

WG-167

A Proposal For
the Women's Place
- Toronto

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Women's Resource
Groups

Y. W. C. A.
RESOURCE CENTRE

A PROPOSAL

FOR

THE WOMEN'S PLACE

137 George St.,
Toronto Ontario.

07/3

PROPOSAL FOR THE WOMEN'S PLACE

The Women's Place began in June 1972, the first centre of its kind in Canada. The aims of the centre as described in our charter are very broad ones indeed, and vary from permitting the operation of a centre to provide consultation for women in Toronto, to running a library and bookstore. We originally viewed our functions as catalytic and supportive; providing a place for women to chat, discuss problems and organize other activities. Groups initiated at Women's Place could either remain here or break away to work on their own. Both have occurred. We began with an office which provided a skeletal referral service, a library, a bookstore and newsletter. We provided speakers on request, a space for high school women to meet and a space for the production of the Other Woman newspaper. In addition, we organized consciousness-raising groups and many liberation school courses.

Women's Place has served as a catalyst for many other women's groups and the newsletter has assisted them in communicating with Toronto women. We are supportive of women in their activities and their problems, in their research and actions concerning women's rights and women's roles, and in promoting

the culture and development of women (see Appendix A for a detailed breakdown of activities).

Over the past two years many changes have occurred. Some of our original functions, such as our educational courses, are now being provided by established institutions. The universities and colleges teach such courses as 'Women in Canadian Society', 'Women in English Literature' and 'Women and the Law'. The YWCA and Toronto Board of Education have their own liberation school and fix-it courses. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, several groups have evolved from Women's Place and moved out on their own to concentrate more fully on their specific areas of interest. In the fall of 1973 a feminist theatre group still in existence (Mountain Moving Theatre) evolved through us to provide alternate culture -- some women's views of society. In August 1973 a Medical Clinic began at Women's Place and expanded to the point where it moved out on its own January 1974. In May of this year three groups -- the bookstore, self-defence collective and the Women's Press, moved out to form what is now the Amazon Workshop. Women's Place has been the centre of such a diverse range of activities that it is undoubtedly a healthy development for expanding groups to move out on their own.

Women's Place is now providing six basic functions: drop-in, referral service, newsletter, speakers bureau, legal clinic and consciousness-raising groups. Recently, however, a group of women have decided to open a Women's Cultural Centre which will include a cafe area. In conjunction with this group

of women, we decided that the drop-in did not fit in comfortably with our other functions and that the cultural centre could better perform this function with their cafe. As a result we decided to reorganize our priorities and focus our energy on five activities: a referral system, a speakers bureau, newsletter, consciousness-raising groups and a legal clinic. Two activities, the legal clinic and the consciousness-raising groups, require no energy from those working at Women's Place. The consciousness-raising groups are being organized and started by a small collective of women and the legal clinic is run and paid for by the University of Toronto Student Legal Aid Society (CLAC).

In our reorganizing and focusing of attention on these three areas, we reviewed our basic working structure: that of two paid co-ordinators plus a multitude of volunteers. In order to serve the needs of women and function efficiently and effectively within our three defined areas, we will need a larger number of full-time paid workers. In our estimation a bare minimum of seven paid staff members will be able to satisfactorily fulfill the goals we have set. Further on in this proposal these three areas and the functions of the workers are described. Even with this request for seven staff, we have not asked for a book-keeper, fund-raiser or office person to answer general information correspondence and phone calls and to do the necessary miscellaneous paper work. With this in mind, we will still be relying heavily on volunteers to assist in these tasks as well

as in those the paid workers may require assistance with. One of the important duties of all seven staff members not discussed later in the proposal is to train and oversee the work of volunteers. With seven, rather than two staff members, this training program should be an extremely well organized and consequently effective method of initiating interested and committed volunteers.

As in the past two years, Women's Place will continue to be run by a collective of committed women who are responsible for (a) the hiring of the workers, (b) the disbursement of funds, (c) the effective running of the Place, (d) various policy statements and (e) any changes in direction or organization. The paid staff will be (a) responsible for the daily operations of Women's Place, (b) answerable to the collective and (c) part of the collective as well. This collective meets a minimum of every two weeks and will continue to do so, in order to conduct the business and make decisions.

REFERRAL SYSTEM

The Women's Place referral system is a unique service, the only one of its kind serving women in Toronto. This referral system is intrinsically different from any other referral agency in that we check and re-check the quality of the services we list in our referral files (see Appendix B for an outline of areas in the referral file). We conduct an intensive interview with individuals and organizations listed, in order to determine (a) what they have to offer women in terms of serving their needs and (b) what their attitudes towards women and their methods of dealing with women are. If an interview is not feasible immediately, we ask that a detailed questionnaire be answered. In these ways we expand and update the referral system continuously. In addition, a re-evaluation of any organization ensues if we receive any number of complaints about them.

