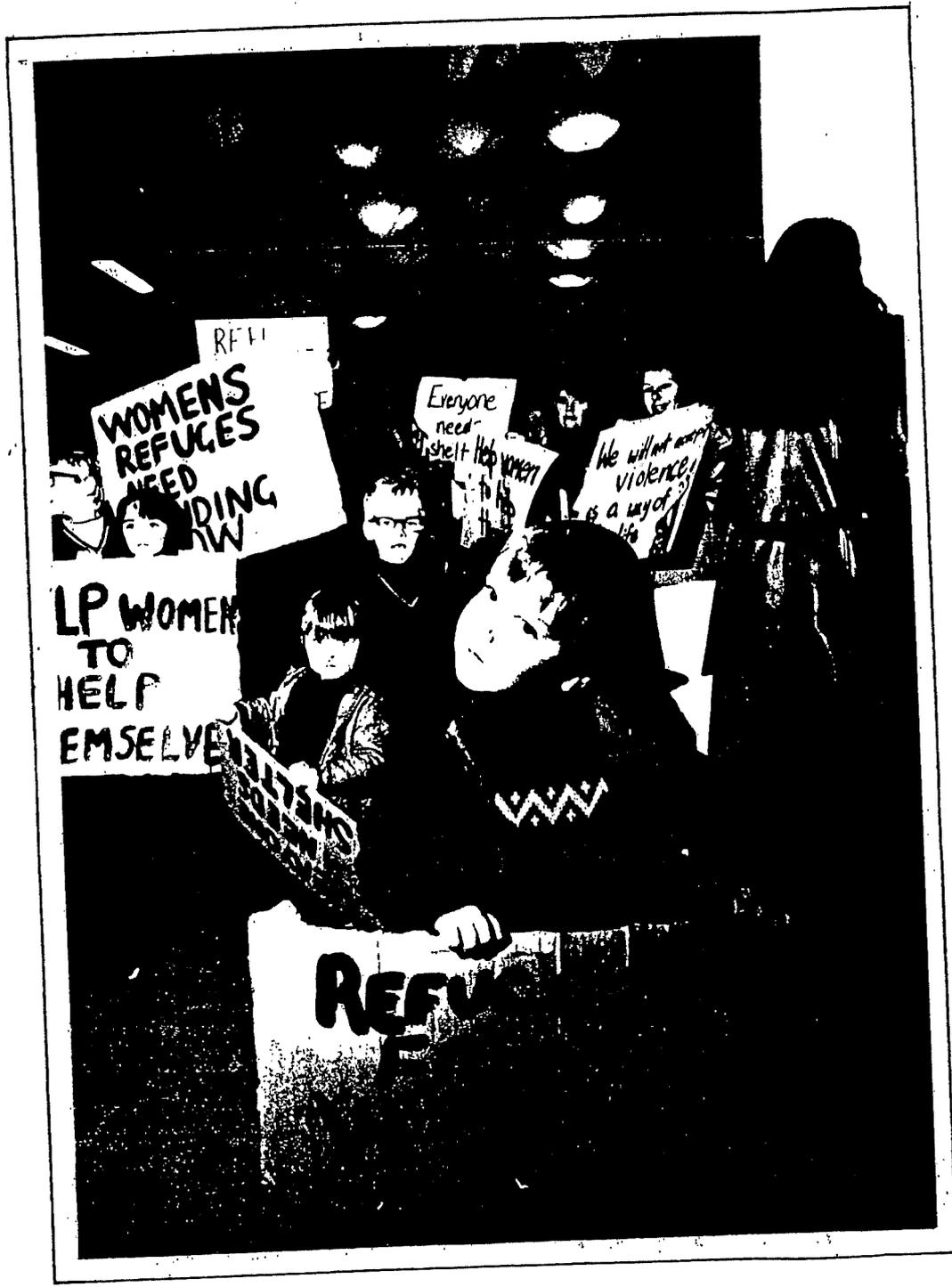


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Refuges

CANBERRA WOMENS REFUGE



SECOND REPORT 1977

Many thanks to everyone in the Collective and,

A.N.U. Students Association
Apex --- Canberra Lakes Group
Baptist Ladies Fellowship, Nth. Canberra
Beta Sigma Phi --- Alpha Chapter
Brownies, 1st Mt. Majura Pack
Bowling Club, Nth. Canberra Women's group
Business & Professional Women's Club
of Canberra
Council of Social Service of A.C.T.
I.W.Y. Secretariat
Jay Cees --- Canberra & Woden Valley groups
Liberal Action
Lions --- Phillip Metropolitan branch
National Council Jewish Women of Australia
Quota Club of Canberra
Religious Society of Friends
Rotary Club of Canberra North
Rotary Club of Belconnen
Salvation Army
School Without Walls
Hacket Primary School
Smith Family
Soroptimist Club of Canberra
Soroptimist Club of Sth. Canberra
South Woden Uniting Churches Women's
Fellowship
Traveller's Aid
Victoria League
W.E.L. Housing
Zonta Club of Canberra

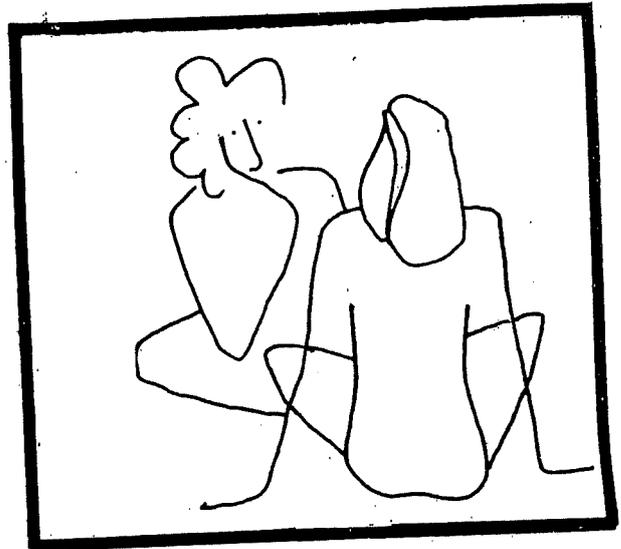
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Colonel Langtry
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Heather Meeks
Margaret Ryan
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Stephen Wenger



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THIS REPORT WAS PREPARED
BY THE CANBERRA WOMENS
REFUGE COLLECTIVE
PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE
CANBERRA TIMES



Introduction

This report is intended to be a record of our personal experiences in the Refuge Collective, how we are affected by our contact with the Refuge. It is also a record of how the Refuge is working and the experiences we have had in attempting to keep the Refuge going.

In contrast to last year's report which set out the aims and origins of the Refuge we have tried this year to tell more about the different people who are involved and live at the Refuge in addition to our actions.



Feminism and the Refug

There has been so much argument about what a "feminist" is that it seems a bit foolhardy to try to define a feminist refuge. However, I think this is an important topic, one that colours and determines what we do and how we do it. So, I have put down my own thoughts.

To be a feminist seems to me to have several parts:

- i) to see and understand the oppression of women, to acknowledge that women are limited in what we can do, be, have because of our sex - by obvious means such as discriminatory legislation and by more subtle means such as the behaviours expected of us (being wives, mothers, supportive, passive, beautiful etc) and conditioning that makes us succumb to these limitations, in the way we see ourselves ...
- ii) to try to overcome the way this conditioning operates within ourselves, what we expect to achieve, what we are prepared to try, the way we learn from the past ...
- iii) to change the way we relate to other women, to value and care for each other, to share power and skills, to understand how we have come to be in the messes we are in ...
- iv) to work to change society, to place a high priority on fighting sexism not only on our own behalf but on behalf of all women while also knowing that the way we work for changes will create the kind of change we will get.

I don't want to write more on this because so much has already been written.

It seems that being a feminist refuge is just as complex. It encompasses why we exist, how we relate to ourselves, to each other, to the rest of society.

The first step is to exist for women, for those who want to make choices about their futures away from social pressures, for those who need to escape the limitations of society or family even just for a while, for those whose need is ignored or denied, for those who want to work with and for women. This means we do not exist because there is a housing shortage (or else why not take families too?), or because some men beat their wives (only a symptom of the problem). We exist because women need the space, time, information and support to make real life choices, away from men and sexism and social pressures to be wives, mothers, lovers before being ourselves.

We may concentrate on the battered, but only because their need is so desperate. I have however always been against the idea of being only available to one group. By excluding single women don't we only continue the idea that mothers are more worthy? I don't think there are groups we can't cater for, only people we can't cater for. Sometimes a woman's need is too great for us to have the energy to help, especially if her need interferes with everyone else's. I think we should approach these people as individuals, not types, and tell them openly if we can't help, but not exclude them before we know them. However, we aren't a lodging for travellers, our emphasis is on women making life choices.

