Happy Spring from the Women’s Center

As you may know, in recent months, drop-in access was cut back to one-hour periods (in addition to time spent attending a group or other activity) while we took on the task of restructuring Center operations to address safety issues. We are pleased to announce that the Center is introducing a daily drop-in period from noon to 3 PM starting June 8. We will continue the one-hour drop-in option at other times, as well as our many support groups, workshops, and other structured activities. We have created a new position, Helpline and Drop-in Coordinator, and hired Henryce Gumes, who has loads of experience working with vulnerable populations. We feel her presence and guidance will enable us to provide more support and assistance to marginalized women facing daunting challenges on a daily basis.

Expanding drop-in access to a few hours will mean a woman can come in and relax, spend time on a computer, time getting something to eat, time talking with others, and/or time being alone in a comfortable space. It can bring valuable structure and a little peace to women whose lives are challenging because of homelessness, lack of childcare or transportation, or because they feel stuck, discouraged, isolated, or immobilized from trauma, abuse, or mental illness. And if any woman just wants to be able to come to a place where she can feel welcome and comfortable, this is very important too. Many of our community members use drop-in hours to further their computer skills, make a meal they may not otherwise have access to, participate in workshops that go on throughout the day, and connect with volunteers and other visitors. This is why we feel it is so important to provide this access to the Center.

The Center also has new and updated community guidelines for all visitors. You can view these updated guidelines on our website. They are also displayed on each floor of the Center. These guidelines will ensure our shared understanding of respectful and appropriate behavior in the Center.

There are also many physical changes under way at 46 Pleasant Street. The library is being moved to the 2nd floor for easier access, while staff offices have been moved to the third floor. Volunteers have been wonderful, pitching in with painting, fixing, and whatever comes up. Moving the very large bookcases down the curved stairway was quite a feat, and even involved sawing the top off one and reattaching it once it made it down the stairs! Floor paint refusing to dry has added to the challenge of getting the house ready, but our fix-it team is undaunted. We’ve received donations of nice couches, chairs, a lovely table, rugs, and much more. A huge THANK YOU to all who have and are helping out!

Beyond that, we have talked with several local organizations to help us make decisions about protocols that will make the center both welcoming and safe, such as a “membership” concept that will roll out in the coming weeks. This is a work in progress. We’ll assess every change, including the new 3-hour drop-in period, and make adjustments when they seem warranted. Bear with us! We hope to get feedback about how the changes are working; both positive and negative, as we evaluate and work to meet the varying needs of our community.

What else is new at the Center? Check out our June calendar on our website, come by to pick up a copy, or just call and ask the volunteer for information on what is offered. As always, groups, workshops, and other activities are free, and all who identify as women are welcome. Join us at our Sewing Group, Spanish/English Discussion Group, Basics of Building a Business Group, or any other activity – or call Katie about starting your own group! We hope to see you soon!

Best,
Liz, Judy, Laura, Susan and Niara

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VOLUNTEER!
The Women’s Center is actively seeking volunteers and volunteering is a great way to give back but also to meet new people and develop new skills. In the words of one volunteer who staffs our center and helpline and also runs a group, “I come here and I meet people who do a wide range of things who come from a wide range of backgrounds and I think the experience of doing that has opened my eyes to a lot more issues that I didn’t always know existed.” Our volunteers play an active role in making the space what it is. There are lots of ways to get involved — staffing our center and helpline, running a group, pitching in by cleaning/gardening/fixing, helping us with social media and outreach, and so much more! Interested in becoming a volunteer, or have questions about the options for involvement? Contact Henryce at 617-354-6394 or henryce@cambridgewomenscenter.org.
The Women's Center
46 Pleasant Street
Cambridge, MA 02139

Helpline: (617) 354-8807
Business line: (617) 354-6394
Website: www.cambridgewomenscenter.org

What's up at the Women's Center?
Check out our monthly calendar on the website.
Email: info@cambridgewomenscenter.org

Hours:
Monday-Friday: 10am-8pm
Saturday: 10am-5pm
We are closed on major holidays

Volunteers
We gratefully acknowledge the ongoing efforts and contributions of our volunteers. Thank you for giving so generously of your time and of yourselves.

For further information about various volunteer opportunities or to offer in-kind donations, contact Henryce, Drop-in and Helpline Coordinator:
henryce@cambridgewomenscenter.org
(617) 354-6394 x13

The Women's Center relies on the generosity of the community to provide a wealth of free programming.
All donations are tax-deductible.
The Women's Center is a tax-exempt non-profit organization.
Federal ID #237131753

Niara Guterres, New Board Member

My name is Niara and I am so thrilled to join the Cambridge Women’s Center Board of Trustees! I started volunteering at the center in September, 2014 and soon after started a workshop focused on entrepreneurship. I’ve been given so many wonderful opportunities through the women’s center to meet inspiring women from a variety of backgrounds and I am excited to join the board to help the Women’s Center grow and develop into an even stronger community.

- Niara

Robyn Bahr, New Board Member

I am honored to be joining the Cambridge Women's Center Board of Trustees. I have been a volunteer since fall of 2012 when I moved to Cambridge from California. The Center has given me a lot in the last 2+ years - more confidence, a better sense of myself, a chance to boost my strengths and understand where my comforts and discomforts are. It's a place that has welcomed me as part of a community - not just of local women, but as a member of the larger Boston area community. I believe it's time for me to give back and I look forward to the future.

- Robyn

Meredith Hutchins, New Board Member

I have been a volunteer at the WC since last September. The Center has helped me see firsthand just how important it is to have a safe and empowering space for women to help other women. I am honored to be a new member of the Board and am excited to help continue making the Center such a great space for the community.

- Meredith

Welcome Henryce!

We welcome our newest new staff member, Henryce Jackson-Gumes, who is filling a new position, Coordinator for Drop-in and Helpline. Henryce brings 25 years of experience in Human Services working with marginalized populations, which will enable us to strengthen our ability to support and assist visitors with pressing needs and issues. She is particularly knowledgeable about services and entitlements that are available and how to access them, which will really benefit many center visitors. Her job includes recruiting, training and supervising out helpline volunteers as well as overseeing drop-in. We are excited to have a staff member who is so familiar with the issues and challenges of many visitors.

Good-bye from Board Member Laura Cherry

I will be leaving the Board of Trustees on June 1, after seven varied, active, and occasionally tumultuous years. Like any worthwhile pursuit, serving as a Board member has been alternately challenging and rewarding.

This was my first experience serving on a Board, so I had no idea what I might expect from it. When I first joined the Board, the Center was going through a significant financial crisis and we faced the distinct possibility that we might need to close down altogether. Hard work by everyone (and notably that of our volunteer fundraisers, Judy Norris and Elaine Westerlund) kept the doors open, but those first few years were all about financial worries. Even when things improved, I learned that finances are always a top-priority issue for a small non-profit like the Center, so we welcomed every penny received and agonized over every penny spent.

