The free, monthly Newsletter functions as a communication tool for the Women's Center. The content consists mainly of news about the Center, announcements, local women's news, etc. The Newsletter also is an open forum, providing an opportunity for exchange of ideas and information. Women are urged to take advantage of this. Two co-editors are responsible for the Newsletter for six month periods - volunteers are always needed to help put it out. To work on the Newsletter Committee or be on the mailing list contact the Women's Center.

SOPHIE'S PARLOR

"We're encouraging all women with talent, all women who can sing, play a musical instrument, write poetry, dance, to come to Sophie's Parlor and share their talent with other women, gaining confidence in themselves and their abilities."

Sophie's Parlor, the Women's Center Coffeehouse, is located in the basement of the Center. It is a place where women can come together anytime during the Center hours. Regularly scheduled events include potluck suppers, poetry readings, dances and performances by local women artists. This Coffeehouse is a project of the Women's Center. One half of the profits each month are contributed to the Center in the form of a sustainer. Sophie's Parlor project meetings are open for sharing the ideas and suggestions of all interested women. Information on meetings and scheduled events can be obtained through the Women's Center.

Sustaining the Washington Area Women's Center

An ongoing, personal commitment to the Women's Center can take many forms. One of them is personal financial commitment. This is as important to the survival of the Center as are the devotions of time and energy. If every woman on our mailing list sent one dollar a month, we could meet our current expenses.

We ask for monthly pledges rather than one-time gifts because then we will know that we have a definite amount of money to work with each month. Monthly sustainers are our most valuable source of income - we women must depend on ourselves for support, rather than on outside sources whose interest in the Center may be limited or restrictive.

In addition, monthly support from the community of women is an affirmation of our service to the community. Our ability to show financial commitment from the community lends viability to the Center. This is important if we must secure funds from foundations and other outside sources.

Enclosed you find a sustainer form. Please fill it out completely and return it as soon as you've decided on the amount of your sustainer. Our monthly income (like everything in the Center) is dependent upon all of us keeping up our commitments.

The Center is a tax-exempt organization so you may deduct contributions. If you wish to send your first check along with the sustainer form, please make the check out to the: Washington Area Women's Center.

Thank You.

A Final Note . . .

We feel that we can begin to end oppression by providing choices to women. When women have real choices to make and can meet the demands of their daily lives, then they will develop the strategy for ending their oppression. In order to develop that strategy we need the experiences of all women. Women are separated by many societal differences of class, race, age, education, and aspirations. In order to define ourselves as a common class - women - we must share our experiences, accept how they make us different, and develop an understanding of each other that will resolve those differences.

The Women's Center struggles to meet women's needs. We have a commitment to ourselves as women that dares us to struggle. Commitment and struggle take many forms - each woman must "be militant each in(her) own way". For some it is involvement in a service project, for others it is involvement in a discussion group, writing and putting out a newsletter, teaching or taking a course in the Sojourner Truth School, pledging money, or answering the phone.

The doors are open . . . we hope to see you soon becoming an active part of the Women's Center!