The next step is to be run by women. This has many functions: it frees us from the role-playing pressures that exist when men are around; it gives us a living example of women doing things, running their own lives/work; it gives us a chance to meet and know women and be together; to work at things we are generally excluded from, to learn and share new skills; to enjoy being with women involved in serious work, of helping other women without being in the usual power relationship of other helpers such as social workers (I'm OK, you've got a problem); together, we show the rest of society what women can do; we can gain strength to work for change ...

Then, how we operate is vital. We function as a collective. This means we see the importance of the people who do the work or who are affected making the decisions rather than people who are separated from the daily round, the intimate contact etc. - it means that we don't believe experts understand better than us what the problems and solutions are. They might sometimes have good advice on how to achieve an end, but not on what to achieve. So, we don't need professionals, and we don't want anyone to be set up as being better because they are trained. I always think that warmth, caring and vulnerability, a willingness to try new ways, and openness about yourself, etc. are far more important than knowledge. That can be acquired.

A collective is also a group in which everyone has a chance to express themselves, to learn skills, to have an impact. This means keeping the records open, sharing all information so that everyone knows what is going on and can comment on it or influence it. It also means listening to each other, going slowly enough for everyone to speak and be heard, so that we all learn to speak in groups, to value our ideas and opinions enough to express them. It means meeting procedures should be minimised as they exclude those who don't know the rules. Also it means jobs should be shared and rotated wherever possible, regular positions should be minimised to help the spread of skills and information. Not all members of a collective want to be involved in everything but the opportunity should be there. Policy issues and changes should really be talked out so we can reach a consensus about what to do. (Majority decisions and votes often mean that what one person or groups want is always ignored or overlooked). Inevitably some people know more, do more etc. Okay but constant vigilance you know ...

In operating, I think an emphasis on autonomy and openness is vital. A woman makes her own decisions in her own time. She also decides what to tell us, how and when. She needs information about her rights, about services available. We might have opinions and we may share them. Fine. As long as we acknowledge them as ours and let her reach hers. To do this we should be open. No secret record cards which put her down or confuse her about where we stand. No secret discussions with welfare about her. It's amazingly good to never say anything about someone you are not willing to say to them.

At the same time we are individuals working or living together and

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co-operation is important. We shouldn't oppress other women, for example by letting some do all the shitwork, or by reducing standards to the lowest common denominator, or by always expecting the most experienced to do things, or ... We need to concern ourselves with how we as a group are operating. This is really relevant at times of ideological battles. We can sometimes discuss our opinions, analyses or whatever until the cows come home and never agree on who has revealed the truth. Then we need to ask ourselves how are our differences affecting us? What do we have in common? How can we work through this together? What are the basic values we agree on? Can we build on them? Or is it time to split?

The big question arises around action for change. I think it's important to agree change is needed and to decide on specific issues we can fight around. This means working out how we think things should be and how to get there. We may need a lot of interim goals as real change is slow. There are hundreds of issues - housing, pensions, the law, child care, education, employment, community services etc. We can't tackle the lot, so we also need to be aware of with whom we can link up for action on different issues and what our commonalities and differences are with those people, groups.

However, I have always felt that we must be prepared to recognise our limits and to value the work we do by merely existing, by sharing our lives and work. Often there are debates about politicising the residents. Fine. But, just deciding to control your own life is a big step. For many of us it was a long time before we reached that stage and longer to the action in a group stage. The question of what we can do to help that process along remains open. I think talking helps; experience with closer, more immediately relevant actions is a good step; participating even by listening at meetings is useful. We need to be aware that trying something hard and failing can be very discouraging. This all means that I think we should be wary of expecting rapid radicalising of people and of down-grading our achievements. If the aware and concerned at the Refuge can work on one big issue or a few small ones during a year, we are working for change. It all helps.

There are many other areas for thought but the last thing I want to say is that we should continue to say we are a feminist refuge and try to live it out. (I don't believe in unconscious feminists. They may be fantastic women but that is not the same thing as stating that you are a feminist, acknowledging your awareness and action).

In claiming to be feminist, we will always have to respond to people who ask us what that is and to do this we will have to keep asking ourselves too, asking where are we? How did we get here? Where next? What do we really want? We should keep this alive.

31st October, 1977.

FEEDBACK,
The National Times,
P.O. Box 506,
G.P.O.
SYDNEY. N.S.W. 2001.

Dear Sir/Madam,

We don't often get bouquets, so your sympathetic reporting of the Canberra Women's Refuge (N.T. October 24), was much appreciated, particularly since the aims and the work of the Women's Liberation Movement have so often been misunderstood and misrepresented by the media. We feel however, that some of the comments made in the closing paragraphs of the article were misleading, as it is impossible to understand what the refuge is trying to achieve unless it is seen as part of the Women's Movement.

Much of the so-called "sloganeering" of the Movement is in fact the response of the media and other people, to what the Movement has to say about our society. We at the refuge believe that we also have an active role to play in fighting injustices and making women's needs, often unpalatable, public issues.

A further correction is necessary regarding the numbers of women and children seeking shelter at our refuge. The figures quoted were for our first year of operation, in the following twelve months (July 1976-1977) 198 women and 259 children sought shelter.

Your article could also have lead people to believe that women living in intolerable circumstances, no longer have any worries. Unfortunately this is not so and the problems for many women and children are still enormous.

There are now approximately 50 refuges for women around Australia. Twenty of these are administered by feminist collectives and the Canberra Women's Refuge is the only one here run along these lines. Women's Refuges by the very nature of their work, have to put a limit on the length of time a woman can stay, so as to make room for other women arriving, often bruised and battered, on the doorstep.

In most Australian cities emergency government housing is virtually non-existent, since waiting periods are often over 18 months. Non-government flats and houses, at a reasonable rent, are extremely hard to find. Estate Agents generally don't like to supply housing to women whose only means of support is a pension and there is still much discrimination in this area. Bond and advance rental payments also make private housing inaccessible to women and their children living below the poverty line.

Even in Canberra, where emergency housing is easier to obtain, it takes a lot of courage and determination for a woman with two young children to go-it-alone on a pension of \$68.00 per week.

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Part-time work is hard to find at the best of times, for a woman who has been out of the workforce for several years and in the present economic climate it can be almost impossible. Even if she gets a job she has to be on a pretty good wage to come out on top, after cuts to her pension and the payment of child-care fees.

So the alternatives are still very limited and many women go back, after the wounds have healed ... until the next time, simply because they don't really have much choice. And because they have been brought up to believe that to be 'female' they should be submissive, forgiving and loving in a marriage relationship, and that they must keep on trying to make it work, no matter what the cost to themselves as individuals.

The men who beat their wives are often alcoholics, victims of a society in which they feel alienated, inadequate and unable to cope. After a drinking spree their frustrations and tensions are released, for a while, by bashing or abusing the wife, who they blame for their own lack of self-esteem. She is much more accessible than the boss or the unseen, all powerful 'system', which after all supports and condones violence and aggression in men.

We should not forget that battered women are only the most obvious victims of a violent society. Lack of freedom, never having your own money, being confined to playing the role of a 'Wife' or 'Mother' only instead of being accepted as a person in your own right, all these pressures constantly limit what a woman can be or do in our society. Refuges were opened with a consciousness of many more subtle oppressions than that of physical brutality alone.

Our role is to provide support and comfort to those, alone and with children, who seek shelter, we are as your article so aptly put it "women sharing the problems of being a woman with women", we cannot be objective but we realise that the liberation of women is only one step along the road to a better society for everyone.

Admittedly, support systems, in Canberra, for people in need are fairly good, though even here, those most desperately in need are often the last to find out about the rights and services available to them. However facilities here are by no means an example of the "Australian Welfare System", as anyone who has lived elsewhere will tell you.

There is still a long way to go before women and children are adequately provided for in Australian society, but we cannot overlook the important and vital role played by women such as Germaine Greer, in helping us to understand and reject the limitations imposed on us and in serving as a catalyst for those of us who are in a position to do something about it.

Yours sincerely,

CANBERRA WOMENS
REFUGEE COLLECTIVE

Pressure on Government

Womens Refuges expose a multitude of women's needs and oppressions. The Collective gathers information about the enormity of the needs serviced by the Refuge, and discovers our relative inability to meet those needs. We want to use the information collected to pressure the government to provide adequate finances and services to assist women in distressed circumstances and to raise the consciousness of people about the situation of women in this society and the need to change it.

Towards the end of 1976 the Collective presented some of the constant problems that were confronting us to policy makers in the ACT. We outlined where policies or the ways in which they were being carried out were discriminating against women and children and recommended various changes.

We have concentrated our energies on two main areas, the law and housing.