A highlight of my Board tenure was participating in the Women’s Center 40th anniversary celebration, with its music and spoken-word performances, silent auction, and great conversations between women who have loved and sometimes literally been saved by the Center. The joy that night was palpable!

Now, as I leave, the Women’s Center is dealing with a new sort of challenge: the effort to ensure that the space is welcoming and open to all women, while also maintaining an environment that is safe and free from the threat of violence. I have no doubt that the current Board, volunteers, community members, and staff will keep working together to find the solutions that will best fit the Women’s Center, with its unique history and special role in women’s lives.

I’ll miss working with the Board, but I hope to stay close to the Center for many years to come.

- Laura Cherry
The Work World Is a Weird Place

The work world is a weird place, especially for a LGBTQ woman like myself. Navigating it can be trouble even in a place like Massachusetts, which offers protections to people like me. Coming out over and over again can feel weird; a workplace full of straight people can be weird; a lot of it can be weird, and so for some reason I haven’t had that much confidence in myself in the workforce.

This is why I started the LGBTQ at Work group, which meets the first Tuesday of every month, 6-7pm. Apparently the concept of having an LGBTQ at Work group is something of a novelty— I wanted to make it a place for women to talk about the uncomfortable things they might face every day, but maybe most importantly, make new friends and make connections.

This is the first group I’ve ever started on my own, so it’s been a bit of a learning curve. I’ve handed out flyers and done outreach to groups like Fenway Health, and while I’ve gotten some good responses, the group is still in the process of building and I’m hoping attendance will continue to grow as time goes on. I also know that it takes bravery to talk about these kinds of things, and it can be intimidating, but my group aims to provide an environment that can help dispel peoples’ fears and be a supportive, safe space.

If you have ever felt hesitant coming out at work, if you have ever felt discriminated against, or even if you don’t experience it yourself but understand it’s a huge issue that often flies under the radar—I would be honored if you’d join us! Together we can mold this group into a place for us to not only help ourselves or others in similar situations, but also to network and empower ourselves in our careers.

This was not an easy decision. I’m so grateful for the opportunities I’ve had over the past year and a half to work with some amazing people and to help in the process of working to make the Women’s Center as safe and empowering a space for all women as it possibly can be. The Women’s Center is a space rich in human resources— our amazing volunteer staff, my colleagues on the staff and board, and all of the amazing women who visit the Center to use the drop-in space and attend groups and events have inspired me and taught me so much. I’ve been consistently inspired by the commitment of our volunteers who take time out of their busy lives to staff our helpline and our Center’s drop-in space, as well as running groups. Without the generosity they show in giving their time and the empathy they show in interacting with women of all backgrounds and identities, the Center quite literally could not exist.

It is the spirit of community and mutual support and empowerment that makes the Center unique and special, and it is this spirit that I hope all of you who are or have been involved with the Center will continue to nurture. As with any community, it takes the contribution of each member to produce the payoff that benefits all members. Whether you’re able to give of your time, to give monetarily or through donations of furniture, office supplies, or other items, or simply to come attend groups, meet other women, and tell others about the Center, each contribution is important and valued.

I know the Center has a bright future and I look forward to hearing about it!

- Katie

Good-bye from Katie

I wanted to take the opportunity to share with you all the news that my last day at the Women’s Center will be July 17, 2015. I have been accepted into an intensive full-time graduate degree program and, after a great amount of reflection, I have decided this is the next step that makes sense for me personally and professionally.

This is not an easy decision. I’m so grateful for the opportunities I’ve had over the past year and a half to work with some amazing people and to help in the process of working to make the Women’s Center as safe and empowering a space for all women as it possibly can be. The Women’s Center is a space rich in human resources— our amazing volunteer staff, my colleagues on the staff and board, and all of the amazing women who visit the Center to use the drop-in space and attend groups and events have inspired me and taught me so much. I’ve been consistently inspired by the commitment of our volunteers who take time out of their busy lives to staff our helpline and our Center’s drop-in space, as well as running groups. Without the generosity they show in giving their time and the empathy they show in interacting with women of all backgrounds and identities, the Center quite literally could not exist.

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I know the Center has a bright future and I look forward to hearing about it!

- Katie

Building a Business

I began volunteering at the Women’s Center to become more involved in the community and to meet women from different backgrounds. I have always been interested in entrepreneurship and thought it would be great to start a group where women could meet to discuss their own entrepreneurial aspirations. I really believe that everyone has the ability to be entrepreneurial.

I’ve had the opportunity to meet a wide variety of women since – women who’ve wanted to start their own businesses but weren’t sure how. I thought that if I could break down the components of a business plan, perhaps more women might be encouraged to at least consider developing their own.

However, for so many of the women that I have met, there are myriad reasons why they are hesitant to pursue entrepreneurship – the least of which is unfamiliarity with a business plan. Rather, for most, starting a business just seems impossibly misaligned with the reality of their day-to-day life, often because of self-doubt. Part of this includes the belief that ‘I don’t know the right people’ or ‘I don’t have the right background or experience’, and yes, it would be naïve to admit that those are unimportant or easily overcome - the reality is that 50% of businesses fail within the first five years.

Still, I think that the greatest thing about the Women’s Center is the opportunity for me personally - beyond providing women with support and encouragement - I find that it is a space to acknowledge that yes, sometimes it feels impossible and that is okay.

When I began volunteering here, I felt discouraged because I’d spent nearly two years working on a venture that proved to be unsuccessful. I questioned whether I was smart enough, dedicated enough, to start my own business and I thought ‘Could I have done something differently?’ ‘Did I really do everything I could?’ I’ve learned since from talking to other women how important it is to allow ourselves to try, even if we fail.

I think that it is so important to give support in a way that is truthful and sincere. We all face personal challenges – anxiety, depression, mental illness, domestic violence – that are invisible to the outside world but are very real to us. But I think that it is when we allow ourselves to talk openly and honestly about those obstacles that we become – ultimately – strong enough to take on the challenges that we fear.

- Niara

Trauma Discussion Group

The Women’s Center has long been a haven for women seeking support, community, and a safe space to make their voices heard. Over the past several months, we have begun to create this space through a Trauma Discussion Group, which is open to all women who are looking to share their experience and connect with others.

The Trauma Discussion Group is a free drop-in group held every Thursday at 6pm. Welcoming women from all walks of life and who have experienced or are experiencing any kind of trauma, the group attracts a diverse array of members and perspectives. Our goal is to create a safe and welcoming community that fosters trust, healing, and personal growth.

While we encourage women to tell their stories when they feel ready, the primary focus is on coping with the aftermath of trauma to lead a healthy and balanced life. The group is peer-facilitated and is focused more on creating a community of support than on achieving time-based goals and objectives.

Interested in learning more or joining? Stop by any Thursday evening, or email groupcambridge@gmail.com for more info.

