

A brief history of the Sudbury Women's Movement- 1970-1985

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2020

1969

- Canadian Union of Students hold a meeting in Sudbury . The women at the meeting organized to assert their rights in the organization, based on articles by Sarah Spinks, Myrna Wood and Linda Seese. At the same time, a group of students occupied the president's office at Laurentian University, demanding student representation on the Board of Governors. A small group of these women begins to come together around consciousness-raising.

- First Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) organized. Members included Susan Byron (then Greeson), Ann Morrison, and a few others. Joan Kuyek joined in 1970. Mostly had consciousness-raising sessions and organised a self-defence for women course.

1971

- Women's Liberation (WLM) gets an office in the basement of the Mine-Mill Union Hall. Engaged in work around daycare, sexual assault, abortion and birth control. There was a split in the group over organizing methods: being task-oriented vs. the consciousness-raising method.

- SWLM starts organizing a daycare centre, the first in Sudbury. Called the Little Peoples Community Centre, WLM approached the Mine Mill Union for space and applied for a Local Initiatives Program (LIP) grant. The union membership was fiercely opposed to the daycare and we had to look elsewhere. "What will our wives do if they aren't looking after our kids!" We also lost the LIP grant as a result.

- Sudbury Tenants Association (dealing with the housing crisis at the time) and The Mucker – a community paper – were organized by many of the same women in WLM. The Mucker continued to be published until 1973.

- Bell operators walk off the job and WLM organizes support pickets and helps with a leaflet.

- WLM in Sudbury takes part in the Abortion Caravan demonstrations, sends a few women to Ottawa and talk to the local media. WLM finds it is doing abortion referrals, and also helping battered women get out of the community.

- Women at Fielding Lumber go on strike to try to get minimum wage in their contract. Support pickets and publicity by WLM.

1972

- In June 1972 - we were able to open the daycare in the ground floor apartment at 250 Elm Street. It lasted for only a few months before it closed. The very women who wanted it for their children couldn't afford to send them there if we had to meet provincial guidelines for daycare (small toilets, etc.) However, the Laurentian Child and Family Centre opened at the University.

- After a major expansion is finished, there are major layoffs at INCO, and over 10,000 people leave the community. The abortion referrals and escape helping continues informally.

1973

- Women mobilize to provide solidarity and housing for Chilean refugees in town.

- Abortion Counselling and Referral Service (ACCRA) finally established in Sudbury, with paid staff.

- Joan Kuyek and Sue Byron open The Book Mine, a bookstore selling alternative books and magazines, including books on women's liberation.

1974 -75

- INCO hires their first few women in blue collar jobs. Cathy Mulroy starts work in the copper refinery. (see her book "My View from the Blackened Rocks"- 2019)

- Women Working in Production at Inco in Sudbury: The first women working in hourly rated production jobs at Inco were hired in 1975. By 1981 there were approximately 50 women and 10,000 men. At this time a Women's Committee was formed in 1981 to determine the issues and needs of these women. One important issue was women having the opportunity to get apprenticeships leading to higher skilled and higher paying jobs. A questionnaire was produced, meetings were held and as a result of a bit of pressure and some broader union support, some changes were made that allowed a few women the chance to train as apprentices.

- The Women's Committee also wrote a monthly column for the Searcher, the local union newspaper.

1975

-International Women's Year. An attempt to try to organize a local film festival falls apart over Toronto Women's groups trying to take it over. The Women's Liberation Bookmobile comes to Sudbury.

- YWCA opens a shelter for assaulted women.

- Left caucus organized to try to bring the left and women's groups together.

1977

- The women working at blue-collar jobs at INCO organize Women of Steel, to deal with harassment they are facing.

- 23 women meet to discuss setting up a feminist women's collective. They called it "Women Helping Women"(WHW). The group was initially made up of about 15-18 women. They met regularly over the next few years. They described the group: "We believe that women in our society are oppressed and that the source of the oppression is not only men, but is woven through the whole fabric of society and is an integral part of the superstructure of this society. Our intent as a collective is to inform Sudbury women through education publicity and action." WHW received a grant from the Secretary of State to do a survey of women's social and economic needs in Sudbury. The survey was carried out in the summer. WHW talked to over 95 women and got some very disturbing information about levels of assault, attitudes to unions, economic insecurity, etc. Over the next few years ,the group produced several booklets, and two videos on women's issues. Women Helping Women published a booklet: Alternatives to Hysteria: A Guide to Sudbury Women in Crisis. The booklet was published on newsprint and in both French and English, we were able to print 15,000 and hand it out all over the city (apartment buildings, high schools, etc.) we launch it on IWD in March 1978

- WHW made two videos. The first, Alternatives to Hysteria, Part I about the issues surrounding access to birth control. It was shown on a local television station and used in classes at the university. The second, Alternatives to Hysteria, Part II, the true stories of two

women's issues with the psychiatric system. It is also shown on the local station (CKNC). WHM takes off, and the group grows to 50 members. We are still meeting in each other's homes.

1978

- September 14. The Steelworkers Union Local 6500 goes on strike at INCO. WHW decides that they need to get control of the discourse about how women feel about the strike. We meet and decide to organize "Wives Supporting the Strike" with the strikers wives. The group does propaganda, moral support, organizes a Christmas party for all 13000 members and their families, runs a clothing depot, Aid to New Mothers and a baby fund, carries out a bean supper in community halls all across the region. The strike goes on for nine and half months. A film, *A Wives Tale* is made about the Wives group. Women are also key members of the citizens Strike Support committee and the Strike Support Newspaper. The union wins the strike.

- A Women's Studies Program is established at Thorneloe College. During its first year the program was coordinated by Dr. Christopher Headon, then by Mercedes Steedman and in 1990 by Margret Kechnie. Initially it was an interdisciplinary program involving several departments at the university.