The Law

A major discussion paper was written in January outlining injustices experienced by married women from the Refuge through the practice of the legal system in the ACT.

We sent this paper with two confidential case studies to the then Attorney General, the Hon. R.J. Ellicott. Copies of the paper were also sent to other politicians and groups we thought might be interested.

In our paper we made some specific recommendations in an attempt to alleviate specific problems. These included:

- that the Family Law Act be interpreted in a more equitable manner. This could partially be achieved through considering the eviction of a violent husband in recognition of the right of a woman and her children to live in the family home.

- that Police dealing with domestic violence be prepared to tell the women of their rights and direct them to the Australian Legal Aid Office, instead of just telling them to take out a "Keep the Peace Order" from the Court of Petty Sessions, which is virtually powerless; and

- that unemployed trained interpreters in Canberra be employed by a government body on a sessional basis, to help with difficult legal procedures.

We had many responses to this paper and representations were made on our behalf to the Attorney General and the Minister for the Capital Territory.

In March we met the Registrar and Counsellors of the Family Law courts. Both said that although the paper had caused a considerable

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stir, the feedback was valuable for them to have.

The increase in communication generated by the paper was extremely useful for us. We also talked to the ACT Police. In June we had a fruitful meeting with the Assistant Police Commissioner. Since then we have followed up one of the ideas coming from the meeting, that we talk to police cadets about the Refuge during their training.

Although all this communication has been useful there remain insurmountable problems that many women have to contend with and the law and its interpretation remains much the same.

There are women who have sole legal right to their home plus non-molestation orders against their husbands. These women often continue to be harrassed by husbands forcing entry to the home and inflicting further violence. Our contact with the Police was an attempt to find ways of getting better protection for women in these situations.

There are also many husbands desperately angry with the loss of control over their wives lives. These men make continuous threats and sometimes attempt to kill their wives. Many try to make sure that if they cannot possess their wives, then no other man will ever be able to get close to the woman. They also try to make sure that friendships made with women at the refuge are broken.

There is still a very strong ruling from Judges involved, that fathers should be able to see their children. This is so even if the fathers were frightening or grossly neglectful. Because of this husbands are able to find out where their wives and children are.

The amount of evidence a woman needs to accumulate before the Judge will take action on a non-molestation order seems ridiculous. Yet if a man is given a short prison sentence for assault of his wife, she risks even greater rage. This is a special problem in "domestic disputes", even if the parties have been separated. There are special laws such as a wife not being obliged to give evidence against her husband in court and there is the problem of the police who often tire of "domestics". It takes a lot of conyincing before the police believe that a serious assault or death could be pending.

So for months and sometimes years after leaving their husbands and fathers some women and children still suffer from fear because of the lack of protection given them by the legal system and the community as a whole.

Housing

A short discussion paper was written on the urgent housing needs of women and children as seen by the Refuge.

In summary, our paper argued:

Government Housing

- That a woman is not eligible for emergency housing if her name is on the joint title of a marital home, or if the family has already been granted a government house. This is totally irrelevant to the woman and her children's urgent need of accommodation, if the husband will not leave the home.

- That there should be an opportunity for joint tenancy for two women, who thus have equal legal security. Women at the refuge sometimes wish to share accommodation with a new friend for companionship, protection from harassment from angry husbands, and to share costs.

- That counter staff have been offputting to women whom they do not believe are eligible for emergency housing, sometimes refusing to accept applications although they had no authority to do this.

Private Housing

- Women on their own, especially with children, often seem to be assumed by real estate agents and landlords to be bad risk tenants, based on totally unfounded prejudices.

- Bonds required by landlords are so unreasonably high that it is virtually impossible for a woman supporting a family on a pension to save enough money.

The discussion paper went on to say that if the women's refuge is to operate at its most effective level, it should have a reasonable turnover of women and their children to accommodate those in immediate need of its services. There are many women and their children who need an interim housing situation to cover the period from two, up to twelve months, while they finalise legal proceedings of divorce and custody, sort out their financial situation, have a chance to save more money, and so establish themselves as an independent unit from their previous marital situation Therefore we strongly recommend that the Department of Capital Territory Government Housing Branch set aside a number of their houses specifically for the purpose of interim emergency housing of this type.

We also asked for halfway house accommodation as an extension of the women's refuge's functions.

The paper was sent to local and other politicians including the Ministers for the Capital Territory and Environment, Housing and Community Development and the Real Estate Agents' Institute.

As a result of representations made on our behalf by our local members and senators, Mr Staley granted an interview where he agreed to temporary housing assistance for one of our residents who had been forced to leave her home which was a government house. This meant that she and her husband were both eligible for a government house.

Mr Staley also agreed to grant joint tenancy to two women. However, in a subsequent letter he said that the matter was being considered.

We also raised the problem of women who come from interstate to the refuge, and are therefore not eligible for government housing, because of the twelve months residency requirement. Although Mr Staley seemed sympathetic to the needs of these people, the departmental representative from the Housing Branch was adamantly against this, fearing a flood of people from interstate demanding government housing in the Australian Capital Territory. This is quite exaggerated, as the women who come from elsewhere have no choice but to flee from where they came in fear of their lives. Also of course, women leave Canberra to go elsewhere for the same reasons.

Subsequent to this meeting, Housing Branch officials advised the Emergency Housing Committee to be very cautious in allocating emergency housing to women from elsewhere, because they said the Minister was firm on this ruling.

A Case Study:

In early August '77, two women at the refuge, both with three children, had been there for three months and had not been granted houses by the emergency housing committee, because they had not been in the ACT long enough. One was from the local region and one was from Western Australia, and they had both left where they had lived because of longstanding violence to them from their husbands. They could only have a chance at a reasonable life in a new community.

The Collective sent a letter to Mr Staley describing the situation. The two co-ordinators and the two women involved later met with the Minister who felt the Emergency Housing Committee was not being flexible enough in its interpretation of its role. He granted them houses immediately, and issued a press statement saying that this would set a precedent.

At a meeting in August, we told Mr Staley that we knew of many government houses in the ACT which were lying empty, apparently because of the Department of Capital Territory's skeleton maintenance staff, and inefficiencies.

At these meetings with Mr Staley and with officers of the Housing Branch, our requests for half-way housing were refused.

Mr Staley said that if the Emergency Housing Committee worked as effectively as he hoped it would in the future, half-way housing should not be necessary.

This has not proved to be the case.

Squatting

In mid-July a welfare officer brought a woman and her four children to the Refuge. She had been evicted from her Government home for being several hundred dollars in arrears with her rent. A number of collective members were extremely angry and all felt the need to take swift action. We believed it was iniquitous that Housing Branch had evicted a woman supporting herself and her four children on the Supporting Mothers Benefit after Welfare Branch had proposed that they would guarantee payment of this woman's rent. The Housing Branch completely rejected this proposition even though it is a common arrangement made between the two branches of the Department when people have difficulty paying their rent.

With the support of Senator Susan Ryan, Maureen Worsley (Member of the Legislative Assembly and Chairperson of the Emergency Housing Committee) and Canberra Times journalists, Jack Waterford and Diana Plater, collective members moved into the house with the woman and her children. We intended to squat until the Housing Branch let her stay.

We were joined by people from the Low Cost Accommodation Committee, Stress Cottage and Lennox House at ANU. In addition to the Canberra Times, radios 2CA and 2XX and television CTC 7 gave us media coverage to help bring our actions and the woman's situation to the attention of the public. Late in the afternoon senior officers from the Housing Branch agreed to accept Welfare Branch's original offer with one third of the arrears paid in cash.

This was a significant event for the Refuge as it was the first time we had been involved in open confrontation with a Government body. Previously we had always worked with other agencies and authorities in an attempt to obtain adequate housing for women in need. We have had some success but not nearly enough. We have many women living in the Refuge who for one reason or another are not found to be eligible for emergency or other government housing. The "sit-in" stimulated some of the women who had been living in the Refuge for some time to consider direct action to obtain housing for themselves and their children after normal procedures had been exhausted many times.

They found it extremely frustrating to see many houses lying empty for months in the immediate vicinity of the Refuge while they lived in the Refuge which was an overcrowded and often tense place to live.

We held meetings and it was decided that two women who had had a particularly long wait would make one more attempt to go through "the system" by seeing the Minister for the Capital Territory before deciding to squat.

This time the women were granted housing. However the squatting issue continued to bubble as many women were still having to meet the residency requirements before they could be granted a government house even though they were obviously in urgent need of housing after living in the Refuge for months. No-one would choose to live in the Refuge if they had somewhere better to go as it is a crisis centre and because of this it is a difficult place to live. It is also important that the Refuge remain a crisis centre where people can get the support they need.