As we have a great deal of information on every individual and organization listed in our files we can meet the special needs of every woman requiring assistance. For example, if a woman calls us asking for a gynecologist who inserts IUD's and who spends time answering the questions of patients, we can give her the names of several doctors she can choose from. If a woman calls in need of legal advice concerning separation and divorce from her husband, it is important for us to be able to refer her to a specialist in family law (there are few) who is

sympathetic to women's rights. We would like to prevent the occurrence of cases similar to that of Irene Murdoch, the woman who was denied her share of the farm she helped to build in Alberta.

The amount of work involved in running an adequate referral service is enormous and we see the need for a minimum of four full-time staff. The task of expanding and updating the referral file is a continuous one, involving a great deal of time for interviewing and assessing various agencies and groups and would require one full-time person. In addition, a lot of public relations work and advertising needs to be undertaken to ensure that women know of our existence. This area of function would also include checking on whether the needs of women were being adequately provided for and attempting to remedy any deficits by coordinating efforts with, and assisting the person doing the interviews. With the 40-60 phone calls per day that have been received in the past year, there is plenty of work for at least two people if we include the paper work as well: answering correspondence, updating and keeping the file in order, checking for accuracy, and assisting the speakers bureau and newsletter.

THE SPEAKERS BUREAU

The Women's Place has already had considerable success with the Speakers Bureau. Each month we handle about ten requests for speakers from schools, colleges, universities, unions, women's and community groups, radio and television stations etc.; we have received very positive feedback from these groups concerning these speaking engagements.

We are trying to expand this service by actively seeking speaking engagements. There is a tremendous need for this type of activity because all aspects of the media (radio, television, newspapers, theatres, films) present very stereotyped, often degrading, and consistently damaging images of women. In speaking to as many groups as possible, we are attempting to combat the prevalent sexism and sex stereotyping in our society, to encourage women to expect equal rights and equal treatment and to present a more realistic image of women as strong, competent individuals. As well as providing the usual type of speaker, we are using a feminist theatre group which puts on short plays and then speaks on feminism to small groups, using the play as a stimulus for discussion. We are also contemplating the use of films and videotapes to supplement talks on various topics.

In providing such a feminist alternative, a great deal of coordinating with various women's groups in the city will be

necessary. For example, members of the Rape Crisis Centre or teachers of self-defence would speak on their respective subjects. Such liaison now exists, but we feel expansion is essential. To achieve this, will require much more time and effort.

The functioning of the Speakers Bureau can be divided into two parts. Public relations is one important part of expanding the Speakers Bureau and consists of five specific task areas. We need to advertise our existence by contacting (a) high schools (man/woman in society classes, health and sex education classes), (b) colleges and universities (sociology, psychology, women's and english literature courses), and (c) various community and women's groups, in order to provide them with information on the topics we speak on. Another important aspect of the public relations function is to liaison with various groups in order to discover what topics are of interest and what new areas should be researched. Setting up the engagements and working out the financial arrangements, receiving feedback from the groups who have heard speakers and relaying this information to the speakers in order to maintain and improve their effectiveness, are the other necessary areas of the public relations function.

The other major activity of the Speakers Bureau is organizing and assisting the speakers themselves. We have several well-informed women who are involved in many women's activities as

speakers already, but it will be necessary to seek out more of these women to provide broader coverage of women's concerns and interests. Each speaker will provide a report on each completed engagement. Along with the feedback from the groups themselves, this information will be used to improve the quality of the talks. Workshops for the speakers will be organized to deal with problems encountered while speaking, to improve speakers' ability to talk and to field questions from their audiences. Ongoing research to continually upgrade knowledge and prepare new topics will be one of the necessary activities of the speakers, and the Speakers Bureau will help organize and provide access to resource materials.

These two major areas of activity will require two paid staff members. The Speakers Bureau will then be able to make a major contribution to the development and education of Toronto citizens.

NEWSLETTER

Until recently, the newsletter has been a "Women's Place" newsletter but now we are trying to make it into a "women's" newsletter. We are making a concerted effort to reach and serve as many women as possible, not just those involved with or interested in Women's Place activities, and we are attempting to increase our subscription list of approximately 3000 women. We view the newsletter as a communication link between the many women's groups in Toronto, catering to their needs, interests and activities. The contents of the newsletter include:

- I. Ongoing and special activities of women's groups
- II. Monthly calendar of events in Toronto for women: movies, concerts, plays, lectures, courses, etc.
- III. A forum for issues of concern to women: e.g. daycare legislation, legal reforms to the marriage laws, instances of sexism in media and elsewhere
- IV. Critiques of cultural events from a feminist viewpoint.

