Jessye Says Hello!

Dedicated to social justice is a stronger piece of my identity than my name, pronouns or background. That said, I’m Jessye Kass and I’m truly ecstatic to be here.

With over eight years of direct service experience domestically and internationally, I am both ready and excited to serve as Director of Programs. Deeply passionate about empowering vulnerable communities, I have had the Cambridge Women’s Center on my radar for several years, and previously referred my old clients here.

Most recently, I was managing an affordable housing program for chronically homeless HIV+ adults and homeless youth with mental health disabilities. I also have experience living and working in Ghana, Kenya and Thailand. My work scope has included program management, staff and volunteer supervision, art education, counseling, 

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Letter from an International Volunteer

My time in the Cambridge Women’s Center was a great experience! I’m an international volunteer with the organization United Planet. I wanted to do a Quest in Boston towards women empowerment. They arranged the volunteering project for me. I didn’t know anything about the Women’s Center before I arrived in Boston.

The first thing I noticed in the Center was its open, warm and empowering atmosphere. The walls were covered with inspirational quotes, pictures, paintings, etc. After I was shown around, I was impressed with how big the house was! Also, I noticed how people accept each other as they are. Women get the opportunity to find approachable support from the volunteers, but also from the other women.

Especially during the groups, I could feel the support and the empowerment of the women next to me. I attended the Spanish-English group, the Trauma Support/Discussion Group, the Women’s Healing Circle,
Welcome to our Summer Newsletter! By the time you’re reading this, autumn is already getting started. It’s been so busy here at the Women’s Center this summer, we got a little behind schedule. But we’re excited by the changes — including a new Director (see Jessye’s Hello on page 1), new members of our Board of Trustees (see page 5), new computers for our two Computer Labs (coming very soon!), and a variety of new groups and workshops.

We do apologize for the delay in this newsletter. The best way to keep up to date with our activities is to follow us on social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), or sign up for our email list by clicking the button on the home page of our website: www.cambridgewomenscenter.org.

Since autumn is now in view, we’ve already started working on our fall newsletter, which we’re expecting to be out around Thanksgiving time. You can look forward to these articles:

- Celebrating the 10-year anniversary of the Survivor Theatre Project, which is growing with a new director!
- Our Women’s Resource Database is going online, making it accessible for anyone who needs information about social services and other support.
- Reminiscences from the very first President of the Women’s Center, who talked with us recently about the exciting early days of the Center.
- And much more!

All of our groups and activities are made possible thanks to your support. We rely on our community — our friends and neighbors — to keep us moving forward, serving more than a thousand women every year with material aid, informational resources and emotional support.

If you’d like to help us continue to serve women in need, please consider making a generous contribution today, using the enclosed envelope to mail a check, or making a secure online donation at our website.

Thank you, and we wish you a happy autumn!

~ By Linda Pinkow, Development Coordinator

Meet Jessye  (continued from page 1)

teaching, training, recruiting, grant writing and reporting. I am thrilled to employ these skills here, and eager to help grow and nurture this truly unique space.

As a new leader here, it is important for me to hear your ideas and experiences. Please feel free to reach out to me directly: my email is jessye@cambridgewomenscenter.org, or just come see me at the Center. I would love to hear from you!

An International Perspective  (continued from page 1)

the Beading Group and the Writing Group. In these groups, people don’t judge each other; they respect each other’s stories and they just listen and try to understand. I’m happy to have witnessed this beautiful interaction.

The Center offers things in such an accessible way. For example, the Luncheon. Sharing food creates a bond; while eating you talk about anything and you get to know each other better. I noticed the women I shared food with, those were the women I created the best bond with. They shared popcorn, smoothies, cut some fruit, or cooked some chicken.