In November the decision about whether to squat arose again. We have been trying for months to establish a Halfway House, somewhere where women, over the initial crisis can be safely housed until an alternative becomes available where they can be self supporting but with the occasional assistance of other members of the collective. We tried in May to get the house next door granted as a Halfway House. This request was refused (see excerpt from May Diary). This house has been left vacant since then.

In late October we decided to press our claims for a Halfway House yet again. We made a formal application to use the house next door as a Halfway House. However two women in the Refuge decided that they had waited long enough for "emergency" housing that had still not been granted. The Refuge was overcrowded and so they decided to move into the house next door that had been empty for so long. It is an important step that it was the women themselves who had experienced the waiting who grew angry and wanted to take action. The collective decided to support the squat in every way possible and with the help of all the media we are continuing to press for the use of the house. Negotiations are still underway.



Action Groups

To help ease the problems of administering the Refuge and associated activities committees have been formed to look after roster training, maintenance, follow-up housing and co-ordination of NSW refuges.

Co-ordination Group

Since the beginning of womens refuges in Australia, people involved have lamented the need for better communication and co-ordination amongst refuges. When this was brought up at a meeting of NSW refuges in Canberra towards the end of 1976, a group of women from the Canberra Womens Refuge Collective agreed to operate as the co-ordination group for the ACT and NSW refuges for a limited period.

We agreed to be the first to accept the task, because it seemed to those present at the meeting that we were ideally located in Canberra in the case of any funding emergencies. However we had, and still have, no intention of continuing in this role and hope to rotate it with other NSW refuges.

Since its formation, the co-ordination group has met on many occasions. Its first task was to write to as many refuges as possible, to tell them of our existence, the reasons for it and offered and sought any assistance. However our main and most exhaustive job was the preparation of a budget submission to the Prime Minister on Commonwealth funding for womens refuges.

Strong rumours followed up by newspaper articles were anticipating reluctance on the part of the Commonwealth to provide any funds for presently unfunded refuges or any additional funds to existing ones in the 1977-78 financial year. It was also expected that any money provided was to be made available by way of block grants to the States which would open the opportunity for what happened in Queensland in 1977 to be repeated there and possibly elsewhere in 1977-78.

Consequently we drew up a list of all known womens refuges in NSW and as a list of questions we needed answered to draw up a budget submission and then called on as many people in the Canberra Collective as we could to 'ring around' the questionnaire to the refuges on our list. This invariably took much longer than anticipated - at least 2 or 3 phone calls.

Understandably many refuges had not heard of our existence before and were often reluctant to participate immediately. This meant a good deal of time to explaining the reasons for the formation of the group and the purpose of the exercise in hand. However for us the contact made in the phone calls was very rewarding especially with the refuges in places distant from Canberra such as Darwin with whom we had previously had no contact. The information we received provided the basis for the final submission which emerged after several solid working meetings of the larger Canberra group and the smaller co-ordination group.

We found that, in the 50 womens refuges we contacted in the 18 months to July 1976, 12,000 women and children had been accomodated. This increased to about 15,000 during 1976-77. But despite this obvious need for crisis accomodation for women and their children which these figures show, there remained a number of major Australian cities without a refuge, e.g. Ballarat, Mt Gambia, Bunbury, Orange, Bathurst and South Coast of NSW.

On the basis of the telephone discussions with some of the refuges some truly appalling funding and accomodation situations were revealed. So much so that we devoted a portion of the report to brief case studies, highlighting some of the worst of these.

We concluded the submission with an outline of how we would like to see Commonwealth funding for refuges operated.

Although the Commonwealth is continuing to fund refuges in 1977-78 by way of block grants to the States under the Community Health Program, womens refuges was the only area of this program which the Treasurer singled out in his Budget speech as being an area which his Government considered to be a high priority. The Government has also indicated that within the Community Health Fund, \$1 million has been provided for the funding of new refuges even though the Commonwealth cannot insist that the States spend it in this way. Finally it has given some assurances that the 2 refuges in Queensland will receive funding one way or another this year.

We are constantly aware of the need for better communication between Refuges. Each Refuge still tends to organise independently and this creates confusion, conflict, misunderstanding and funding inequalities between us.



Talking with Residents

As the women who come to the Refuge form the largest number of our collective we have included some of their feelings and ideas, thoughts about their past, the Refuge and their futures.

"How did the Refuge help you?"

M: "In more ways than one. It made me realise that I am a person now, and shouldn't have to be bashed around and helped me get on my feet. It made me believe in myself for once and not what other people tell you."

K: "As well as being a refuge from violence it has helped me immensely and it has given me a chance to stand still and think of where I am going and what I have done and what I would like to do as far as myself and the children are concerned."

S: "You made me feel like a person again. I feel like I can cope on my own which for many years I haven't felt able to do It just happened with the co-ordinators and roster women and women resident here - just chatting to them and listening to their problems and their plans and talking to them myself."

First mentioned was often help with obtaining legal aid, housing and money but the increase in self worth gained by many women who have stayed in the Refuge is evidence of the many intangible benefits the Refuge is able to offer.

"How did you find living with other women as a group?"

G: "You know you think you're the only woman with that kind of problem ... It's easier to cope with when you know there are other women in the same situation.... I've never been game to admit I'd been bashed up or anything. That's a thing you don't tell other people. It was a shock (to hear that other women had been bashed too). You think you're the only one ... then you come here and find other women and they say they haven't told anyone about it. You can talk openly with them and say things you can never say to your husband".

M: "Depending on who's here at the time there's lots of support and helping each other ... sometimes you have people who pull together and other times you walk in and it's cold".

L: "You really need people who've been here a bit longer because the old ones know a bit more and have more guts for doing things than the new ones have".

K: "I think you have to be here at least 3 weeks before you settle down. In the first week you are all up in the air and on edge".

J: "I find it very exciting because once you sort of get to know other people you help one another at the same time".

Previously cooking, cleaning and other housework was done by everyone individually and meal times especially were chaotic. This year a roster was introduced so that now all these tasks are shared, food is bought in bulk for everyone and turns are taken to cook for the others.

"Do you think that sharing helps?"

M: "Yes, it's better than going through the fridge and saying who does this belong to and who does that belong to ... I think the kids are a lot better too because they were the ones who suffered".

We have found that many women need to come to the Refuge a number of times before they are able to make a final decision about where they will live.

C: "The first time I came to the Refuge I stayed here between 3 and 4 days. The second time I stayed about 5 days and the third time I stayed 5 weeks and 4 days, the longest this time because I'm not well and truly sure - I went back with him twice before to see if we could fix things up, put things together and that, but he wouldn't have anything to do with it".

K: "I was talked out of (leaving) before and the main argument was from my family ... very hard for a woman on her own to manage with two children ... so I went back even though I didn't want to".

A recurring theme was that the women felt they could not talk to their husbands; that their men were not interested in talking about problems and working through solutions either alone or with counsellors.

"Why did you come to the Refuge?"

L: "I have 6 stitches over one eye ... I arrived here absolutely terrified ... that my husband was going to follow me and assault me again and get my two little boys. I don't know where I would have gone or what I would have done if I hadn't been able to stay at the Refuge. My sister could only put me up for two nights ... I didn't want him to come there and cause trouble for her as well as myself ... I knew I had to go somewhere he didn't know about".

J: "I wasn't going to be a punching bag for him or anyone else so I took off with the kids to the Shelter".

Many women find that they feel safer if they are able to go to a Refuge in another city and sometimes in another State, somewhere where their husbands can't find them as the women above mentioned.

"What do you want to do now?"

J: "Now I want to find a place for the children and myself and start a new life without him. I don't want them growing up thinking violence is part of marriage. I don't think that that is the correct way to solve arguments. I want to try and give them the best education and upbringing I possibly can. I hope to get another good job and support my children and myself but at the moment my biggest worry is accommodation".

This is basically what most women want: a safe, comfortable home free from violence and tension, room to grow, have friends and raise their children.



A Letter

Sometimes we find ourselves measuring our "success" by the number of women who don't go back into what seems the same situation. We need reminders that this is not so. Such a reminder came from an ex-resident and part of that letter is reproduced below. She was in a desperate situation when she came to us from interstate, terrified with four very young children and a violent husband who soon afterwards abducted the children. When, many months after she had established herself and her family in a suburban home, we heard her husband had returned to live with her we were very distressed - a failure.

She writes:

"I'll always be grateful to Lizzie, Helen and Mary and all the others that helped me through a very bad time. I feel now that it was all meant to be. It has given our marriage a solid foundation though I'd never have believed it at the time. Maybe it could be of comfort to some other girl that sometimes we have to hit rock bottom before we can rebuild a happy relationship I thank you all and although (my husband) would never say so, he owes you thanks too."



