



Cambridge Women's Center On Our Way

Fall 2020 Newsletter

46 Pleasant Street | Cambridge, MA 02139

Business: (617) 354-6394 | Helpline: (617) 354-8807

www.CambridgeWomensCenter.org

Dear Friend of the Cambridge Women's Center,

This, our 49th year, is not the year we were planning or hoping for, but none of us were. Working within the challenges of the pandemic, we've tried to make the best of our new reality. One member writes, "the Women's Center is such a beautiful sign of kindness and justice, now even more than ever, in this very trying time."

Though we temporarily closed our physical site on the evening of March 16th, we quickly pivoted our helpline to remote and many of our groups online. A regular helpline caller reported that our helpline was allowing her to **"survive this pandemic,"** through the support she receives. Another member noted, **"the helpline has been a lifeline."** Group attendance has increased, as women can join from near and far, and we have added groups specifically to cope with COVID-19.

On August 3rd, we re-opened limited on-site services. Folks can drop-by our outdoor space, and use laptops, access WiFi, print, browse our clothing rack, chat, and receive emotional support and resource referrals. At our front door, they can access food and supplies in to-go bags. Each day we are open, at least one member tells us how grateful they are that we are open. In our first month, we've logged over 270 instances of care provided and served 79 women in-person. It has been incredible to see returning community members (masked and socially distanced) at the Center again, as well as many newcomers.

Unfortunately, like many small nonprofits, this pandemic hit us hard, both financially and emotionally. In addition to pandemic stressors, we suffered a break-in and burglary on April 22nd. Our hearts break thinking of the desperation felt by our most vulnerable community members at this time, and the desperation that may have led the intruder(s) to take this course of action. Without a security system, no alarms sounded when the intruder(s) smashed a window in the back of the house, or when they used a crowbar to break into the locked offices. There was extensive property damage to the doors and locks. Over \$1,000 worth of gift cards, petty cash, and material goods, such as disinfectant wipes and backpacks, were taken.



We re-opened outdoors on August 3, 2020.

This intrusion of our space made the need for a security system clear. After reviewing several options, we had a security system installed. The three-year cost for this security system is over \$4,000 and was an expense we were not prepared for. Fortunately, the insurance claim and generosity of our community members has covered the majority of these costs.

Our need for personal protective equipment, sanitation supplies, new technology, transportation support, cleaning services, and increased oversight of programs, has added over \$20,000 to our shoestring budget. **Will you consider making a donation to help us bring community-building and life-saving programs to women in the Greater Boston area and beyond?** Any amount helps. **Grassroots support from the community is how we have sustained the CWC for almost 50 years; your support today will help us through this difficult time.** We look forward to the day we can re-open more fully and welcome you back into our space. Until then, we will continue to look for creative solutions to complex challenges and look forward to celebrating our 50th anniversary in 2021.

Thank you for your support,
Cambridge Women's Center Staff & Board

IR to bIRch Transition

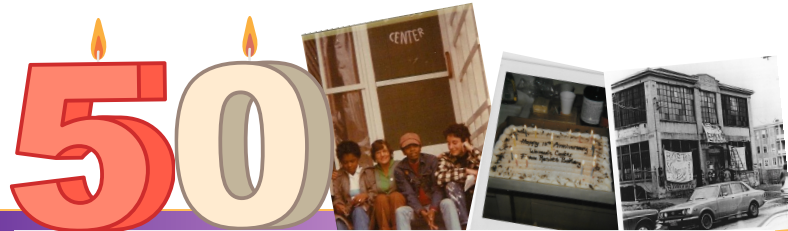
In 1980, the Women's Center became the home of Incest Resources, the first organization in the country for survivors of incest and childhood sexual abuse. I will always be grateful to the Center for believing in me as an incest survivor - and disabled dental hygienist back then - and supporting IR's mission.

In 2015, having reached the age of 70, I made a five-year plan for my retirement from IR. Since that time I have been actively engaged in mentoring and training a group of talented and inspiring members of the IR survivor community. Leadership has gradually been transferred to them, and they are prepared and committed to continuing free programs for survivors by survivors!

Together we have established a successor non-profit organization to Incest Resources called The bIRch House. Members of the survivor community chose the name, knowing a grove of birch trees was my sanctuary as a child, and with the spelling honoring the legacy of IR - a lovely tribute that is very meaningful to me. Adding to the significance of the name, the birch tree symbolizes new beginnings, regeneration, and hope.