The paid worker will be a liaison between the various community and women's groups concerned with women's problems and issues. This will require a great deal of attention to ensure that the interests of all concerned are served. She will also be responsible for gathering information, soliciting written mater-

ial, editing, doing layout and actual production of the newsletter, completing the mailing operations and keeping the mailing list up-to-date.

APPENDIX A

ACTIVITIES AT WOMEN'S PLACE

- (a) Summer 1972: Bookstore
Library
Referral System
Newsletter
Consciousness Raising Groups
+ General Drop-In (daily)
Lesbian Drop-In (weekly)
Speakers' Bureau
Liberation School Courses:
 Women's History
 Women & Revolution
 ✓ Women & Labour Law
 Women in Canadian Society
 ✓ Women in Literature
 Women & Psychology
 Women & Our Bodies
 ✓ Yoga
 ✓ Self-Defence
 ✓ Auto Mechanics
 ✓ Carpentry
 ✓ Fix-It
 ✓ Consciousness Raising Workshops
- Fall 1972: Same as above (a)
Lecture Series
Women's Press
Legal advice for women
- Winter 1973: Same as above
More Liberation School Courses:
 Mothers & Daughters; their similarities &
 differences
 Sex Role Stereotypes
 Video Workshop
 Women as a Minority Group
 Women in China
- Spring 1973: Same as above
- Summer 1973: Same as above
Legal Handbook for Women: Women & the Law
Legal Clinic at Women's Place
Medical Clinic at Women's Place
- Fall 1973: Same as above
Personal Counselling

- Spring 1974: Same as above
International Women's Day organized
- Summer 1974: Rape Crisis Centre O.F.Y. group
Mountain Moving Theatre group

WOMEN'S PLACE AS CATALYST

- Fall 1972: Planning Women's Film Festival
Interval House
- Spring 1973: Gay Women's Conference
- Fall 1973: Feminist Theatre Group
Nellie's Hostel
Self Defence Group
Feminist Bookmobile
- Spring 1974: Women & Children's Health Clinic moves out
Rape Crisis Centre begins
Amazon Workshop begins (Bookstore moves out with
with Self Defence Group & Women's Press)

WOMEN'S PLACE SUPPORTS THROUGH THE NEWSLETTER

Baldwin Street Gallery
Canadian Women's Educational Press
Clearing House for Feminist Media
Campus Community Daycare Centre
The Open Door
Parkdale Single Parents Association
Women's Bureau
Abortion Coalition
Women for Political Action
Woodgreen Community Centre
Women's Involvement Project
Operation Family Rights
Men's Consciousness Raising Groups
Consciousness Raising Groups for Married Women
Drug Counselling
Harbinger Community Services
Trigger
Ontario Conference for Women
Radio Free Women
Feminist Bookmobile
WOMPA
Women in Transition
Toronto Women's Yellow Pages
Group for Daycare Reform

APPENDIX B

OUTLINE OF REFERRAL FILE

- 1/ ACCOMODATION: Half way houses & homes: alcoholics
drug addicts
unwed mothers
women with/without children
Hostels & Residences: long term with/wout children
short term " "
- Permanent Housing: housing/rooming agencies
residences
low rental housing
Central Mortgage etc.
- 2/ EDUCATION: Courses concerning women ...counselling
General interest courses
Financial Assistance for same
- 3/ EMPLOYMENT: Job Counselling and Information
Job retraining
Unemployment counselling information
Workers Benefits ie compensation
Unions
- 4/ HEALTH: abortion
addiction
birth control
dentists & dental clinics
doctors: g.p's
gynecologists
nutritionists
sterilization
health collectives
mental health: psychiatrists & psychologists
counsellors & therapists
crisis centres
clinics & hospitals
body therapy/physical education/dance/self defence classes/
yoga/swimming...health clubs
Sterilization
Venereal Disease
- 5/ CHILDREN: alternate education
camps
daycare
dentists/doctors
legal rights
pre/post natal care
- 6/ LEGAL: lawyers-family law
immigration
rape
students
etc.
legal clinics

