

Archive No. 17

Women's Liberation Switchboard

Women's Liberation Switchboard was formed at a meeting on 13 January, 1979, by women from the old Roster Group, who had been responsible for the phone service at the defunct WL Centre, and workers from women's refuges to provide a phone information, support and referral service for women seeking refuges as well as a whole range of services in the community. The service was initially funded by women's refuges for rent and phone costs and was situated at the newly opened Women's Cultural Palace, 74 Moore Street, Fitzroy, with several other women's groups. Women were rostered on for four hourly shifts, from 10am to 10pm seven days a week in a volunteer capacity.

WLS served as a central phone contact point for information about the WLM and WL groups and provided an essential referral service for refuges in Victoria. The anonymity of the addresses of the refuges in Victoria was kept in strictest confidence. Having a phone referral service enabled the refuges to offer the residents a safe and secret location to ensure their safety.

Halfway through 1979 WLS put in a submission for funding for wages to pay workers to answer the phone as well as running costs so that the service would run more efficiently. To be eligible for government funding the service had to change its name and added Women's Refuge Referral Service to the title. Funding was approved in 1980 and it wasn't long before WLS/WRRS, as it was referred to, ran two separate and quite distinct services. WRRS was funded by the government with paid workers and referred women to refuges.

WLS was an unfunded service run by unpaid workers who gave out information on a whole range of WLM related activities including meeting times for activist groups and when and where demos were happening; referred women to services in the community, everything from doctors who did abortions to women carpenters and electricians; provided a phone contact point between the various activist groups; and supported women who were questioning their sexuality and needed to know where to find lesbian activities.

The two groups finally became officially autonomous in 1984.

WLS moved with the other activist collectives in to the WL Building when it moved to Rosslyn Street in 1980 and then to Victoria Street, West Melbourne, in 1982 and finally to

Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, in 1989. WLS continued to provide a phone information, support and referral service for the women of Victoria until the WL Building closed down in 1992. The WLS collective had its final meeting in January 1993.