The survivor studio space The bIRch House has created is open, light-filled, and offers safety, anonymity, and privacy. As I approach retirement at year-end from my 40 years of volunteer service with IR, I feel both gratified and excited about the future of survivor healing! For more information: www.birch-house.org

ELAINE WESTERLUND



JOIN THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY PLANNING TEAM!

Were you marching for feminist action in the 70s? Are you excited to use your abilities for a historic women's space?

Do you have a few hours a month to volunteer?

Join a volunteer team of women activists, community members, party planners, tech gurus, marketing wizzes, and women connected to the CWC. We are planning a 10-day celebration to align with the 10-day women-led occupation of 888 Memorial Drive, the 1971 event that led to the Center's opening. As the oldest, continuously-run community women's center in the U.S., this is a milestone for the Center and the nation, and it is a chance to celebrate women's activism in Greater Boston.

To sign up, fill out our Interest Form:

www.bit.ly/CWC50

OR email events@cambridgewomenscenter.org

Your voice will help define how we ring in our 50 years.



Cookie chatting with a group in our living room.

IDEAA: a mini intro

The 'Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accountability in Action' (IDEAA) Committee is a group of 14 volunteers, staff, board, and community members. The committee is currently spearheaded by a large majority (86%) of people of color, and 50% LGBTQIA+ members. We are motivated by making the CWC a more equitable and inclusive community and by building power among individuals who typically do not have a voice in decision making here.

IDEAA meets bi-weekly, and sub-committees meet more frequently to work on projects that address all aspects of the center: our mission & values, community guidelines, hiring practices, volunteer training, finances, and more. We want to rethink, reimagine, and restructure existing power dynamics at the center, and continue building solidarity with our community members.

It is incredible how in just two months we have created a space dedicated to organizational change with a capacity for nurturing human connections. **How do we create a community that is expansive in its definition of who is welcome and feels safe? When discrimination occurs, how do we hold one another accountable from a place of communal care and respect? Who among us is empowered to do so?** For us, these conversations begin by encouraging one another to be present, by reflecting on personal experiences, and by continuously learning how to better support one another and support our community.

IDEAA has become its own little community that is actively imagining and cultivating new possibilities for inclusion and equity at the center. If you are interested in participating, please email IDEAA@cambridgewomenscenter.org

SLANDIE & MICHELLE
CWC IDEAA COMMITTEE

A Conversation on Community and Hope

This summer CWC welcomed Rawda Aljawhary as our new Volunteer Manager, and also did our first virtual training of volunteers. Both the newest cohort of volunteers and Rawda started their new roles while our physical space was still closed. One of our new volunteers, Liz B., and Rawda sat down to have a discussion about what brought them to and what they've found here at the Center. Below is a portion of their discussion, edited for clarity and length.

The following content references violence and may be challenging to engage with.



**Rawda Aljawhary,
Volunteer Manager**



**Liz B.
Volunteer**

Liz:

What led you to first join the Center as a member?

Rawda:

Well, we grew up with like 16 years of child abuse and there's so much domestic violence and there was sexual violence. Some of my earliest memories include hearing the neighbors below us, who were my cousins, being beaten. I would wait until the screaming stopped, so that I could go down there afterwards, and we could care for each other as best as we could. When we would go to school in Egypt, I remember girls coming to school with a limp because they had experienced genital mutilation. People would respond by gathering around, especially the other girls.

Liz:

Not feeling safe when you're little...I've found that as I get older I try to be around people who've had similar experiences. I really connect with them the best and feel safe around them; Which is why CWC is such a nice place to find. It's a community of people in the process of healing.

Rawda:

When I came to the Women's Center, I needed it in the worst way. I didn't know how badly I needed it and the positive effects, which are compounding and rippling out so much in a way I could never have expected.

Liz:

I've been looking for a community to be part of that, where I fit in, but also that I can give something to. Dealing with depression, it's sometimes hard to believe you can have anything worthy of giving. Volunteering here has been a two-way experience for me, where I'm having a chance to give to others, but they're also reciprocating in my healing.