- Cambrian College establishes a Womens' Resource Centre

- The telecare crisis line starts to provide rape crisis counselling and referrals

- Women at Women's Studies at Thorneloe College organize a Northern Ontario women's conference with support from the Health Promotion Directorate.

1979

- March. IWD at Steel Hall is a huge success. A bus load of wives has gone to Toronto for IWD, and come back accusing some of the wives of the group of being communists.

- June. The strike ends. The Wives group votes to disband. The francophones in the group establish Femmes en Mouvement. They create a play on sexuality, work on school curricula and support various strikes.

- Nov. 3-4, 1979 the Northern Ontario Women's Conference takes place in Sudbury, bringing together women from all over the North. A bilingual conference. It produces a handbook and action guide for women in the north.

1980

- Hospital workers strike. Kay McNamara fired for refusing to go back to work. When IWD committee asks her to speak, the Business and Professional Women quit the committee, claiming her speech will be too polarizing.
- Women in Action project during the summer, funded by the Health Promotion directorate. The project puts out a booklet on women in Northern Ontario, and starts organizing for a Sudbury Women's Centre.
- Fall. The Northern Ontario Women's Conference takes place in Kirkland Lake, funded by the Health Promotion directorate. On the way to the conference, terrible freezing rain forces a car load of Women Helping Women to the side of the road at the same time as a car load of Anishnaabe activists. The WHW learn that the Anishnaabe women had asked for a grant from Health Promotion for a conference but had been refused. The white women lobby during the Kirkland Lake conference and get agreement from participants that they will not do more work with the Health Promotion directorate unless they agree to fund the indigenous women to have a parallel conference next time. Success. The next conference is held in 1981 in Toronto, called the "Strategies for well-being" conference. It is two parallel conferences in adjoining spaces and with permeable boundaries.

1981

- January 1. **Sudbury Women's Centre (SWC)** opens on St. Ignatius Street. In June, a thinktank sponsored by SWC reveals differences in direction amongst participants. In September, there is another dispute over whether to move into a space in the old INCO medical centre. INCO makes demands that women who were part of the Wives not be in the steering committee. The women refuse the space with Inco.
- Strike of clerical workers at Garson Mine supported by SWC. Women organize to stop shipment of yellowcake from Blind River to Port Hope for refining.
- Ontario Working Women organized; some Sudbury women involved.
- First Northern Eastern Ontario Women's Conference (NEOWC) in Sault Ste, Marie on "Women and Multinationals".
- Major re-organization of Rape Crisis Centre

- Cecile Coucette begins organizing the Family Benefits Working Group for women on Mothers Allowance.

1982

- Sudbury All Gay Alliance organizes. Although the group is largely male, a number of lesbians are involved.

- Acid Rain Theatre organized, later becomes Stick and Stones: all women using Theatre of the Oppressed methods. (Laurie McGauley, Arja Lane, Bonnie Bliss, Donna Moshenko, Nina Nasedkin)

- From September 1982 to February 1983. Formation of The Nickel Alliance, calling for the nationalization of the Nickel Industry, is organized in response to a six month shut down of INCO operations (due to falling nickel prices). Women in the group want to use the NEOWC participatory processes; the men want standard trade-union style format. The group engaged in a few demonstrations, but the group collapses once the women back off.

- Landmark case on “man in the house rule” – the Cheslock case- is heard in Divisional Court. She is represented by the Sudbury Community Legal Clinic and supported by the Family Benefits Working Group. She wins.

- In November, the North Eastern Ontario Women’s Conference holds a second conference in Sault Ste. Marie.

1983

- Neighbourhood Action Project (mostly the women from Sticks and Stones theatre) gets funding from the Secretary of State. Co-op a number of workshops with dramaturge/activist Paulette Gagnon, and start to organize around the housing crisis, welfare etc. Produce a handbook for organizing: Recipes for Change.

- United Tenants (mostly women) grows out of Neighbourhood Action and in September helps a homeless family occupy an empty house at 370 Melvin Street for a week. They succeed in getting them housed.

- Two local community conferences test out the participatory methods used by Neighbourhood action and United Tenants.

- Sudbury Women's Centre carries out a number of forums on issues important to women. Mary Lou Murray goes to work for the National Action committee (NAC)

- Geneva House (a women's shelter) is set up.

- In June Nickel, a play about mining wives, written by Brigette Haentjen with music by Daisy Debolt premieres in Sudbury.

1983-6

- Community health project led by Jennifer Keck and Henriette Dauphinais through Laurentian University.

- In 1986, produces Critical Paths: Organizing on Health Issues in the Community.

- Sudbury Women's Centre Boycott of Coulson Hotel. In 1984 (circa) a group of women heard that women strippers working at the Coulson Hotel were being beaten and forced to work as prostitutes against their will. As a result, several women from the Women's Centre formed a picket line around the Coulson and handed out leaflets designed to get others to boycott this hotel. Although, in the end they were not successful, it did publicize the situation.

- In solidarity with 1884 Eaton's Strikers, Sudbury Women's Centre and local unions, held a support Rally through downtown.

- Five-week Socialist Feminist course at Sudbury Women's Centre

- In early 1985, Mercedes Steedman and Susan Kennedy offered a course on Socialist Feminism and the Women's Movement. Over the next 5 weeks approximately 10 women discussed and debated the following:

- A history of the Socialist Feminist Women's movement
- The history of the women's movement in Sudbury – the issues, struggles and debates
- Global politics and women's issues – and how the women's movement connects to the struggles of other peoples
- What and where the women's movement is going. Looking at strategy, tactics and organization

- Women's politics in the '80's – Organizing ourselves