- Casey
Body Image Discussion Group

For the past year the Women’s Center has held a weekly Body Image Discussion Group. We have had many talks about what it means to identify as women, and have found that we all bring something very important and unique to each discussion, but can still connect with each other in significant ways. Sometimes we do activities to help deconstruct powerful, harmful media messages. Other weeks we share articles that reflect individual values and ideas surrounding beauty and health. We talk about the messages we’ve received from family, friends, partners, and social media. The group promotes body positivity, and we work to explore what that means.

Body positivity doesn’t have to mean that you love everything, but that you acknowledge that at your core you are good. Whether you are thin or curvy, blonde or brunette, have acne, scars, stretch marks or anything else about your physical self, none of these are indicators of your self-worth or how deserving you are of love, acceptance, and safety. We acknowledge that we are trying, and doing the best we can. Join in a space that recognizes your beauty and worth, but validates that some days it’s okay not to feel so good.

The group will transition to Wednesdays, and will be led by Gianna Gambardella. Gianna is determined to keep the group focus and dynamics the same, so the transition will be as smooth as possible. She is very excited to be a part of this great space for women. Please join her and the rest of the Body Image Group at the Women’s Center, Wednesdays at 6:00pm.

- Gianna and Carissa

Survivors Sharing and Healing

3rd Fridays of the month, September—June, 6-7:30 pm
Incest Resources’ current series for Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse will come to a close on Friday, June 19th with the topic Spirituality and Healing. The group will start up again in September with the following dates and topics:

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>September 18</td>
<td>Childhood</td>
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<td>October 16</td>
<td>Depression</td>
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<td>November 20</td>
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<td>December 18</td>
<td>Control</td>
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<td>Trust</td>
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<td>Triggers</td>
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<td>March 18</td>
<td>Shame</td>
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<td>April 15</td>
<td>Self-Confidence</td>
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<td>May 20</td>
<td>Sexuality</td>
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<td>June 17</td>
<td>Support</td>
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Please come on time! No one will be admitted after 6:15pm so that the group process will not be disrupted.

This well-attended and much-loved group, facilitated by survivor-therapist Dr. Elaine Westerlund, has been running at the Women's Center since 1983!

Recent appreciations from group members include: "This group is fantastic - always validating, informative and empowering!" & "I have learned so much in this group. Each new topic is rich with discovery and understanding for me. The quality of the leadership provided by Elaine consistently amazes me - she provides wisdom, security and comfort, always. This group is an unimaginable gift." For more info call 617-354-6394.

On-Going Groups

- Basic English/Spanish Discussion Group (2nd & 4th Wednesdays, 11am-noon)*
- Basic Yoga with Maddy (Mondays, 6-7pm, ends mid-June)
- Basics of Building a Business (1st & 3rd Saturdays, 11am-noon)* Info: Niara, n.vugterres@gmail.com
- Beading Group (every Monday,2:30-4:30pm)*
- Being LGBTQ at Work (6-7pm (1st Tuesday of the month)*
- Board Meeting (monthly, call for dates, 5:30-7pm)
- Body Image Discussion Group (Tuesdays, 6-7pm)
- Breakfast Club (Saturdays, 10:30-11:30am)*
- Cooking Basics (Thursdays, noon-1pm)*
- Crafternoons (2 Saturdays/month, noon-1pm)
- Crochet & Knitting Circle (1st & 3rd Weds, 11am-12:30pm)
- Feminist Book Club (Last Monday of month, 7-8pm)
- Incest Resources’ Drop-In Discussion Group for Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse (3rd Fridays, 6-7:30pm, September through June)
- Ladies, Let’s Talk About It—Women’s Narcotic Anonymous (NA) Meeting (Thursdays, 6:30-8pm)*
- Luncheon at the Women’s Center (one Tuesday/month, noon-1pm)*
- Monthly Theatre Workshops (call 617-354-6394 for topics, dates, and times). Info/register:
- Painting and Drawing (Tuesdays, 11am-1pm)
- Pro-Survivors Mother’s Group (3rd Tuesdays, 6-7:30pm)*
- Sewing Group (every Thursday, 10am-12pm)
- Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. Peer led support group for women in a straight relationship struggling with her sexual orientation. For info: kate.e.flynn@gmail.com
- Street Harassment Discussion and Support Group (last Wednesdays, 6:30-8pm). Not meeting in June.
- Survival and Support; Women Coping with the Mental Illness of a Loved One (one Tuesdays/month, 6-7:30pm)
- Teen Discussion Group (1st & 3rd Weds, 6-7pm)
- Trauma Support Group (every Thursday, 6-7pm)
- Yoga with Elise (Thursdays, 1-2pm)

Other Groups and Topics

Healing through Creative Arts: Sharing Our Stories: a theatre workshop with humor, creativity and care. Saturday, 6/20, 1-3pm. Participants will use theatre games to explore and express personal experience. Energy and curiosity are the only requirements. Facilitated by Noemi Paz. Register at martharogersmusic@gmail.com or call 978-408-9233

*Dealing With Anger: Expressing Ourselves With Loved Ones Without Hurting Our Closest Relationships. Monday, 6/22, 6:30-8pm. Julie Catalano, LICSW, will teach anger management and communication skills for conflicts with children, parents, friends, intimate partners. Pizza lunch will be served, childcare may be available with advanced notice. RSVP 617-429-4738 or somervillecounseling@gmail.com

Career and Academic Skills Workshop Series. Fridays, weekly (starting 6/19), 12-1pm. Support with job/school applications, internet job hunting, interview skills, resumes/cover letters, improving grades and standardized test scores and other skills. Info: msp72@georgetown.edu

Fertility Awareness Group. Thursday, 6/11, 6-7pm. A space where women can discuss natural birth control options. Info: anna@acnfertilityawareness.com

Sexuality and Sexual Health Discussion Group. Fridays, (starting 6/19), 5-6pm. Join us in an open space to discuss the myths and realities surrounding sexuality and sexual health. Info: miaiwomenscenter@gmail.com

*Wheelchair accessible groups; other groups accessible by pre-arrangement
Congratulations Incest Resources!

2015 marks the 35th anniversary of Incest Resources! We are hoping to celebrate this milestone with a special survivor event in the fall. Founded in 1980 by four survivors, I.R. Inc. was the first organization in the country for survivors of childhood sexual abuse. An all-survivor, all-volunteer nonprofit organization, I.R. was established to create a vehicle to bring survivors together for mutual support and activism. Along with a handful of other survivors, the women of I.R. helped to pioneer the national and international survivor self-help movement of the 1980’s and 1990’s and became a model for other survivor organizations worldwide. I.R. provided many firsts for the survivor community in 1980 including its first political voice, first speakers' bureau, first help-line, first self-help support groups, first referral and resource network, first survivor self-help literature, and first legislative action group. In the 35 years since, I.R. has introduced many other firsts, continuing to support both survivor recovery and survivor activism. In addition I.R. has supported the development and growth of programs focused on survivor healing and empowerment through the arts, including the Survivor Quilt Project and the Survivor Theatre Project. To learn more visit www.IncestResourcesInc.org

Sharing your Women’s Center Story

The Women’s Center has been an important part of many women's lives since 1971, providing a space where anyone who identifies as a woman can feel empowered, grow, and supported by one another. Throughout these years, hundreds of women have been a part of the Center’s history—working interning, and volunteering their time to the organization and the women who visit the Center. Center visitors have been a vital part of the organization, voicing their thoughts and ideas, attending support groups, calling the help line, utilizing the resources available at the Center (the computer lab, the kitchen, the comfy couches)—illustrating the importance of having a safe space where women can come and gather.

