Entry type: Organisation
Entry ID: AWE0003

Canberra Women’s Liberation Group

(1970 - 1976)

Born	19700101, Canberra Australian Capital Territory Australia
Died	19761231
Occupation	Social action organisation

Summary

The Canberra Women’s Liberation Group was formed in June 1970 after two women from Sydney Women’s Liberation spoke to eight female anti-Vietnam War activists, who decided to meet on a weekly basis on Wednesday evenings, to discuss their own form of oppression. The weekly meetings continued until 1976. One of its founding members was Julia Ryan. Their meetings were held in different houses in Canberra suburbs until 1975, when they shared Canberra Women’s House with the Women’s Electoral Lobby and the Abortion Counselling Service.

Details

Meeting venues were initially at Canning Street, Ainslie, then in the living rooms of various women’s homes. The group grew quickly to more than twenty, with recruits mainly being students, junior academics, or teachers in their twenties and thirties. They rented a house in Bremer Street from 1972 to 1974. In 1975 it moved to Lobelia Street, O’Connor to Canberra Women’s House and shared that house with the Women’s Electoral Lobby, (WEL) which was formed in 1972 and the Abortion Counselling Service There was no formal membership, hierarchy or structure, although minutes of meetings were kept. Women enrolled on a mailing list and volunteered for jobs. They had a monthly newsletter, which ceased in 1976 as original members moved on to other activities.
Members undertook research into topics such as education, psychology, the nuclear family, and femininity and led the weekly meetings.
The group was invited to address organizations such as the Humanists, Rotary, schools and women’s service clubs. Other activities included running information stalls, celebrating International Women’s Day, consciousness raising and organizing conferences.
Julia Ryan has argued that ‘Canberra WL did not die. It changed our lives, and the ideology spread so wide that those of us who had known every feminist in Canberra now did not know every feminist in our suburb. The movement had grown, not in the way we imagined, but beyond our dreams.’

Published resources

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Book Section
Canberra Women's Liberation, Wollstonecraft, Shulasmith, 1998

Site Exhibition
From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection
Julia Ryan interviewed by Sara Dowse [sound recording]

Elizabeth Ward interviewed by Sara Dowse [sound recording]

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection
Records of the Women's Electoral Lobby, 1952-2010 [manuscript]

Papers of Christine Fernon 1970-1985 [manuscript]

Private Hands (These records may not be readily available)
Papers of Julia Ryan

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