Rawda:

The Center and this type of community with women, with survivors, with people with disabilities, with people experiencing homelessness, and who are vulnerable and forgotten about- they're the people that are finding their strength and their courage and looking at society most truthfully. After advocating for the vulnerable so much for so long- that was perfect. That's exactly where I belong and finding the Center at this time is really just the work that I've always done and always wanted to do. It reminds me that community is life and that loneliness is death. That's what I've been thinking about the pandemic.

Liz:

That is what's special about places like CWC is that there is a way to connect with people that comes from loneliness, but really sublimates it clearly. You can bond more strongly because of all of the past pain and find joy in this unique connection.

Rawda:

We're talking about finding joy and companionship with people who don't repress or invalidate a part of you at the door when you walk in. People can take something unspeakable, and they reflect on it. Even though it's painful, they distill it and refract it into something much more beautiful and not horrific. This metaphor I like to think about is 'I just need one Ember burning. One Ember to be still alive and left at the end of those 16 years on the other end; To have faith that I will remember I have to relight it'. These conversations are where we reassert each other. They keep evil and oppression and darkness at bay. They do.



"During this time, I've learned that the way we relate to others is extremely important. Listening, kindness and compassion matter.

Self care - nutrition, exercise and meditation have sustained me. So has waving hello to perfect strangers while on a walk and maintaining positive energy. I strive to respond to what happens rather than reacting out of fear. For those of us who are able to remain healthy the pandemic is an opportunity to grow."

ANONYMOUS CWC MEMBER

Distant Reiki with Lenea



Lenea Brooke in the CWC library - February, 2020.
Photo by Emily Sotomayor.

Can you describe your connection to the CWC?

I am a Reiki group leader and a member. I first found out about the CWC through my wonderful Reiki teacher Christine Radice. I grabbed a calendar and I signed up for multiple classes. I've taken yoga classes (which I miss so much), the financial planning classes, and a mindfulness dream building class. I've been doing Reiki for a year or two? You'd have to ask Judy! Not long enough!

For those unfamiliar, can you describe what Reiki is?

It is basically a Japanese stress reduction method--a technique to promote the body's relaxation response, and natural healing ability. It's an alternative therapy commonly referred to as "energy healing" that goes off of the other person's energy to provide healing. I've had Reiki before so I know it works. Some people are like "what is that?" you just have to experience it for yourself because everyone's experience is different.

What was Reiki like before the pandemic?

It was great. Some days would be extremely busy, some days would be slow. Some members were actually coming every Friday. I always looked forward to it because I knew I would be able to help someone. My fondest memories were seeing so many women from all walks of life. Some from Cambridge, some from parts of Massachusetts that I've never even heard of! I've had women email me who were just in town visiting and were so happy that Reiki was offered at the center because in their country they do Reiki. I was happy and shocked to see so many women in that room, packed, patiently waiting to have Reiki. I just never thought so many women would be interested in Reiki and loving it.

What has running the online "Distant Reiki" sessions been like for you?

It's been OK but not like before. At the CWC members would feel more at ease and more comfortable with me face-to-face. I got a deeper connection with the person. The challenge is not being at the Center. Period. But I've still been able to provide distance Reiki to those who are interested. And honestly, I still have people emailing me every week, faithfully, even when I'm not on the calendar. They usually send me their name, and what they're going through so I can focus my energy toward that as best as I can. Some people can be dealing with mental/physical anxiety, or emotional stress. I send distance Reiki to them. I always meditate and center myself so I can focus on how I can direct my energy to them. They might be able to feel it instantly, or during the day, or weekend. Everyone's different. In due time, when this all passes, I'll be back.

What has this time of social distancing and sheltering in place been like for you, personally?

In the beginning I was stressed out because it came out of nowhere. The schools shut down, I was actually taking Spanish classes, because everyone thinks I'm Spanish. I was getting ready to start doing Reiki at Brigham and Women's and that didn't end up happening. I have been able to spend a lot of quality time with my son, though. I have become a teacher, assistant, a student, a PE teacher, an art teacher all of that --I should have gotten a report card with straight A's this last school semester! It's been something! My son is 10, he's an only child, and it's been OK. I am very grateful, but this has been tough.

Words of wisdom for our readers?

Just breathe, be mindful, everyone is going through this pandemic right now. Have loving kindness for yourself and everyone else. This will pass. And maybe don't watch the news so much.