To honor the lives the Center has touched, we are collecting stories from everyone and anyone who has been part of the Center's history. My name is Mariya, an MFA student at Lesley University. I am helping the Center capture these stories through interviews (in person and via phone). Through these interviews, we’re hoping learn how the Center has impacted lives over the last few decades. What tools, skills, and experiences have folks who visit the Center gained? Most importantly, we want to learn what keeps women continually wanting to attend groups, visit the Center, come in to utilize the resources, or volunteer their time. We want to hear from those who have walked through the Center’s door, collect their stories, and share their experiences with the community. To give you a preview of what’s to come through these stories, read why Sarah decided to become part of the Women’s Center and how it has impacted her life.

“I wanted to volunteer at the Women’s Center because it is a really great place to connect with the women and the community we’re serving. I’ve connected with other volunteers here. It’s a really homey environment. Welcoming and accepting and I like that. I had a few friends from school who volunteered here and encouraged me to volunteer and so it was nice to come in here and have people I know already volunteering here.”

If you want to learn more about the project or are willing to be interviewed, please contact me at mariyataher@hotmail.com.

- Mariya Taher

Appreciation from our Interns

We have had the privilege of interning here at the Women’s Center from September through May. We’ve gone from being strangers in this community to feeling like we belong.

When we started in September, fewer women were attending groups/coming to the Women’s Center, we had only one Center Coordinator, and the Center was still working to figure out its next steps after some major changes. During the last several months, Henryce has been hired as Co-Coordinator along with Katie, new protocols are in place, and a lot more women are participating. Being a part of this enormous change has been a challenge and an honor, as has being welcomed into this network of strong, supportive women.

Prior to our time here, neither of us had any experience with non-profits or small community organizations like the Women’s Center. We’ve seen the ways this space and its volunteers have helped the women in the community find resources, connect to others, and grow together. We each will be going to a very different environment next year. Valerie will be working with women with eating disorders at McLean Hospital and Carmen will be at Whidden Hospital on their psychiatric ward. Both will be highly clinical and structured - in many ways the opposite of the Women’s Center! But the experience we’ve had here running groups, answering helpline calls, and working with each of the women who come in to use the space, has shaped the way we think about our role as group facilitators and as women in the world.

This will be an experience we carry with us as we move on from the Women’s Center. We are immensely grateful for the welcome we received, sad to be leaving the connections we’ve made, and looking forward to new opportunities for ourselves and for the Center. Wishing you all the best! - Carmen and Valerie

Survivor Theatre Project

On April 26, the Touring Company performed Called To Speak for a large, young, diverse audience of artists and activists Makeshift Boston in the South End at an event called The Art of Life After, A show that focused on surviving sexual violence. An incredible singer/songwriter opened the show, a selection of survivor visual artists had their works up in the gallery, and the audience toured the pieces before and after the performances. Called to Speak actors contributed poignant thoughts, ideas, and analysis during the talkback with the audience. The organizers, Alicia and Mattie were fantastic and deeply appreciative of the collaboration and we hope to work with Mission Gallery in the future.

Survivor Theatre Project touring company celebrating after performing at “The Art of Life After,” a show bringing forth survivor voices at Makeshift Boston.
I first got involved with the Women’s Center as a helpline volunteer over a year ago, and last summer my best friend and I decided to start the Feminist Book Club. We welcome all women, read one book per month and meet on the last Monday evening of the month from 7-8pm to discuss. Our only rule on book choice is that it must be written by a woman.

We are a small but dedicated group. There are months when our conversations are so engaging and passionate that we diverge from talking about the book itself, like when we read transgender activist Janet Mock’s incredible memoir, Redefining Realness, and ended up spending half of our meeting discussing what it means to be a woman. There are months when we all agree that our book choice was so good that there isn’t much to critique or analyze, so we spend most of the time rehashing our favorite parts, like with Roxane Gay’s Bad Feminist. But every month brings an engaging conversation with women who love to read and talk about women.

The Book Club is just one of the ways that I spend my time at the Women’s Center. I also staff the helpline once a week, and I am on the social media committee. We have been building up our social media presence for the past year or so, and it has been so fun to help find articles and videos that I think women in the community might be interested in.

A caller on the helpline recently asked me why I volunteer here and what I like about it. I told her that I first started because I was interested in counseling, and an emotional support helpline seemed right up my alley. But I never expected to become so involved. It has been so great to be a part of this community. I have met and spoken with so many wonderful women, and I’m so grateful for the experience.

-Jessica

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"Those whom we support hold us up in life"

Support the Women’s Center Online!
Go to www.cambridgewomenscenter.org and click on "Support Us" and then "Donate Now."
You will be contributing through “Network for Good”

Yes, I want to support the Women’s Center!

_ $2,000  _ $1,000  _ $500  _ $250  _ $100  _ $50  _ $25  _ other $___________

Please make checks payable to Women’s Center. Mail to: Women’s Center, 46 Pleasant Street, Cambridge MA 02139

Name ________________________________________________________
Address_________________________________________________________________________
City_______________________ State_____ Zip Code___________________
Phone_____________________ Email________________________________

_ Designate my gift to  □ Pay down the loan  □ where needed most  □ Other _________________________
_ My donation is in honor of: (name)_____________________________________________________
   (address)_________________________________________________________________________
_ My gift will be matched by my employer_____________________________________________

□ I/We would like to become a regular monthly sustainer, with a pledge of $_______/per month.
□ I’d like to include the Women's Center in my retirement or other future plans.
□ Please send me a volunteer application.
□ If you’d prefer to be taken off our mailing list, please check this box and return this slip, or email us at info@cambridgewomenscenter.org
Give to women’s empowerment, healing and change!

June 2015

Dear Friend,

After a long winter, we have entered a new season, and I am asking you to make a bold gift that will change lives.

The work of the Women’s Center is vibrant and transformative! It gives low-income and abused women a place where they can recreate themselves and recover from life’s challenges.

Through Survivor Theatre Project, women who have experienced sexual violence write and perform original plays that allow them to reclaim their power and tell their stories. Participants are able to let go of their pasts and step bravely into the future.

Rape, assault, and childhood sexual abuse are profoundly isolating experiences, especially within a culture that denies their prevalence and impact and does little to stop it. STP’s work is guided by an anti-oppression framework that allows for multiple, complex identities and experiences. Here, survivors can come together in conscious awareness, build an ensemble, learn theatre and improvisation skills, and create something amazing together!