Children

Like other Refuges, we soon came to see that we operated what could more aptly be called a Women and Childrens Refuge - not just a Womens Refuge. We realised that it is not only the parents who suffer from the break-up of a relationship or marriage. The children are in many ways punished more - in a state of insecurity wondering where they shall live, with whom, guilt that perhaps this may some how be their fault. More often than not the family, thus the children, have been in a stressful state for a long while before the decision to move out is made: situations often involving violence and alcohol. Women in crisis are often too exhausted and distressed to adequately care for their children, concentrating most of their energies on immediate safety and other pressures. Some of the women have never developed adequate skills in these areas, often due to poor parenting in her past.

We soon became aware that we were not doing enough for the children: that we needed a special person responsible for the children and mothers as parents. We did not have the resources to provide this.

In March 1977 we received a T.A.B. grant of \$4,200 to provide a part-time Child Care Co-ordinator.

Our main objectives were:

- To provide support and care for children resident in the Refuge.
- To recognise the special role of women as mother, accept ambivalences and help her work through these often giving her "time-out" and having the children cared for elsewhere on a daily basis.
- Improve child/parent relations.
- To help identify a child's problems (many children are given the label "behaviour problem" as they express their confusion and insecurity) and help through the refuge or facilities outside to overcome them.
- To link up with and use all childhood support services available particularly in South Canberra. The co-ordinator is a vital link to the professional childhood services: many of the parents would not know of these services, or would be too afraid/suspicious to use them.

It is emphasised that the child care person never sought to replace the mothers. Even though we feel strongly that society has a collective responsibility for children, in practice it is the mothers who remain the caretakers.

It was decided that for the efficient running of the Refuge it was necessary that most of the children were away from the Refuge for most of the day, most of the week. The women then had time to talk to each other and the workers, carry out the time consuming and exhausting arrangements and even sometimes have a well deserved rest.

The school aged children were taken to school as soon after they arrived as possible. Preferably they would remain at their own school, however because of inadequate transport it was usually necessary to enrol the children at Griffith Primary School. We developed a close liaison with the staff there and they have been very caring and helpful.

An arrangement was made with Manuka Occasional Care Centre to take our children on an emergency basis for full day care. The staff there have been great and have recognised our special need and provided excellent care.

A Community Health Nurse stationed at Narrabundah replaced the Infant Welfare sister. This change was a great improvement in providing a more active involvement and a greater range of care for the baby, older child and women. However because we felt that she was still being underutilised we set up a structured "interview" situation and a set time each week. All new mothers were to bring their children to see her, along with any sick women or children.

The Child Care Co-ordinator compiled a Resource folder of child care facilities in the ACT and Queanbeyan and during the year she was a member of the ACT COSS Child and Family Welfare Task Force making a submission for a revision of the ACT Child Welfare Ordinance.

We employed a play leader to help care for and provide meaningful and enjoyable recreation for the children in the December-January school holidays (part-time) and in the May school holidays (full-time). The money for the latter came from the Office of Child Care.

Our backyard was made a more enjoyable place for children by the erection of a climbing/play apparatus and a sandpit.

Our 1976 Christmas party was a great success for all. Santa Claus was of course present bearing lots of goodies. Over 50 children were there, mostly ex-residents!



Child Abuse

The most commonly talked about form of child abuse is the "battered baby" syndrome. However child abuse can be seen in a much broader perspective, encompassing psychological cruelty, neglect, deprivation of love etc.

Viewed outside the narrow perspective of child abuse many children we see at the Refuge have been, and continue to be abused, mostly unintentionally.

There has very often been violence - sometimes extreme, in the home. Father beats mother, mother vents her anger and frustration on the children - the power hierarchy. Stress in the mother is increased by her feeling of having no power over her life; that she is caught, there is no way out. Her health often deteriorates and there is an increase in consumption of drugs - particularly cigarettes, alcohol and tranquilizers.

The mothers often have ambivalent feelings toward their children. On the one hand they may love them desperately and not want to give them up to husband/foster care; and on the other feel resentment and anger that she could be free and independent without them. These feelings are very often communicated to the child by excessive worrying and concern, excessive demands then sudden punishment.

There is often deprivation of warmth and affection as the woman is completely engrossed in her own problems. The child has lost one parent and is terrified of losing another. This may lead to acting out problems ranging from constant whinging and screaming, breaking things, bed wettings, thus further increasing the problem by attracting more negative feelings.

The most consistent form of physical violence in the Refuge is the hitting of children. This may be the excessive use of hitting as the only way of correcting undesirable behaviour, or excessive force when someone loses their temper. Other things such as kicking, shaking, scratching can be discouraged by peer group pressure (from other residents and workers). Having other understanding adults to turn to when these feelings come, to share them and give time out is very important.

This may seem negative, however I feel that with adequate support in the community these mothers can be good parents and allow the children to grow into healthy adults. A society which isolates women with their young children whether in the marital home or if single in poor quality housing on an income below the poverty line with no real attempt at a collective responsibility for children must be condemned.

Co-ordinators Day

The morning - it's 9 o'clock and the phone is already ringing. I've been a stop much all day. I'm greeted at the door with problems. Sometimes its flattering to be thought of as a problem solver, sometimes it just seems impossible to do anything. Sometimes I feel so helpless, so untouched by a tough life - and yet being a woman unites me with all these women.

Someone says "a woman with three kids rang and she's coming in an hour: she was crying and she's got no money but I said we'd pay her taxi fare."

Someone else introduces M; the police brought her here last night. She has two black eyes that would do credit to any makeup firm in the variety of blues, greens and purples surrounding her sad eyes.

The older kids are all at school but there seem to be endless little ones coming up for cuddles. With a blue-eyed baby on my knee I answer the phone - a drunken voice (at this hour?) asks for P. She's not here. "Tell old jam-face I love her. You've got a nice voice, what's your name?" "I work here". I put down the phone and talk to M who came in last night.

One of the collective who's on roster that day arrives. Some of us sit down round the dining room table, have coffee, check whose come and whose left over the weekend, ask whose got appointments with legal aid, housing and welfare. M just wants to recuperate for a day or two before she goes anywhere. J has to go to court but is terrified of seeing her husband there: one of us goes with her to support her.

In a momentary lull we chat round the table. "All I wanted when I got married was a nice house and kids, and outings at the weekend like barbecues. The he started to drink. He spent over \$400 one week on drink".

"My husband didn't drink much, only a couple of beers in one night. But he couldn't take it. Then he'd get violent."

M's husband destroyed all the furniture: cut it all to ribbons, broke all the chairs. She's left the Refuge now but he still bothers her, still threatens her. The police come and take him away but he comes back the next night.

K was so desperate she drove thousands of miles interstate in a 25 year old car with 3 children in the back, to get away from an ex husband who wouldn't leave her alone.

The doorbell rings .. it's a lady from the local church with a home made cake which we put away carefully for the kids' tea. The phone rings - someone asking us to speak about the Refuge at a Health Centre. The woman with three kids arrives in the taxi, the cake is brought out again to give these kids and while everyone else entertains them I try and comfort and support the new arrival.

Sometimes I go home from the Refuge thinking the whole world must be peopled by men who are sexual perverts and alcoholics; men who have no respect for women, men who are so jealous that they won't let their wives out to take the kids to preschool, men who take out their miseries on their wives with violence.

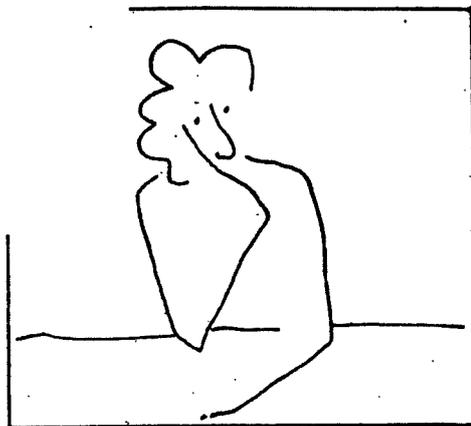
I need to get away from the Refuge to correct my world vision.

But I still have to face the reality for many women three days a week at the Refuge, and getting away is more difficult than it might seem. I only have to say where I work and everyone turns to me with bated breath ... and they're not always sympathetic. The stereotypes come out in a typical Canberra dinner party. "Some women like being beaten", I'm told, after months of trying to help women cope with the terror induced by violence.

While writing this I received a phonecall ... the second this evening from the Refuge. (All four of the workers work much longer than the 2½ days we're paid for). A volunteer on roster rang up. A woman with six children has just arrived minus their school clothes. Everybody will know something has happened if they go to school tomorrow without them, and it won't be much fun for them. She's been back to the house with the police but her husband wouldn't let her in. The police said "a man's home is his castle", thereby denying her any rights. What to do. Ring the police and try again. She has got rights. By law half the contents of the house are hers.