Breakdown cont'd

- 15 -

- 7/MEDIA/
CULTURE: Artists & Artists Groups
Cultural Ethnic Associations
Dancers & Dance Groups
Filmmakers
Photographers
Publishers/Newspapers...Mags etc
Theatre Groups
TV (radio too)
- 8/COMMUNITY SERVICES: Crisis Lines
Immigration Services
Information Centres
Welfare Groups
Tenants Associations
- 9/WOMENS GROUPS: Art
Health
Media/Culture
Political
Single Mothers
- 10/SEXUALITY: birth control
civil rights
sex education
social groups...heterosexual
homosexual
therapy
ANY relevant body disciplines
- 11/ GROUPS IN NEED OF VOLUNTEERS
- 12/WOMEN INTERESTED IN STARTING GROUPS ON VARIOUS TOPICS
- 13/OUT OF TOWN WOMEN'S GROUPS

This is a breakdown which gives some idea of the scope of our project. Naturally it is revised and juggled according to changes in the community around us.

APPENDIX C

BUDGET

<u>SALARIES</u>	
7 people at \$7,800 per annum.....	54,600
<u>EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES</u>	
Office supplies.....	480
Referral Service pamphlets & ads.....	300
Newsletter (paper plus postage).....	4,200
Typewriter rental.....	300
Gestetner ink & repairs.....	480
<u>UTILITIES</u>	
Heat.....	360
Water.....	84
Electricity.....	200
Telephone (installation of 3, plus expenses)....	966
<u>RENT</u>	
\$275 per month.....	3,300
<u>OTHER</u>	
Insurance.....	166
Travel (4 people doing liaison work).....	480
Capital expenditures (2 desks).....	200
	<u>TOTAL</u>
	66,116

APPENDIX D

BUDGET BROKEN INTO TWO SECTIONS

SPEAKERS BUREAU & NEWSLETTER

REFERRAL SERVICE

<u>SALARIES</u>			
3 people.....	23,400	4 people.....	31,200
<u>EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES</u>			
Office supplies (2/3)	320	1/3.....	160
Newsletter	4,200	Referral pamphlets...	300
typewriter rental, 2/3	200	1/3.....	100
gestetner ink & repairs	320	1/3.....	160
<u>UTILITIES</u>			
Heat.....	240	1/3.....	120
Water.....	56	1/3.....	28
Electricity.....	133	1/3.....	67
Phone (one).....	322	two.....	644
<u>RENT</u>			
2/3.....	2,200	1/3.....	1,100
<u>OTHER</u>			
Insurance.....	111	1/3.....	55
Travel (2 people)...	240	two people.....	240
Capital expenses... (one desk)	100	one desk.....	100
<u>SUB-TOTAL</u>	31,842	<u>SUB-TOTAL</u>	34,274
		<u>TOTAL</u>	66,116

5 September 1974

FROM: The Women's Place
137 George St.
Toronto.

TO: Secretary of State
Citizenship Branch.

YEAR END REPORT

The past year has been one of self-examination at Women's Place. We have attempted to analyse our role in the Women's Movement and our function to women in Toronto and Southern Ontario, given the changes that have occurred since Women's Place first opened. In the past two years, some of the programs and services the center initiated in this city have been picked up by organizations that have the staff and resources to improve and expand upon them. And we see this as a very positive step; Women's Place showed that certain needs of women definitely did exist and now more women have access to these services. Also, the Women's Movement in Toronto has become much more diffused. While at one time almost all the feminist oriented activities in the city originated at Women's Place, this is no longer the case. And this growth too is positive; in fact, the expansion of feminist collectives was one of the primary goals of the center. So, we have found ourselves in the position of realizing a first stage has, in a sense, been passed. The prime needs of women two years ago are, some of them, being met adequately elsewhere. What are the services and functions of Women's Place that should and must be continued, and what other or new needs can we now focus energy on providing? This is the question that the collective and other women at the center discussed and debated during the winter and fall.

At the same time, during the last year, Women's Place has continued to perform its two main purposes, 1. providing services to women, and, 2. providing facilities and acting as a catalyst for projects and actions for and by women.

The newsletter has continued to be a very much demanded and very important service. It is put out each month with articles on activities at the center, news about other women's groups and information on issues of concern to women. It is distributed to some 3,000 women and has a tremendously high potential, given time and effort, which we luckily had this year.

The referral system has possibly become our most important service and certainly our most requested. Each week we receive hundreds of calls for information on everything pertaining to women. Throughout the year, we have continually improved and expanded this service, especially over the summer when several women worked on it full-time. And the need for referrals seems to be growing all the time.

The legal clinic operated two evenings per week and the women law students saw about five clients per night. It obviously met a need of many women with no access to legal information and advice. Because many callers each day wanted some kind of legal assistance, during July and August a law student was available each day to refer