During the year, hundreds of women pass through our Center’s doors to begin a journey of healing and change. For Hilary, this meant recovering from deep depression.

“I had run myself ragged bartending my way through college in record time. After graduate school, I fell into my own private hell unable to speak to anyone. For the next 2 years, I was in and out of mental hospitals and had lost all hope.

“One day, coming from my therapist, I happened on the Women’s Center and immediately fit in. I could come and sit and read, use the kitchen, or just be anonymous.”
Daily, women call our **helpline** in need of a compassionate ear or they come through our doors and attend **support groups, classes**, and make new friends. As they receive support, they grow stronger, and some go on to develop projects and organizations that serve vulnerable women.

“There was no pressure. I felt comfortable. Over time, I began talking with women and then volunteering. Now, I lead a weekly Mental Health Resource Group and feel good about my life!”

Organizations that the Women’s Center has helped get started are: Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, Elizabeth Stone House, Deaf Women’s Counseling Project, Transition House, Art Collectives for Homeless and Low Income Women, and Survivor Theatre Project. As a **grassroots incubator** for making change, we believe in sisters supporting one another. **We need you to make a difference!**

Your support will allow our doors to remain open and free of charge to any woman who wants to enter them and begin again. Since 1971, it has been committed women (and men) like you who have made our community work. This spring, **your gift to the Women’s Center will bring forth new life!**

Please give generously.

In gratitude,

Women’s Center Board of Trustees
http://cambridgewomenscenter.org/supportus/donate_now.html

PS: We are **$14,000** away from being **debt free**! Your support could help us finish paying off the **$80,000** loan taken out in 2006. Would you help the Women’s Center have a real **Independence Day celebration** by giving a **gift of $1,000 by July 4th!!** 14 gifts or more and we’re letting sparks fly!!!

“’Cause baby, you’re a firework
Come on show them what you’re worth”

--Katy Perry
Dear Friends,

We are writing to ask for your help to support a vital space in the Cambridge community. The Cambridge Women’s Center has served as a place of refuge, collaboration, and social change for the past several decades. On a daily basis, it encourages women to learn, connects them with vital resources, and promotes personal growth and healing. With a rich diversity of classes and groups, important resources like computers and a stocked kitchen, and a dedicated team of volunteer staff who are always prepared to help, the Women’s Center has fostered the development of a vibrant and open community which has been life-changing for countless people who have passed through its doors. One user of the Center affirmed this impact, stating:

“The Women’s Center was the first place where I could admit aloud that I had been abused because no one else would know and I wouldn’t be a ‘case’. Now, I have a normal life because of programs at the Women’s Center.”

Thanks to the generous support we have received over the years, we are able to offer all programming completely free of charge to all women. Donated computers have provided hundreds of women with the opportunity to search for jobs, find housing, and connect with loved ones. Grocery donations throughout each week ensure that all women who come to the Center are nourished, and are able to make choices and prepare food without facing judgment or shame, regardless of their situation. Women from all walks of life are able to come together to practice yoga, learn a new skill, or cope with trauma or addiction. The long-standing helpline offers another valuable resource for women in the Boston area and beyond. Six days a week, a team of volunteers answers calls from women seeking anything from resources for domestic abuse and shelter to a listening ear.

The ability to offer these critical services in a casual community setting offers incredible value for everyone involved. The women who use the Center and call the Helpline have described it as a lifeline, and many mention that, at some point in their lives, it has been one of the few places they are able to turn. The Center is equally impactful for the many volunteers that staff it, offering them an opportunity to engage with women that they would likely never have crossed paths with otherwise. These daily interactions foster the development of remarkable new perspectives and unlikely friendships for everyone involved.

In order to continue offering these life-changing services, we need your help. With only one full-time staff, the Women’s Center is an incredibly lean organization—meaning that any donation has a significant impact, and goes directly towards helping the many women who use the Center every day. Please consider making a gift to help us maintain and grow these critical programs.

With Gratitude,

Casey Fox  Judy Norris
Helpline volunteer and group facilitator  Board of Trustees
My First Experience of Being a Volunteer in USA

Being a volunteer for first time has been a wonderful experience in many ways. Let me tell you how it happened. First, I need to tell you that I’ve been living for first time in USA for almost two years, because of my husband’s job. When I moved to live here I didn’t know anyone, and my English was terrible. For that reason I’ve been spending time taking class of English as a second language and other topics when I can improve my speaking.

This year at the end of February I saw a sign in Cambridge Library about some activities of the Women’s Center. My own experience coming to the Women’s Center was very nice. The atmosphere was so kind. Also, I liked the house. It is decorated with some recycled crafts. I started to participate in some groups. One day by accident, someone of the staff administration told me that she speaks Spanish a little; I answered her “Whenever you want you can practice with me.” However, she had a best idea; she asked me “Would you like to participate as a volunteer?” I answered her “Sure! I’ll be glad to do it, but my English is not good enough.” So she told me you can teach us and we can help you at the same time. So far, I’ve been teaching Spanish for seven months. As a result, my English has been improved.

If you are English speaker interested in learning or improving Spanish or vice versa, the Spanish-English class is open for all levels. We have a very nice group of learners. The intention is learning in a relaxing way, simple grammar, new vocabulary, songs and games. Also, you will get some handouts. You can join us the second and fourth Wednesday of the month, from 11:00am to 12:30pm. (The group is open for all levels. We have a very nice group of learners. The intention is learning in a relaxing way, simple grammar, new vocabulary, songs and games. Also, you will get some handouts. You can join us the second and fourth Wednesday of the month, from 11:00am to 12:30pm. (The group is open for all levels. We have a very nice group of learners. The intention is learning in a relaxing way, simple grammar, new vocabulary, songs and games. Also, you will get some handouts. You can join us the second and fourth Wednesday of the month, from 11:00am to 12:30pm. (The group is open for all levels. We have a very nice group of learners. The intention is learning in a relaxing way, simple grammar, new vocabulary, songs and games. Also, you will get some handouts. You can join us the second and fourth Wednesday of the month, from 11:00am to 12:30pm. (The group is open for all levels. We have a very nice group of learners. The intention is learning in a relaxing way, simple grammar, new vocabulary, songs and games. Also, you will get some handouts. You can join us the second and fourth Wednesday of the month, from 11:00am to 12:30pm. (The group is open for all levels. We have a very nice group of learners. The intention is learning in a relaxing way, simple grammar, new vocabulary, songs and games. Also, you will get some handouts.

The Women’s Center is a lovely place to share time, knowledge and experiences with others. As in my case, the opportunities most of the time are outside in company with new friends that you will meet soon!

- Martha Blass

Behind the Scenes Update

This past year has been one of challenges and great opportunities. As you may know, we were without any paid full-time staff members from late July until mid-September. This put us at a crossroads: do we cut much needed resources, such as drop-in hours, or use the opportunity to reach out to volunteers and community members? Not only were we able to keep the daily activities going, but we also were able to reevaluate much of our direction and feel the support of the community and our amazing volunteers.