On my last two days, I realized how much I had given and how much love they gave me back. They gave me so many compliments, some women got emotional. At that moment, I realized I had accomplished my mission in the Center!
A Survivor Writes and Helps Others Heal

Rawda Aljawhary has been a Women’s Center member for about a year, participating in many of our trauma-related groups. Several months ago, she became one of the facilitators of our writing group for trauma survivors, “A Survivor’s Write to Heal,” when Cindy, the group’s founder, needed to take a break. Rawda recently told us how important writing has been in her life, and how our unique writing program has helped her and others:

Writing started for me in high school. We were growing up in a very violent neighborhood, and so writing was a huge tool. It’s similar to how you always see basketball in poor neighborhoods. Typically, that’s an outlet for people because it doesn’t involve much money — it’s just a hoop — and so similarly for me, writing didn’t take anything expensive, it just took a pen and paper. I was writing stories from a very young age and would read and escape into imagination.

And I did creative writing in college…. For four years in college I workshoped my writing very regularly, we had these intensive, extremely informative writing workshops — very structured — so it was this dedicated, very diligent, rigorous program, and then I came here and it was wonderful to find a very trauma-sensitive, trauma-centered writing group with Cindy, and with the rest of the women here. I think that was wonderful, because usually I’m the only writer in the room writing about trauma.

This group is different because I don’t have to explain. You don’t have to go through the whole effort of explaining why your pain matters. And why it’s not just navel-gazing, or self-pity, it’s actually a refinement process — of refining sorrow and suffering into something — to have this interesting fruition come from sorrow and suffering. When you write about it and you distill it into something — into wisdom. And it makes you a much better person for having gone through that experience and using it to have greater empathy for other people.

It’s been such an honor and such a joy to be substitute facilitating for Cindy, and I think that some of my favorite parts are when, at the end of our discussion and at the end of the writing period, everyone is sharing their writing, when people have somehow, in the short time that we’re together, distilled these amazing, exquisite pieces of writing, these achingly beautiful pieces, they’ve reached some amazing conclusion, or some sort of enlightenment has been reached through the discussion and at the end of the writing. So the pieces that people share are very profound, very moving. Everyone just gives their honest experiences to each other, shares with love with each other. It’s so great to watch that process unfold.

Provocative Performance Benefits Women’s Center

For many women, the current #metoo discourse is cathartic, while the stories are all too familiar. As we struggle to confront the actions of people we trusted, turn anger into preventative policy, and consider our own biases and mistakes, the emotional work can be overwhelming.

I recently had the wonderful opportunity to consider these issues through the lens of theatre and community at a performance of “Kings” at the Somerville Armory. Written by Brit Christopher and directed by Samantha Gambaccini, the play confronts toxic masculinity and entitlement, substance abuse, and personal responsibility for standing silently by when your friends are acting reprehensibly.

The play is fictional, but draws its power from the real experiences of people involved. Each superbly written and acted character had depth and nuance that allowed the audience to become invested in them, even when we were repulsed and angered.

During a discussion with the cast, writer and director after the performance, the impact was clear. People spoke emotionally about their own experiences and, in some instances, their own guilt. The intimate setting provided the perfect environment to speak honestly and listen closely to others.

Art allows us to unpack challenging social questions in a unique and powerful way, and I certainly left feeling hopeful despite the heaviness of the evening.

The Cambridge Women's Center is deeply grateful to the producers of Kings, Little Dinos Productions, for donating the proceeds from the Somerville performances of “Kings” to us. Their generous contribution will help the Women's Center continue providing services to the women of our community, and standing up to all forms of violence and inequality disproportionately born by women.