Inside the CWC: new video!

www.bit.ly/InsideCwc2020

Before we closed our physical location in March due to COVID-19 safety concerns, we collaborated with Nola Pikalova on an incredible new video! Have a look at www.bit.ly/InsideCwc2020



Thank you for your generous support:

The 888 Women's History Project
Alice Willard Dorr Foundation
American Repertory Theater
Anna B. Stearns Charitable Foundation
Bank of America Charitable Foundation
Basil Tree Catering
Bay State Federal Savings Charitable Foundation
Boston Women's Fund
Brookline Food Coop
Bushrod H. Campbell and Adah F. Hall Charity Fund
Cambridge Savings Charitable Foundation
Cambridge Community Dispute Settlement Center
Cambridge Community Foundation
Cambridge Naturals
Cambridge Trust
Cambridge Women's Commission
Cummings Foundation
Cambridge-Agassiz-Harvard (CAH) Fund
CCTV Cambridge
College for Social Innovation
Community Cooks
The City of Cambridge
Dignity Matters
East Boston Savings Bank
East Cambridge Savings Bank
Emily Joy Sotomayor
The Fieldstone Foundation, Inc.
Flushing & Batavia Foundation
Foley Hoag Foundation
Food for Free
Forge Bakery
Hartley Corporation
Foundation M
John Donnelly Trust
John Snow Incorporated
Lamplighter Brewing Company
Lovin' Spoonfuls
Marion L. Decrow Memorial Foundation
Mass Humanities
MIT - Vagina Monologues
Nola Pikalova
Steele Family Foundation
Susan A. and Donald P. Babson Charitable Foundation
The Philanthropy Connection
Tufts Health Plan Foundation
Urban NYCHE Marketing, Inc.
Womenade Boston



The Survivor Theater Project Leadership Team!

Project Update: Survivor Theater

The mission of Survivor Theatre Project (STP) is to empower survivors of sexual abuse with the tools to break silence and end sexual violence through empowerment, social justice, creativity, and public performance. STP has been connected to the CWC since its founding in 2008. CWC is their fiscal sponsor and we are totally impressed with their work.

Survivor Theatre Project continues to stay vigilant to the changing times we are currently facing as a community. As a collective, STP Leadership Team is supporting survivors during crisis, continuing to focus on BIPOC survivors of sexual violence, and cultivating questions about true liberation for survivors. We as a collective are taking the questions all the way in - taking them to heart, holding each other as we navigate, dancing through it together, practicing, experimenting, and learning. We are offering videos, remote programming in the form of support groups and workshops. Healing Through Creative Arts continues to thrive, and Thriver's Blueprint takes shape for a 2021 launch. We are doing this with no explicit models out there that can coach us. It is such a challenging and tragic time, and a moment of reckoning with our country's deep roots of systemic racism. It is also a rich time, prime for change and reinvention. We are finding the courage to step up in this collective moment and finding strength in our sacred community.

STP LEADERSHIP TEAM



Judy and Karlotta celebrating a birthday in the living room



Cambridge Women's Center

46 Pleasant Street | Cambridge, MA 02139

Business: (617) 354-6394 | Helpline: (617) 354-8807

Email: info@cambridgewomenscenter.org

Outdoor Drop-In Hours:

Mondays: 6-8pm | Tuesdays 4-8pm Thursdays 2-8pm

Helpline Hours:

M-F 10am - 8pm & Sat 10am-4pm

Website:

www.CambridgeWomensCenter.org

The Cambridge 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, (Women's Educational Center Inc., Federal ID #23-7131753)

Consider Supporting Us However You Can:

1. Make a donation online or via mail

Donate online:

Visit our website CambridgeWomensCenter.org

OR directly to <http://bit.ly/GiveToCWC>



Mail in checks

made out to "Cambridge Women's Center":

Cambridge Women's Center

Attn: Judy Norris

46 Pleasant Street

Cambridge, MA 02139

2. Purchase items off our Amazon Wishlist

Purchase supplies that aren't normally donated such as handwarmers, spices, towels, printer ink, and art supplies. Visit our website OR go directly to <http://bit.ly/WishlistCWC>

3. Get connected!

As a small, grassroots organization, we are always looking to connect with potential partners in our community. For nearly 50 years we have survived and thrived with the help of individuals, businesses, and others groups in our community who believe in our mission. If you or someone you know has an interest in partnering with us for an event, matching a donation, joining our Board of Trustees, volunteering with us, or has some other great idea, please get in touch! Email: info@cambridgewomenscenter.org