

THE CENTER FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES AND SERVICES

A Brief History

From the very outset (Summer of '69) it was clear to all of us in the Women's Movement on the San Diego State College campus that women's needs are not isolated but, rather, interlock in many subtle as well as obvious ways. It was clear that neither an academic program alone, nor an isolated service, however important, would reflect our understanding of these interlocking needs. We (30 women or more) developed the concept of a Center composed of interlocking components corresponding to the various needs. The political realities of the moment put a limit on the number of components in our plan, but the structure we conceived allowed for the creation of new components according to the availability of the components we came up with initially were Academic, Research, Publications, Recruitment, Tutorial, Cultural, Child Care, and Community Storefront. The academic program, which will no longer be referred to in what follows, is now known as the Women's Studies Program, and is no longer affiliated with the Center. The remaining Center is called the Center for Women's Studies and Services, or CWSS.

Some Principles and An Example of Organization

CWSS is an organization within the Independent Women's Movement dedicated to identifying and meeting the long-neglected needs of women: not only material needs, but also such basic needs as a positive self-image and political awareness. Our method consists in initiating radical programs, ranging from one-time events to lasting service projects, and catalyzing new organizations into being. The following are examples of CWSS activity conducted through its components and ad hoc organizing groups: organizing of women's poetry reading, art festivals, educational programs, etc. (on and off campus); recruitment into college, followed by a variety of supportive services, of women to whom higher education would normally be an unattainable luxury, or simply not within the scope of their self-image (e.g., women ex-prisoners or women on welfare); tutoring by women in areas traditionally dominated by men, such as engineering; organizing of a transportation network that takes children to visit their incarcerated mothers, of Sisterhood chapters and educational-cultural programs within women's prisons (CIW and CRC), and of women's literature workshops and a tutorial program in a women's honor camp; publication of a women's poetry anthology (Rainbow Snake), of varied research by and about women, of women's personal narratives, of a bibliography of women writers, of a newsletter, etc.; getting our sisters onto boards and commissions that deal with the present and future status of women; and so on. Underlying all of this activity are the three basic principles of CWSS; self-determination, community orientation, and participant control.

An Example of how these principles actually operate, as well as the interlocking nature of the components, can be seen in the Women's Festival of the Arts held last spring at SDSC. This event was sponsored by the Cultural Component. One hundred and fifty women artists in all media - graphics, film, poetry, dance, music, sculpture, photography - were involved. A core organizing committee of the artists was brought together by CWSS organizers. Remaining sensitive to the wishes of those artists who did not wish to be involved in organizing efforts, this core group passed on policies and practicalities

that had to do with the Festival, aided by whatever human and material resources could be made available by CWSS.

A critical part of the three-week event, which gave it political depth beyond the fact that it was an all-woman show, was a panel on "Women of the Convicted Class" sponsored by the Recruitment Component (all funds gathered at the Festival went into the CWSS Emergency Support Fund for women ex-prisoners entering college via recruitment). This panel provided a feminist perspective on the nature of crimes committed by women and on the treatment of women in the American judicial-penal system. It gave rise to several discussions of deep political content, and initiated for many an analysis of the relationship between sexism, racism, and the fact that human needs in general are not being met by our present society. Thus, political education becomes a natural outgrowth of the event.

Recent Projects: The Downtown Storefront and the CWSS Convention Action

Our two most recent projects involve the opening of a downtown storefront which will provide walk-in counseling, information, referral, and classes for women (the opening date and location to be announced), and the CWSS Convention Action (a part of CAP), located at the Cordijn Center at 2422 Congress Street in Old Town. We will be providing medical and legal services, acting as an information and rumor control center, as well as presenting feminist programs and events. The next general meeting time and place is available by calling the CWSS office at (714) 286-6063.