~ By Ella Weber
Thank You to the following people and organizations that hosted fundraisers and organized donation drives for the Cambridge Women’s Center this year:

- MIT Stop Our Silence, a student-run group, which donated the proceeds from their annual production of The Vagina Monologues to the Women’s Center.
- Fletcher Global Women and the Henry J. Leir Institute for Human Security at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, which staged the play “A Memory, A Monologue, A Rant and a Prayer; Writings to End Violence Against Women & Girls” last February, and donated part of the proceeds to the Women’s Center.
- Samantha Gambaccini and Little Dinos Productions, who donated the proceeds from their play “Kings,” and Arts at the Armory in Somerville for their assistance in hosting the play.
- Rogera Toussaint-Michel and her wonderful staff at Urban NYCHE Marketing for pro bono marketing services.
- Alinda Bostick (Asiam Designs Photography) for taking beautiful photos of the Women’s Center.
- Classic GraphX in Central Square for donating printing services.
- Brookline Food Co-op, Food for Free, and Lovin’ Spoonfuls for their ongoing food donations that keep our kitchen well-stocked.
- Community Cooks and the Cambridge Zen Center for making and bringing delicious meals for our twice-monthly luncheons.
- Donors for our Thanksgiving Day Holiday Meal: Whole Foods Market (River Street), Star Market (Porter Square), and McKinnon’s Meat Market in Davis Square.
- Donors for our Christmas Day Holiday Meal: Whole Foods (Fresh Pond), Wegman’s in Medford, Dave’s Fresh Pasta, 7ate9 Bakery and BFresh Market in Somerville; and to Joelle Leacock and the Leacock family, Cambridge City Councilor Sumbul Siddiqui, and others who volunteered to make the holiday party festive and bright!
- The following organizations and businesses that did “Wish List” donation drives for us this year: Harvard Real Estate Group, Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard, Biogen, and ERT.
- David’s Bridal of Westwood for a large donation of clothing.
- A group from the Harvard Graduate School of Education for doing a Work Day at the Center.
- All the many individuals who made in-kind donations of items to support our programs and services.
- Our volunteers, who keep the Center running—including our group facilitators, Drop-in and Helpline staff, building maintenance, computer support, fundraising and publicity volunteers, and all the others who help to keep our doors open.
- Everyone in the Women’s Center community—your contributions keep the Center going strong!

Current Groups and Workshops

All activities are FREE. All who identify as women are welcome.

* = wheelchair-accessible — groups can be moved if needed.

Find our current calendar at cambridgewomenscenter.org

- Bay State Butches*
- Beading Group
- Breathe & Believe Yoga
- Community Conversations with Jessye (monthly)*
- Family Law Workshops
- Femse* (12-week workshops)
- Feminist Book Club*
- Fertility Awareness
- Financial Coaching
- Healing Through Creative Arts Workshops, for survivors of child sexual abuse
- Housing Specialist Assistance
- How to Go Vegan & Stay Healthy
- Incest Resources’ Drop-In Discussion Group for Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse
- Knitting Group * → Lesbian & Bi Women’s Discussion
- Managing Your Money
- Meditation Workshops
- Narcotics Anonymous Meeting
- Open Luncheon (twice a month)*
- Reconciling Support Group
- Healthy Mind, Body and Soul
- Self-Defense Workshops
- Sewing Group
- Spanish-English Conversation*
- Straight Marriage, Still Questioning*
- SIA (Survivors of Incest Anonymous)
- Survivors Write to Heal
- Trauma Support/Discussion Group
- Unsupervised Art Time
- Women 65+ group *
- Writing Your Way
- Write Your Story

I.R. Group Turns 35!

Incest Resources’ Drop-in Discussion Group for Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse is returning this fall for its 35th year! This unique group meets on the third Friday of each month, September through June, from 6:00 to 7:30 pm (no one admitted after 6:15 pm) and is facilitated by survivor-psychologist Dr. Elaine Westerlund.

The 2018-2019 IR Group Series will include the following dates and topics through the end of this year:

- Friday, Sept. 21st: Secrets
- Friday, Oct. 19th: Self-Blame
- Friday, Nov. 16th: Family
- Friday, Dec. 21st: Spirituality

A flier with the remaining topics for the 2018-2019 IR Group Series will be posted at the Center in the fall.
My name is Neha Srivastava, and I am excited to be joining the Cambridge Women’s Center as a board member. The Center’s history of women supporting each other to provide necessary spaces for activism and services is inspiring, and I feel honored to be part of it. I am excited to contribute to the intentional community fostered at the Center around women’s power and compassion. I am particularly interested in furthering housing and economic rights for women, and am eager to connect with other Center members around these issues. I look forward to continuing to know the Center community, and finding ways to collaboratively further the Center’s mission and capacity.