Fighting for women, by women - along with friendship, support and shelter, its what a Refuge is all about. We have to fight for better houses, more houses. We fight to educate bureaucracies, the police, politicians and the community in general. We fight to change laws and end the oppression of women.

It's why I wanted to work at the Refuge. But I keep on working at the Refuge because I have never before seen such courage and determination as shown by the women who go through the Refuge. I love and respect the women I'm employed to help.



On Roster (1)

I just wanted to write about how I feel being a roster person at the Refuge and why and how I became a roster person.

I will start with the "why and how".

For sometime I felt that I was living on the surface of life. A nice man, nice kids, nice home, nice car, etc, etc. How nice and how easy it is to keep on going that way. How easy it is to become smug about other peoples' problems.

After being away from Canberra and returning after three years earlier this year, I found Canberra so sterile and artificial. Everything looks to nice, just the way my life looks, yet I know that it can't be all as nice as it looks.

Shortly after that I saw a film about a Womens Refuge in Sydney which made a deep impression on me and I decided to find out if there was a Womens Refuge in Canberra and if it could use my help and help me.

I have now been a roster person for about five months and find myself becoming more and more involved as time goes by. Both physically and mentally.

The way it is run suits me well. No bosses and no shit workers.

I felt quite at a loss at first and it took quite a few weeks to feel my way and feel confident about what I was doing there.

Sometimes it seemed as if no-one noticed that I was there and I felt quite lonely and wanted to cry out "help!"

This doesn't happen any more.

Other times I was barraged with questions and requests that I didn't know how to handle and felt I should.

But why should I?

Now I feel much surer of my self and happier with my self.

I love the friendship, the caring, the emotions, the comforting, the talks and the laughs.

I like to be of practical use and fix and clean things when the mood takes me to help to make the place as pleasant as possible.

By going to the Refuge and being part of the collective, I have become more aware of the real problems women face once they have left the misery they endured before coming to the Refuge. I can understand now that it takes great courage to come in the first place and to face the problems ahead of them.

I am more aware of the professional services offered to the public and how inadequate they are and almost void of feelings.

I have also become more aware of myself and how I feel and how other people feel.

Sometimes I feel as if I am in a whirlpool of feelings and I am being sucked in deeper and deeper. I find myself caring so much about what has happened and still is happening to some of the women at the Refuge that I take their problems home with me and I want to go there as often as I can. I try to drop in as often as I can. I often wonder if this is just a passing phase. My caring may be just a passing phase but the need for a womens refuge unfortunately still remains. For how long, I often wonder. Why is our society the way it is!!



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On Roster (2)

I have recently had a lot of contact with younger feminists and also have a friend who was involved in the Refuge. All this was the real beginning for me of seeing the need for change. It has taken a long time to come out.

The alternatives available to you if you decide to face up to the outside world are so often repair services. During my years of isolation in my home I had time to think. Slowly I formed my feminist ideas and became aware of the need for people with similar ideas. You also miss out on the warmth and love that exists in the community when you are alone in a house and I was feeling the need for sharing.

My involvement in the Refuge for the first time means I have come in contact with a group of people that think along the same lines as I do. This helps me as an individual and I get an amazing amount out of it. I was uncertain about what to expect at the Refuge, wondering whether my limited background would make it difficult to talk and listen. I found however a remarkable similarity with people there and age doesn't seem to matter. It also seems good that there is a number of us so that we can all offer different things to different people.

It is marvellous to work with a group of women. It is so different. When I was younger you were looked down upon if you spent all your time with women. If you got away from women you could better your lot and thereby be more independent.

Mixing with a group of women particularly those that are realising their positions as women means that the Refuge has been a positive coming out for me.



Changing Roles

In 1977 we were able to put into practice some of our ideals about the employment of volunteers. When the child care job became vacant we realised there was only 2 to 3 months before we found out if we would be given enough money in the budget to enable us to employ someone for another 12 months. Two volunteers then spent approximately 5 weeks each in this role. They both found this very rewarding, enjoyed earning money doing something they felt was worthwhile. The Refuge benefitted with the sharing of skills and knowledge. Both continued to be volunteers afterwards.

Another woman who had been a volunteer for about a year was also chosen as a co-ordinator. Below are some of her impressions of the differences she felt.

Theoretically there is little real difference between the paid workers and volunteers. They share equal place in the collective (in the decision making process). I was however surprised by the way my role changed.

The main difference was a tremendous increase in my feelings of responsibility. I usually couldn't pass the responsibility for getting something done onto someone else. The residents look to me to do something about their problems, there is the responsibility of trying to co-ordinate things at the Refuge - sorting out the most immediate and important. Before, I could go to a co-ordinator and get advice, tell them about a problem and expect them to do something about it. Suddenly I was the person other people came to. I was the same person but was suddenly expected to have the answers - to make decisions. I know there is a collective to share the major decision making but little decisions, about people and their lives go on all the time.

This feeling was brought out after a recent meeting of the collective. I felt so frustrated because there was something I knew had to be done but no-one else there wanted to talk about it. The other things were important too but the trouble was that I knew I'd have to do these things if no-one else did.

As a co-ordinator I have an established role: I always have something to do. Even though I had been a constant helper at the Refuge for a year and felt comfortable, there were many times when I felt uncertain, even useless. Thus being a co-ordinator makes things easier for me but I really feel for volunteers, especially the new ones when they have no definite role and don't know what to do. I think that this is not good for the Refuge, that this is a problem for the collective that we need to work on.

As a volunteer, women rarely came to me to ask for help, I usually had to approach them, or was indirectly asked.

Because I spend much more time at the Refuge each week and because the responsibility is greater I need much more emotional support and physical presence of other people. I look to other people for help and feel let down when it doesn't come.

Agencies and government officials with whom I deal afford me greater status as a paid worker compared to being "only a volunteer". I know this shouldn't be so but it certainly makes dealings with them easier. People erroneously assume that because a person gets paid they are more important than a person who doesn't.

Thus there are greater rewards in being a co-ordinator, but I feel these could and should be shared around so that the volunteers get more. One basic reason for this is that I am there so much more but this doesn't account for all the differences.



Roster Training

Even though our paid staff has increased to four, most of the workers at the Refuge are still volunteers. We do not demand that our volunteers have any formal training in welfare or counselling work. Traditional counselling from professional people is readily available in the community and we do not wish to duplicate existing services. We seek to meet the needs that arise in the Refuge in a different way.

However we do feel that most workers can benefit from some "training" in a group situation: the opportunity to express doubts and fears and learn something about the workings of the Refuge in a supportive environment whilst getting to know and trust other collective members.

New workers have been asked to attend one Community Volunteers Course run by Council of Social Service. This is a course of 6 to 7 weeks, two hours per week. The C.V.C. covers such things as: basic listening skills; the difference between reflecting feelings and telling a person what action they should take; basic contracting and commitment and an exchange of information between members of various community agencies.

Following this is a Refuge Roster Training course for six weeks, one night per week and led by two collective members (volunteers and/or paid workers). It was thought to be ideal if everyone doing the roster training had completed the C.V.C. For various reasons this did not always occur.

Some volunteers really enjoyed the C.V.C., others did not. Almost without exception, most enjoyed the Roster Training Course. Volunteers are not obliged to take part in either of these courses.

There have been two Community Volunteers Courses in the past year and 24 women from the Refuge have taken part. There have been three Roster Training Groups. Of the two held in early 1977, 19 people took part and of these 14 are still actively involved in the Refuge.

Aims of Roster Training

1. To increase the awareness of and sensitivity to individual women in their individual crises. Facilitating the development of skills in coping with these especially within the Refuge setting.
2. To increase the awareness of women as an oppressed group, discussing the inequalities and injustices perpetrated on women in our society: the importance of Feminism.
3. To increase the awareness of ourselves and the way in which this self can affect our relating to women in the Refuge; sharing ourselves, our limitations.

4. Getting to know other members of the group thus increasing feelings of identification with a group of women working together for a common aim.

5. To share specific information about practical aspects of running this women's Refuge.

It is also a sorting out process. We have a feminist perspective from which we work; we organise ourselves as a collective and are developing a collective structure; we teach each other about the oppression of women in this society and try to establish on-going support and ways of relating to each other as independent, self determining women. It is these areas that are central to an understanding of the aims, policies and actions of our collective.

Loss of Volunteers

We seem to have a large number of people who express an interest in working in the Refuge perhaps come along once then drift away. It seems by looking at the training numbers that training is an effective way of keeping volunteers. It is a time intensive process and we do not have the person-resources to run more than 3 small training sessions per year. It often seems that only the most dedicated and tenacious stay - or those who have some personal contact with established collective members. Unfortunately we never seem to have enough energy to expend on our most precious asset: our volunteers. As we employ more paid workers this must become one of our most important priorities.