The Art and Power of Quilting

The Survivor Quilt Project has three new art quilts in the works, which will become part of its stunning exhibit, Incest Survivors Speaking Truth to the Next Generation.

The latest quilt being created in response to the exhibit is by mothers of incest survivors! The mothers producing the quilt are participants in a workshop series being offered at the Women’s Center this fall and winter. Michelle Harris, founder of the Survivor Quilt Project and registered art therapist and Elaine Westerlund, co-founder of Incest Resources and licensed psychologist, are the facilitators. The workshop series allows mothers of survivors to come together - in a closed, confidential, healing group - and become part of the larger dialogue about how to speak truth about incest. The focus of the quilt-making is on the voices of these extraordinary mothers and what they wish to convey from the heart to survivors - in both words and images.

A second new quilt, which is nearing completion after a fruitful and rewarding three-year process, is a public response quilt produced by three different communities who viewed the exhibits, selecting and arranging materials and developing imagery to create a collective quilt. Two of the communities were the result of a series of open studios that invited viewers to respond to the exhibits. More than 500 exhibit viewers and 30 quilt participants were involved. The third community responding to the exhibit did so alongside a presentation on intergenerational trauma and 15 quilt participants contributed.

The third exciting new quilt in the works represents Latina voices and their responses to the exhibits. This bold quilt, which originated at a community gathering and international art therapy symposium in Guatemala, incorporated the colors and textiles of the region and 80 participants were involved. The quilt has been undergoing further development since, with additional Latina communities contributing to represent a collective Latina response to the exhibits.

All three quilts will become part of the Survivor Quilt Project’s expanding collection of art quilts and growing public education initiative. They will add greater richness and power to future exhibits of Incest Survivors Speaking Truth to the Next Generation and invite deeper community response and dialogue.

- Elaine

(FYI—one site where you can view the completed quilts is www.cambridgewomenscenter.org — Go to projects, then to the Survivor Quilt Project)
Hi, My Name Is Colleen

My name is Colleen Maki and I am serving at the Women’s Center for the next 9 months through the New Sector Resident in Social Enterprise (RISE) Fellowship. New Sector is an AmeriCorps program that operates fellowship programs that engage early career professionals committed to careers in the social sector. My time at the Women’s Center will be spent serving as volunteer and drop-in coordinator.

I enjoy knitting, reading, snowboarding, drinking coffee and good conversation. Most recently I was living in and working in Minneapolis Minnesota as service and social justice coordinator at Grace University Lutheran Church. Through that experience I was able to lead college students in service and discussion around many issues including hunger and food justice. In 2012, I graduated from the University of North Dakota with a BA in political science and a minor in women and gender studies. Having spent time abroad working in Mexico and Spain I have had the opportunity to see how women from all over the globe face unique challenges. I am excited to work directly with women here in Cambridge and reengage with my passion for women’s rights.

During my short time working here at the Women’s Center I have learned many new things including how to run up and down many flights of stairs in a matter of seconds and how to rearrange furniture. More importantly, I have come to understand that the Women’s Center is a community that embraces diversity and welcomes all women with open arms. In my first months here I have already had expansive conversations with members, volunteers, interns, and staff. As a person who is passionate about social change, I come to the Women’s Center excited to learn, engage, and grow in this community over the next nine months.

- Colleen

Social Support

Family problems, chronic illness, the death of a loved one, addiction, mental health issues, loneliness or despair. These challenges and many more constantly confront women in our community. A supportive social environment such as the Cambridge Women’s Center is one way women have embraced to overcome these difficult and emotionally stressful situations.

What does social support really mean? In general, it can be defined as the perception ‘of being connected to others, and knowing that support is there if needed.’ Tangible support is the offer of material help or assistance, such as providing food, or driving someone to a doctor’s appointment. Informational support is the offer of advice, help, or guidance in solving a problem or addressing a personal dilemma. Finally, emotional support is an expression of empathy, understanding, caring, and acceptance towards someone else in need.

Time and time again, different types of social support have been shown to improve women’s physical and mental health outcomes. For example, in one study, women recently diagnosed with breast cancer had better health-related quality of life scores (a measure of overall health and wellbeing) if they also had high levels of social support. As well, in a large study of older women in San Francisco, emotional support in particular was positively associated with better self-reported physical and mental health for women in almost every ethnic group.

One of the most important take-home messages from this research is that beneficial social support can come from anywhere. It can come from friends, family, or other loved ones. However, it can also come from a community institution, like the Women’s Center, that fosters an open, welcoming environment and a safe space for women to express their needs and true selves. These needs may be tangible, informational, and emotional. The people providing the support may be close friends or new acquaintances with a sympathetic ear. However, no matter what form this support takes, it plays a valuable and irreplaceable role in women’s health and happiness.

- Laura Vercammen

Bea’s Take

At the Women’s Center I find that I am truly at home when I arrive for my shift. Though I am technically at the center under an internship, it truly doesn’t feel like I am in the traditional sense of what an internship was for me. I feel like I’m at home when I arrive here and see the wonderful faces of both the volunteers and the women who frequent the center. There is never really a time where I am not learning a new skill here whether it is tactics and de-escalation trainings or learning how to play Mah Jongg. I always find myself learning something new each time I come to the Women’s Center.

- Bea
A generous donor, David Gorman, offered us a complete Thanksgiving feast! Amazing—how could we not accept? But would there be anyone who would be up for opening the Women’s Center and hosting the feast? Amazingly, a volunteer came forward, saying she would do it all—from set-up to clean-up! Other volunteers pitched in—Annie drew a beautiful flier, Bea and Maya put up decorations, Mary fetched a big Thanksgiving donation from Whole Foods, insuring we’d have plenty to eat no matter how many came. Maya and Jacqui came in the morning to help set up. About 20 women came! They RAVED about how delicious the food was and how grateful they were to be able to come to the Women’s Center on Thanksgiving. They loved that the computers were available, too. It was a very special day at the Women’s Center. Thanks so much to everyone who helped and everyone who came! - Judy

Our volunteers, including our group facilitators, who keep the center running and help callers and visitors cope and find some peace in their days. You are awesome!

Brookline Food Co-op, Lovin’ Spoonfuls, Food for Free and Whole Foods for bringing us donations of delicious food—sandwiches, salads, veggies, fruit, yogurt, bread…

Community Cooks for making and bringing yummy meals for our monthly luncheons (3rd Tuesdays and 4th Mondays)!

Everyone who brings in-kind donations or runs errands

Every one of you who donates funds to the Women’s Center, supporting the goals of inclusiveness, acceptance, women’s empowerment, and working towards social change.

