



Campus Women



A Place for Womyn

- Dawn Ambler

We cannot change the world alone To heal ourselves, to restore the earth to life, to create situations in which freedom can flourish, we must work together in groups. -Starhawk, Truth or Dare.

We live with some basic truths in this world. It is a patriarchal society, womyn are oppressed, violence or the threat of violence supports and perpetuates the institutions of dominance which upholds patriarchy, collective action is necessary, and the cooperation of women creates an alternative world vision. We must recognize that the process and the product are linked. We must integrate a feminist process in all we do to create change. We must work collectively in all our actions. To do so we need to create a caring, sharing-based, balanced, safe working space. A place to express our truths and share our knowledge and our power. An environment which supports the process of questioning, critiquing and working for change. Many of our universities across this nation have a Womyn's Centre. In many cases this centre is paid for through student fees and affiliated with the Student Union. In some cases the University also contributes monies and/or grants for the operation of a centre. These centres' services range from a telephone to a space with 24 hour open lounge, office, meeting room and library. Some provide a hot cup of tea or coffee or a place to eat lunch in their drop-in centre as a respite from the daily chaos on campus. Some womyn's collectives have no formal structure but the majority have a formal constitution and policy manual. Many have paid coordinators with the job of outreach, liaison and daily administration of the centre. The U.Vic. Centre has a work study program and hires four students each year. Why a womyn's centre?

* Sexual harassment occurs at all levels of education.

* Womyn are graduating with larger debt loads than their male counterparts.

* Single parents, most of whom are womyn, are living below the poverty line due to inadequate student loans.

* Womyn earn less from summer employment than men.

* A very small percentage of tenured faculty are womyn.

* Access to alternative health care is a priority.

* Gender stereotyping and gender-exclusive language are predominant features of many classrooms.

* Lesbians and women of colour face double discrimination.

* Womyn need a room of their own. What is the mandate of such a place? Based on a month's research by fax and telephone, the bottom line is to provide a safe, supportive environment for womyn. A space that allows womyn to work collectively through skill and information sharing, trust, support and compassion. A place to network with other womyn's ideas and issues. Most of these centres offer extensive resource centres with everything from pamphlets on birth control to films, books (as many as 2000 at Simon Fraser), and access to ongoing research for, and about, womyn. Many plan events and celebrations, workshops, memorials, and speakers. Some have the funds to produce publications for the general university population. The University of Victoria sends a pamphlet on their centre to all first year students. Their Power of Language pamphlet is sent to all faculty and staff. Another important aspect of a womyn's centre is the ongoing liaison with the university itself, special interest groups, and the community as a whole. Promoting equality on all levels of campus life for students, staff and faculty. Issues that affect womyn such as security (Carleton University Women's Centre provides a foot patrol), pay equity, and academics (promoting the inclusion of womyn's content in courses) are all included in their lobbying. The U.Vic. campaign "NO MEANS NO" has been adopted by CFS. Some provide a referral service to other groups and agencies both on and off campus. Meeting areas are for discussion groups on issues such as sexual harassment, daycare, pornography, suppression of womyn's history and ideas, media exploitation, sex stereotyping in education, sexual assault, violence against womyn, and reproductive choice. Support groups are either formed with help from the centre or already existing groups can use the meeting rooms. These groups' interests range from