I am Karen B. Montagno. I was invited to join the Cambridge Women’s Center Board this spring. I agreed because of the high recommendation of the young people who invited me. I spent some time looking at the website and the variety of work that is happening. I was inspired by the programs, workshops, and the dedication of the staff, guests and volunteers. I felt that there was much I could learn and contribute. I am an Episcopal priest who has spent much of her life in community development, social justice and human thriving. I have been involved in collaborative efforts around brave conversations and racial reconciliation. I am a cat person, a plant person, and I love to cook.

I’m Cara Okopny, and I joined the Cambridge Women’s Center Board in April, having relocated to the Boston area from Washington, DC earlier in the year. I was happy to find a way to support women in the Boston area and connect with my new community. I have particularly enjoyed getting to know my fellow Board members, volunteers and Women’s Center visitors, and look forward to learning even more about the Center and how best to support it. I have devoted my entire career to advocating for women and educating others about gender issues as a professor and scholar of Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies at several universities across the country. In my free time I enjoy gardening, spending time with my family and dog in my newly adopted home, and exploring hiking trails in the Northeast.

My name is Tamar Hoffman, and I am grateful to be joining the Women’s Center as a board member. The Center’s history of women supporting each other to provide necessary spaces for activism and services is inspiring, and I feel honored to be part of it. I am excited to contribute to the intentional community fostered at the Center around women’s power and compassion. I am particularly interested in furthering housing and economic rights for women, and am eager to connect with other Center members around these issues. I look forward to continuing to know the Center community, and finding ways to collaboratively further the Center’s mission and capacity.

Can You Make a Gift From Our Wish List?

- Sugar, spices, salt & pepper, cream, honey, butter, vinegar, olive oil
- Plastic food containers with lids and food storage bags
- Paper towels, toilet paper, tissues, hand & dish towels
- Stainless steel spoons, forks, and knives
- Rubber gloves, sponges, new broom and mop
- Environmentally friendly all-purpose cleaner
- Disinfecting wipes (in tall circular containers)
- Unscented hand and dish soap, hand sanitizer
- White-out and glue sticks
- First aid supplies
- Art supplies: drawing paper, watercolor paper, tempura and gouache paints, mat boards, beading supplies
- Knitting and crochet needles
- Scissors, Scotch tape, masking tape, duct tape
- Computers—in good condition, with Windows 7 or later
- Headphones (for Computer Labs); USB sticks; HDMI cords
- 8½ x 11” printer and copier paper (white and colors)
- MBTA passes; gift cards for supermarkets, Target, Staples, hardware, drug stores, etc.

For more info about how to donate items on our wish list, please contact Linda at linda@cambridgewomenscenter.org – THANK YOU!
Please help the Women's Center and the women who depend on us!

The Cambridge Women’s Center relies on donations of money, material goods and volunteer labor. With a very modest budget, we’re able to provide a wealth of resources and opportunities for women and their children ... thanks to the generous support of our community!

Please make a contribution today to help us continue providing urgently needed resources to vulnerable women.

Donate online
Please visit: www.cambridgewomenscenter.org/supportus/donate_now.html. Your contribution will be processed through Network for Good, a non-profit organization that provides secure online donation services.

Donate by mail
Please make your check payable to Cambridge Women's Center, and mail to: Women’s Center, 46 Pleasant Street, Cambridge MA 02139

The Cambridge Women’s Center is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization (Women’s Educational Center Inc., Federal ID #23-7131753). All donations are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

THANK YOU for your generous support!