Those who use the Women’s Center, for being here, appreciating what is here, contributing in so many ways, from sharing what you cook, helping someone with her computer, cleaning, inspiring others with your strength…

A new fitness class is beginning soon at the Women’s Center! It will meet 6:30-7:15pm on Wednesdays, December 16 & 30, and then weekly in January (except 1/27). The class will be run by Katie. Her vision for the class is to empower women and help women show themselves their strength. Here is part of Katie’s story:

“Earlier in life I was sexually and emotionally abused for about a year. After keeping the abusive relationship a secret for 4 years after I got out of it, I went through an extremely intense period of PTSD and depression. I found that exercise became some of the best therapy for me, as it helped me find my confidence and made me feel strong again. I now box because I wanted to learn to fight back instead of taking hits, if I should ever find myself in that situation again. I became a personal trainer in 2013 and am ready to help other women heal and get stronger through exercise.”

We are excited to have this class at the Women’s Center and we are grateful for Katie’s presence in the Women’s Center community. Thanks Katie!

- Colleen and Judy

Coffee machine—12 cups
Regular and Decaf Coffee, tea, hot chocolate, sugar, honey, cream, milk, butter, vinegar, cooking oil
Food containers & food storage bags
Hand and dish towels. Paper towels, toilet paper & tissues
Rubber gloves sponges, sturdy brooms and mops.
Disinfecting wipes in tall circular container
Unscented hand and dish soap
White Board (18’x24”), and narrow dry erase markers
Pens that work well, glue stick, post-it notes
Beadings, knitting and art supplies
Computers—working, not too ancient
13 gallon (large kitchen) trash bags (unscented)
Metal spoons and forks
Printer & copier paper, white and colored
Gift certificates for Target, Tags, Staples, Office Max, Drug Stores, Supermarkets, etc.

A Big Thank You

To Our Corporate and Foundation Funders

Agnes M. Lindsay Trust
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Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Microsoft Matching Gifts Program
Santander Bank Foundation
The Susan A. & Donald P. Babson Charitable Foundation
TD Charitable Foundation
TJX Foundation
WHOLE Foundation


Monday
Singing Class. 12/14 & 21, 11am-noon. Join this class to discover how singing can provide you with another tool for healing. The vibrations of the vocal cords contribute to our overall health, wellness and brain chemistry! Learn some basic singing skills and a few songs. All voices, all ages, all levels of singers. Everyone has a voice. Led by Linda Balliro, private vocal instructor and Associate Professor at Berklee College of Music. Info: "Linda Balliro" ballirostudio@gmail.com


Basic Yoga With Marilyn. Weekly, 6:15-7:15pm. Come restore and rejuvenate your body, mind and spirit. All experience levels welcome (including beginners!). Please RSVP—space is limited. To RSVP or for more info: marilynregan58@gmail.com

<NEW!> Mindfulness Meditation. 12/7 and 14, 4:30-6:00pm (weekly, not meeting 12/21 & 28). Come to de-stress, learn to have compassion for yourself, and find joy living in the present. No experience necessary. Info: ashleyheacock@gmail.com

*Feminist Book Club. 7-8pm, 12/7 (1st Mondays). We discuss books through the lens of feminism and our own experiences. All perspectives encouraged & welcomed. The book: THE BOSTON GIRL by Anita Diamant. Info: jessicamchapman@gmail.com

Tuesday
Healing through Art. Weekly. 11am-1pm. A space for women to come together and use the creative process to heal ourselves. All women welcome. No experience needed. For more information call Forest, 617-416-1297.

<NEW!> Uplifting Friends, Loved Ones, and Community: Basic Counseling & Support Skills. Weekly, 6-7:30pm. A casual space to learn and share methods and tips for supporting friends, family, and anyone else, through a crisis, difficult time, or traumatic event. Each week we’ll learn, discuss, and practice a handful of support skills. Get in touch with your healing powers and be more supportive to those you love, including yourself! Open to all on a drop-in basis. Info: smeade@oberlin.edu

Survival and Support: Women Coping With the Mental Illness of Loved Ones. 12/22, 6-7:30pm. This peer discussion group provides a sharing space for women to talk about the challenges of supporting a friend or family member living with mental illness. Sign-up/Info: cwcsvivsupp@gmail.com

Wednesday
Women’s Center Board of Trustees Meeting. 12/9, 6-7:30pm. Info: board@cambridgewomenscenter.org

Fitness with Katie. 12/16 & 30, 6:30-7:15pm. Full body workout for all fitness levels to improve health and healing. Working out can be a cathartic experience and can help you find your own strength and build self-confidence. Info: Katie@gymit.com

Thursday
Sewing Group. Weekly. 10am-12pm. Open to all women who’d like to sew or mend with a machine or by hand. Make or mend bags, clothing, quilts... No experience needed. Info: 617-354-6394.

Yoga With Elise. Weekly. 1-2pm. Gain strength, flexibility and confidence and learn breathing techniques for relaxation, stress management & focus. Open to women of all experience levels. Please RSVP to eliselovelumba@yahoo.com (space is limited).

Trauma Support/ Discussion Group. 6-7pm, 12/3 (Creating Healthy Boundaries), 12/10 (Intimacy & conflict in relationships), and 12/17 (Navigating difficult family relationships). An intimate group where women can share and get support for all forms of trauma, past and present. Info: groupcambridge@gmail.com

Thursday (continued)

<NEW!> Free Monthly Legal Clinics with Casa Myrna. 12/17. Open to any woman looking for legal information or assistance who has been impacted by domestic violence (physical abuse, threats, belittling, controlling behavior, etc.) 3-4:30pm: 20 minute legal consultations. Individuals can speak with a legal advocate about any legal issue in a confidential setting.

*5-6pm: Topic: Child Custody. General info, Bring questions. Lola, 617-521-0146, to make an apt/request childcare/other help.


Friday (closed Friday, December 25)
Knitting/Crocheting. 12/4 & 18, 1-2:30pm. No experience needed. Supplies provided. Taylor Rooks trooks3396@aol.com

Incest Resources' Drop-In Discussion Group for Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse. 12/18, 6-7:30pm. Topic: Control. Meet other survivors, share commonalities and coping strategies. Meets on the 3rd Fridays of the month, Sept. through June. Please come on time! No one will be admitted after 6:15pm so group process will not be disrupted! Thanks!

*Teen Group. Movie Night. 12/11, 6-9pm. Movie to be decided. Includes light refreshments. Let’s create a safe space for teens to get together and express ourselves without fear of the judgment of others. For info/to get involved: sears.maya@gmail.com

Saturday
*Come for Breakfast! 12/12 & 26, 10:30-11:30am. Come enjoy a delicious breakfast made by Marcy. Info: 617-354-6394

Healing Through Creative Arts Workshop: “Our Body’s Language: Gentle Tools for Recognizing and Managing Stress.” 12/19, 1-3pm. Using simple but profound tools we will identify our body language when under stress. Then we will develop practical alternatives so our body language matches our intentions, empowering us to communicate clearly with integrity. Led by Martha Rogers. For info: martharogersmusic@gmail.com or call 978-408-9233 Walk-in participants are welcome and encouraged.

