

Archive No. 47

Women's Liberation Centre

The first Women's Liberation Centre was set up by members of the Women's Action Committee (WAC) just before WAC folded. And opened at 16 La Trobe Street in March 1972 to provide a meeting place for the various activist groups and the fortnightly General Meetings, to establish a phone contact, information and referral service, to provide a drop-in and support centre for women, to act as a central contact point to disseminate information, to generate discussion and formulate theory about WL ideas and objectives and to put these theories into practice by organizing demonstrations and marches and forming activist groups to carry them out.

The WL Centre was financed by individual women's liberationists who made regular donations of money, by money raised from regular fundraisers and by various women's activist groups contributing money to help pay the rent and bills. Money was always in short supply and it was touch and go trying to keep the Centre open and functioning. The Centre was staffed by unpaid workers who worked on a roster basis to answer the phone and make sure the Centre was accessible for women drop in to ask about the WLM, to buy a WL Newsletter or Vashti or a discussion paper to take home and to catch up with friends.

The WL Centre moved several times:

16 Little La Trobe Street: March 1972 – October 1974

50 Little La Trobe Street: October 1974 – January 1976

100 Little Lonsdale Street: January 1976 – May 1977

165 La Trobe Street: May 1977 – December 1978

All the of the WL Centres were characterised by mismatched second-hand furniture and cushions on the floor, a sink full of unwashed mugs, dozens of posters and notices on the walls, a display cabinet with WL publications and discussion papers for sale, a wooden desk with a phone and a resource file of women's groups and community referrals.

Above all though, the atmosphere was one of radical feminist activity, of political intent, of working to make a difference in the world and of being part of something that was part of a world-wide women's revolution to overthrow the patriarchy. Whether it was talking to a woman on the phone about where to go for an abortion or attending the General Meetings with two or three

dozen feminists all with different opinions but with essentially the same goals or meeting with like-minded women in one or other of the various activist groups to put out the WL Newsletter or to set up the WL Halfway House, the WL Centre was a place where women went to find other women like themselves who wanted to make the necessary changes to enable women to live and love and work without oppression and in the way they wanted.

After the WL Centre closed, WLM activist groups rented various buildings which became known as the Women's Liberation Buildings (except for the first one which was called the Women's Cultural Palace) with similar aims and objectives, basically to provide space and resources for the various activist collectives to meet and plan actions and activities, but without assuming the role of a central authority for the WLM as a whole, as follows:

74 Moor Street, Fitzroy: January 1979 – February 1980

113 Rosslyn Street, West Melbourne: May 1980 – September 1982

295 Victoria Street, West Melbourne: September 1982 – November 1988

28 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy: November 1988 – June 1992

After the WL Building closed down altogether in June 1992, Lesbian Line and Lesbian Open House moved their services to the Women's Housing Shopfront in Abbotsford, WL Switchboard folded and the WL Archives collection moved temporarily (for eight years) to a house in Brunswick and eventually to the University of Melbourne Archives in 2000.