

Archive No. 42

Lesbian Open House

Lesbian Open House started in June 1980 as a sub-group of the Lesbian Action Group. The LAG Open House group met every Thursday evening at 8pm at the Women's Liberation Building and was set up as an informal introduction for lesbians coming to LAG for the first time.

When LAG folded on 11 November 1980, Lesbian Open House became an autonomous group in its own right and from January / February 1981 continued to meet at 8pm every Thursday night at the WL Building at 113 Rosslyn Street, West Melbourne, May 1980 – September 1982, (then at 295 Victoria Street, West Melbourne, September 1982 – November 1988, and finally 28 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, November 1988 – June 1992) to provide lesbians and women questioning their sexuality or new to lesbianism with an informal and open discussion group.

Two coordinators were rostered on to facilitate discussion around the topic for the evening. The group usually went out for coffee afterwards to socialise. Friendships were made and lovers found at these weekly gatherings.

The coordinators met amongst themselves for C-R group meetings and for general meetings to plan the roster and to do the general business, such as publicity and finances (a small amount of rent had to be paid to the WL Building). A representative was chosen to represent the group at the Women's Building Council meetings, possible topics for discussion were suggested and any difficulties that arose during these discussions were aired and solutions offered.

When the WL Building closed down in June 1992, Lesbian Open House moved with Lesbian Line to Haywire the Young Women's Housing Shopfront 409 Johnston Street, Abbotsford, then moved with Haywire when it shifted to 20 Smith Street, Collingwood. After several years, Open House dropped its meeting times to fortnightly and when the group became too large for Haywire's premises Open House continued to meet on the first and third Thursday of every month upstairs at the Smith Street Bar & Bistro, 14 - 18, Smith Street, Collingwood.

Lesbian Open House was one of the easiest, friendliest and informal ways for lesbians to meet other lesbians, to learn about what it means to be a lesbian and to talk about any fears and difficulties she may be having with her newly chosen lifestyle. Many hundreds of lesbians

attended Open House over the years and it certainly provided a very welcome and non-threatening alternative to the bars as an initial starting point.