<NEW!> Trauma Survivors Writing Group. Weekly, 2-3pm. A series of workshops for trauma survivors who wish to explore different forms of writing as a way to tell their stories and to heal. Come to a single session, all, or anything in between. We will draw inspiration from works of fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. Dec. 5, Limericks - humor in poetry; December 12, Myths; December 19, Short story and December 26, Short story. Info: mediterranea97@yahoo.com

*Mah Jongg. Weekly, 11:30am to 2:30pm (come and go anytime - each game takes about 20 minutes). Mah Jongg is a game of skill, strategy & luck! Enjoy cards, Sudoku, puzzles, board games? You will likely love this exciting centuries-old game of Chinese tradition. Everyone is welcome! Come play or learn how to play and ENJOY! Info: carrieanne2e@gmail.com

*AND MORE

*Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. A peer-led support group for the woman in a straight relationship struggling with her sexual orientation. For details more info, email: kate.e.flynn@gmail.com

*Open Luncheons at the Women’s Center. 12/15 (3rd Tuesday) & 12/28 (last Mon), 12-1pm. Coming together to enjoy a meal, share thoughts. All women welcome. Info: 617-354-6394

Need computer help? Feel free to ask a volunteer. Volunteers can help you with computer questions but at times may need to go do other things such as take phone calls and answer the door.
Incest Resources’ Drop-In Discussion Group for Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse
3rd Fridays, 6-7:30pm, September—June

Upcoming Dates and Topics:
- December 18: Control
- January 15: Trust
- February 19: Triggers
- March 18: Shame
- April 15: Self-Confidence
- May 20: Sexuality
- June 17: Support

*No one will be admitted after 6:15pm so that the group process will not be disrupted*

Thank you!

Basic Counseling & Support Skills Group

November has brought a brand new weekly group to the Women’s Center calendar—a space for both learning and sharing, healing and being healed. The Basic Counseling and Support Skills group aims to be a setting where folks can learn tangible tools and practices that contribute toward the ultimate goal of uplifting friends, family, and community, all while caring for oneself in the process. As a new volunteer at the Women’s Center, I immediately appreciated the multiplicity of healing spaces it offers through groups that cater to the variety of healing styles and needs of the women who frequent this space. With a background in support work and peer counseling, I hope to contribute to this array of healing spaces by hosting the Basic Counseling & Support Skills Group. I believe that our communities are made stronger through spaces where we can learn to give the support we so often seek. Learning and discussing support skills can also be an act of healing in and of itself, since it asks us to reflect upon our own experiences seeking and receiving counsel, and what about those experiences was either helpful or unhelpful to us. For example, in our first two meetings, we discussed two skills known as the “pillars of counseling & support:” Validation and Normalization. Discussing what it means to validate and normalize someone’s experience and why this is helpful naturally spurred self-reflection among members of the group. Some folks in the group chose to share times in which they felt affirmed by someone in their life as well as times when they felt invalidated and unsupported. In this, I was reminded of something one of my previous counseling co-workers said to me once: “Most people who do support work are themselves coming from a place of past trauma or hardship, and they are either so grateful for the amazing support they once received that they want to do the same for others, OR they felt so unsupported and alone that they want to give to others the support they wish they’d had.” I hope that this group can fulfill that purpose for anyone who seeks it, and at the very least that it can be a space to appreciate the power and importance of community healing as it has existed at the Women’s Center for so many years.

-Sophie Meade

Writing Workshops for Trauma Survivors

For the past eight years I have been teaching writing at an international and accredited university. I have a BA in psychology and English, a Master’s in Education, and a Master’s in Creative Writing. On occasion a student would unveil personal tragedy in their writing and it would fall to me to best guide them in protecting their experience as well as their self. As Suzette Henke says in her book *Shattered Subjects*, “Through the artistic replication of a coherent subject-position, the life-writing project generates a healing narrative that temporarily restores the fragmented self to an empowered position of psychological agency.”

Studies have shown how confronting trauma in a language-based experience furthers the understanding and assimilation of the trauma. As a survivor myself, I have found the process of putting the experience into an art form very healing. At the time of my trauma, many years ago now, I attended groups for rape survivors at the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center and found them to be one of the most helpful parts of my healing. All of the above experiences contributed to my desire to apply for a grant to offer a series of ten writing workshops for trauma survivors. In mid November we started!

We begin each session by reading a short piece of literature which has to do in some way with issues participants most likely will have faced in their lives. Reading literary works by authors who deal with traumatic subjects can alleviate feelings of isolation and loneliness caused at times by trauma. We talk about the piece we read and how it relates to individual lives and then I give a writing prompt. Participants take turns reading out loud and then receive feedback from both myself and the other participants. The aim of the workshop is to offer a creative outlet in a safe and welcoming environment.

-Silvia

Behind the Scenes Update (continued from page 1)

In late September we hired Colleen Maki as our Volunteer Coordinator. She brings new perspective and energy and has already made great progress in strengthening our volunteer program. She has compiled volunteer training information and has looked into new ways to spread the word through social media. We will also be hiring a Development Coordinator to bring in more funds and expand our community outreach.

Additionally, we were able to secure a grant that allows for close collaboration between the Board of Trustees and a Wheelock College graduate student team in forming a strategic plan for where we are headed and how we can get there. We look forward to seeing how the Wheelock consulting group’s expertise will help us reach our goals and to help us continue to make real and lasting impact for the women we serve.

We have also been able to expand our programming, adding a 10-week Trauma Survivors Writing Series, Fitness with Katie, monthly Legal Clinics for Survivors of Domestic Violence, Mindfulness Meditation, and more. We’re on our way and we are so grateful for your continued support!

-- Meredith, Board of Trustees
About a year ago, I joined the Cambridge Women’s Center as a volunteer and took on the library as a project. I was a librarian at MIT for over 40 years. The library had been very well organized and had a card catalog; however, the catalog was no longer accurate and included books that were no longer here and there were many new gifts to the library that had not been added. So, I decided to add the contents of the library to http://www.librarything.com. You can check us out virtually there. To log in, the name of our library is CambridgeCenter and the password is sophie01. You can search by author, title, or subject tags.

Welcome to the Library at the Cambridge Women’s Center

Feminist Theory is a large category including classics such as Virginia Woolf’s a Room of One’s Own and Mary Wollenstonecraft’s Vindication of the Rights of Women, and more contemporary authors such as Gloria Steinem and Robin Morgan.

Please explore the library and come in to check out books. You can have the books for two weeks, just sign them out on the clip boards, one in the Living Room where most of the fiction has been moved, and one in the Library, now on the second floor. Or spend a rainy day reading at the Women’s Center. We trust you to return the books.

Please take advantage of the library and your volunteer librarian. I would be happy to help with your computer searching or any other reference questions you may have.

If you have books to donate, please contact me at tatobin@mac.com. The library is built from donations, but we cannot accept duplicate titles or titles that do not fit the collection; we especially need current titles.

- Theresa