The Womens Weekend

In May of this year, a much discussed dream of the Collective was fulfilled and a "Women's Weekend" finally took place.

The primary object of the weekend, to which all roster workers and paid workers were invited, was to spend time discussing all the things we never have time to talk about on Sunday meetings or rap groups. A secondary object, which for some women was the most important reason for the weekend, was to get to know other members of the Collective in a more personal way than is possible for most of us through normal Refuge activities. There are friendship groups in the Collective obviously but the weekend gave us all an opportunity to explore relationships outside these friendship groups.

Helen Seaton offered the use of a farm house out at Michelago which she and some friends rent as a weekender. A few people went down on Friday night and by mid-morning on the Saturday over twenty women had arrived. Our agenda was long and comprehensive and needless to say we didn't get through a quarter of it.

Much was achieved in the sessions where we discussed such things as hiring and firing of staff, the open nature of the Collective, Sunday meetings, rap groups, the need for ideology and the usefulness of Refuge as just a band-aid.

Many of us felt that the opportunity for each person to make a statement of her feelings about the Collective was a bit much to handle - I certainly did at the time but in retrospect I feel it was an exercise which has bound us all more closely together and given us some insight into each other as individuals as well as members of the Collective.

For me, Saturday evening was a tremendously warm satisfying time - massage, food, honesty and being together.

Not everyone got the same things out of the weekend - certainly it wasn't the 'retreat' I was expecting it to be - but it wasn't school camp either. I felt terrifically stimulated by the weekend, but I also felt emotionally drained, though in a positive way. For some people the weekend crystallised their attitudes towards certain things and for others it opened up their heads to new ideas.

I am very glad I went.



Our Diary

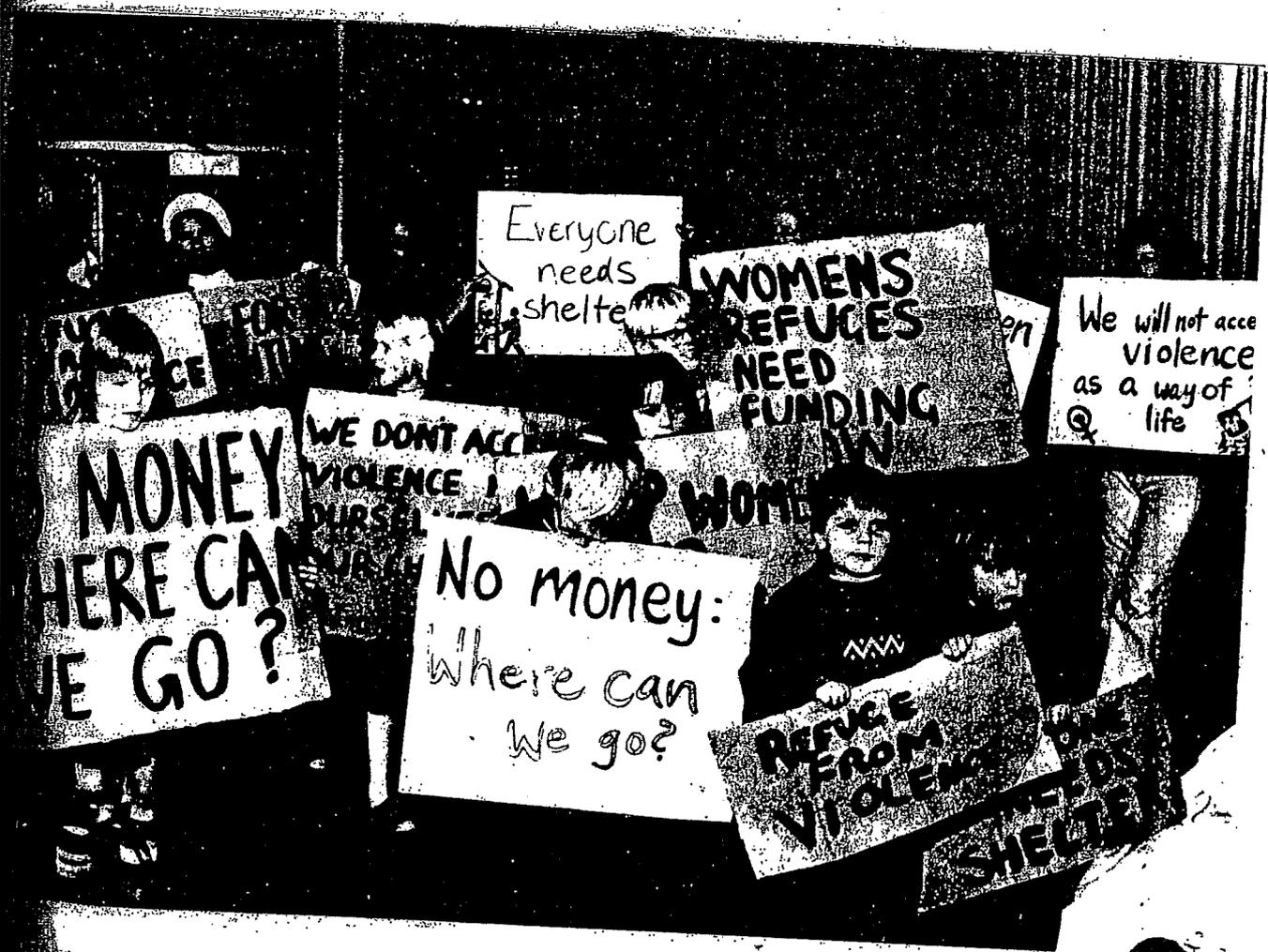
In May this year we decided that information could be spread more easily throughout the collective if it was all written down and distributed to those involved at the time. Many things have not been written about in this report that have been important to the running and continued existence of the Refuge. We have many meetings to discuss an enormous variety of problems that arise and none of these have been mentioned. We have also taken part in numerous demonstrations in an attempt to more forcefully bring our needs to the notice of decision makers. These also have not been written about in any detail. The excerpts of the diary presented here are therefore intended to show a kaleidoscope of all the things we are involved in.

- May 5 J. attended pre-budget discussions with WEL and the National Council of Women. They had half an hour with Mr Fraser, Mr Lynch and others to talk about womens matters in Australia. J. spoke for 5 minutes (!!)
on Womens Refuges.
- May 7-8 Amazing Cathartic Refuge Collective Weekend.
- May 9-20 M. employed for school holidays with a \$540 grant from the Office of Child Care. Lots of excursions, outings. The highlight was 45 women and children (many ex-residents came too) going to Tidbinbilla for the day and revelling in the bush.
- May 12 M. and J. went to talk to Carli Tucker at Beauchamp House about a letter she had received from a Japanese Womens Group who wanted to set up a refuge there. We gave her lots of information.
- May 13 M. had a long phone discussion with Mr Gillespie about
a) the house next door (72 Kennedy St) which we wanted to use for a halfway house (the answer was no).
b) the long delays in getting emergency housing.
- May 17 Received letter from Narrabundah Health Centre: they will provide an after hours emergency service for the Refuge on a two month trial basis.
- May 18 Students from Environmental Psychology (II) to meet residents and S. and C. They are doing a report on the effects of the environment on people in institutions and half way houses etc.
- May 21 Charity stall at Fyshwick markets staffed by residents and collective members. Made \$200!
- Throughout May members of the collective have helped the NSW/ACT co-ordination group by ringing Womens Refuges all over Australia to get information about their funding or lack of it for a budget submission.

June 11-13 J. P. M. and H. attended the Marxism and Feminism Conference in Sydney. There were about 200 women there and the feeling was great.

June 21 C. and H. went to see M's solicitor to find out what we could do to stop M's husband constantly harassing and threatening her. We were told yet again that they can do nothing.

June 29 Sit in at the Department of Health. This was part of a national demonstration that was trying to draw attention to the desperate situation we would be in if we are not funded in the next budget.



July 9 Four Corners program on Womens Refuges was broadcast. The program gave a sympathetic treatment and emphasised that women stay in impossible situations for as long as they do because they have no alternatives.

August 16 Women from the Halfway House in Melbourne arrived to demonstrate at Parliament House on Budget Day. We joined them and got lots of media coverage.



- Oct 8 R. went to Child Care Conference at Beauchamp House sponsored by ACT COSS and attended by most organisations providing child care services in Canberra including Pre-schools and Welfare Branch.
- Oct 13 H. and J. went to a meeting called by ACT COSS to discuss a Community Chest for Canberra.
- Oct 27 Gathering at R's to discuss aims, history etc. Lots of people new and old came. It was nice being together and getting to know people. We replied to the National Times article. I would like to suggest that we form a Task Force in the New Year to write a Manifesto. I think it would be beaut to give to new residents and volunteers and a really good exercise for us all.

October

Our present residents are concerned about the stigma which they feel surrounds them, as women who have needed shelter, in our society. They plan to invite Diplomats, Politicians and other people to suppers at the Refuge to discuss with them their situation and the reasons why they are here. Their aim is to create more awareness and understanding of their needs and to show people that they are ordinary women who were living in intolerable circumstances and had nowhere else to go. They also want people to see for themselves that the Refuge is NOT DIRTY! A delegation of two, this week visited Parliament House and saw Mr Staley who said he would be delighted to be their first supper guest, some time next week. The group are also organising a Xmas toy appeal.

Nov 5

A group of women from Elsie came to see us about lack of funding for Womens Refuges.



From now on TUESDAY MORNINGS will be devoted to CHILDREN ... hopefully in their absence! They should be at school, pre-school or occasional care so that we can relax together and talk about any worries we have concerning their development or behaviour, our relationships with our kids and the general problems of coping, with so many young children in the Refuge. Depending on the needs expressed we will invite speakers on child-guidance, contraception or whatever. These sessions will be open to past and present residents and I would be particularly grateful if some past residents could come and share with us the child related problems they faced, during their time of crisis, and the way in which these were resolved (or otherwise) once their lives had become more settled.

Numbers

STATEMENT OF RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH JUNE 1977

Cash at Bank 1st July 1976		
Capital Territory Health Commission Grant	776.99	
Establishment Grant	3177.51	
Other Funds	<u>3206.22</u>	7160.72
<u>RECEIPTS</u>		
Grant from Capital Territory Health Commission	20000.00	
Grant from ACT T.A.B.	4000.00	
Grant from Office of Childcare	486.00	
Donations	2418.83	
Bank Interest	<u>565.12</u>	
		<u>27469.95</u>
		<u>\$ 34630.67</u>
<u>PAYMENTS</u>		
Salaries	16700.04	
Food and other domestic products	1781.23	
Travel and transport	1310.51	
Fuel, light, power	814.93	
Telephone, postage, stationery	504.65	
Repairs and maintenance	437.55	
Manchester, hardware, minor appliances	1089.15	
Rents, rates, insurances	664.96	
Miscellaneous	725.42	
Capital expenditure	<u>2602.55</u>	
		26630.99
Cash at Bank 30th June 1977		
Capital Territory Health Commission Grant	468.18	
Establishment Grant	329.36	
ACT T.A.B. Grant	1567.62	
Other funds	5680.97	
Office of Childcare Grant	<u>46.45</u>	
		<u>7999.68</u>
		<u>\$ 34630.67</u>

ANNUAL STATISTICS: 1st JULY 1976 TO 30th JUNE 1977

Total numbers resident

Women 198
Children 259 (129 over 5 years, 130 under five years)

Beds supplied during year was 5887, made up of 2106 in the first six months and 3781 in the second six months. That means an 80% rise in bed occupancy over the last six months, partly explained by more beds being available.

Some facts and figures

Average number of residents per night:

1st quarter : 4.8 women, 3.1 children
2nd quarter : 5.7 women, 9.5 children
3rd quarter : 7.0 women, 14.1 children
4th quarter : 8.2 women, 12.6 children

Highest monthly occupancy was January '77 with 698, averaging 7.5 women and 15.1 children per night.

Greatest number on any one night : 11 women, 23 children (4/1/77).

Oldest resident 76 years, youngest resident 5 weeks old.

(A sad social commentary ... For the 10 days following Christmas Day '76 we averaged 9.8 women and 18.9 children each night, probably a record for our Refuge).

Main reason for seeking refuge (women only)

Violence	35%
Homeless	35%
Leaving home	15%
Mental cruelty	4%
Drunkenness of partner	2½%
Not given	2½%
Potential violence	2%
Put out by husband	2%
Other	2%

Referred to Refuge by: (women only)

Previously resident	16%
Friend/relative	16%
Welfare	11%
Not given	9%
Lifeline	8%
Police	7%
Media	6%
Feminist groups	5%
Hospitals/Health Centres	4%
Taxi drivers	3%
Salvation Army	3%
St Vincent de Paul	2%
Others	10%

(Others includes: Doctors, lawyers, Government Departments)

In the previously resident category, two thirds of the women had children and mostly gave reason for coming as violence or drunkenness of partner, the women without children returning, mostly gave homelessness as reason. 82% of previous residents returned in the last 2 quarters of the period covered, as yet we cannot interpret the sudden change (QI 2, QII 3, QIII 10, QIV 17). The time between visits varied from well over a year, to a few weeks.

Length of stay at Refuge (women only)

- 35% one night only.
- 23% more than 1 night, less than 1 week.
- 15% one to two weeks.
- 11% two to four weeks.
- 9% four to six weeks.
- 7% over six weeks.

Of the largest group, those staying one night only, 41% (28 women) had no children with them, but it is significant to note that of these 28 women 10 (or 36% of those without children with them) had left children at home and another 9 (or 32%) were 19 years of age and under. Of those staying 4 weeks and over (33 women), 18% had no children with them, 24% had one child with them, 31% had two children with them, 15% had three children with them and 12% had four children with them.

Number of children accompanying women to Refuge

- 39 $\frac{1}{2}$ % of women had no children with them
- 20 % of women had one child with them
- 21 % of women had 2 children with them
- 12 % of women had 3 children with them
- 6 % of women had 4 children with them
- 1 % of women had 5 children with them
- $\frac{1}{2}$ % of women had 6 children with them

Of those with no children with them (78 women), at least 24 women (or 31%) left their children elsewhere while at the Refuge (at home, with friend, Marymead). More than half the women without children with them were aged 22 and under (8% were 16 years, 5% were 17 years, 5% were 18, 13% were 19).

The more children a woman brought with her to the Refuge, the more likely she would return home next day, but those that stayed more than one night often stayed long enough to solve their problems.

Of those with 3 children
25% stayed only 1 night
21% stayed over 4 weeks

Of those with 4 children
33.3% stayed only 1 night
33.3% stayed over 4 weeks

Of those with 5 children
50% stayed only 1 night
None stayed over 2 weeks

Of those with 6 children
None stayed over 2 weeks

Ages of women using the Refuge

Less than 18	6%
18 to 24	34%
25 to 34	33%
35 to 44	16%
45 and over	5%
Not known	6%

There were 25 women aged 21 and under who had children,
One child : 2 aged 17, 5 aged 18, 5 aged 19, 2 aged 20, 4 aged 21.
Two children : 1 aged 19, 3 aged 20, 2 aged 21.
Five children : 1 aged 21.

Destination on Leaving the Refuge: (women only)

Returned home	27 %
Not known	17 %
Private accomodation	12 %
Friend/relation	11 %
Interstate	10 %
Emergency housing	7 %
Home, husband moved out	3 $\frac{1}{2}$ %
Hospital	3 %
Live-in job	3 %
Other Refuge/Halfway house	3 %
Still resident at Refuge	3 %
Gov. housing, normal list	$\frac{1}{2}$ %

Of those whose destination on leaving was not known, more than 80% were very short stay residents, most one night only. Of those who obtained Emergency Government Housing, 50% did so in the last quarter of the period.

THANKYOU

Many thanks to everyone in the Collective and

ACT Council of Social Services

ACT Marriage Guidance Association

ACT Police

Alternative Bookshop

Australia Legal Aid Office

Canberra Times

Childrens Book Council

Family Planning Association

Kingston Child and Family Guidance Clinic

Liberal Women's Action Group

Low Cost Accomodation Committee

Mental Health Branch

Media: CTC 7, ABC, 2CA, 2CC, 2XX

Narrabundah Health Centre

Occasional Care Manuka

Order of the Eastern Star

Pre-Schools: Causeway, Garran, Flynn

Quota Club

Schools: Narrabundah and Griffith Primary and Infants School

Service Clubs: Lions Club - Phillip and Metropolitan Branches,

Lions Ladies Auxilliary; Rotary - Canberra-Belconnen;

Apex

St Vincent de Paul

Smith Family

Tip Top Bakeries

Tuggeranong Baptist Fellowship

Wesley Uniting Church, Kingston Womens Group

Womens Affairs Branch, Prime Ministers Dept.

Womens Centre

Women from the New Zealand High Commission

YMCA

Zonta

Kate Burns

Pam Coward

Mrs M. Hansen

John Haslem

Mer Henchcliff

John Knight

Mandy Metcalf

Tricia Rees

Mrs I. Robinson

Liz Roebuck

Susan Ryan and staff

Judy Sandry

Lyn Simons

Jack Waterford

Maureen Worsley