Entry type: Organisation
Entry ID: AWE0010

Beryl Women’s Refuge

(1975 -)

Born	19750308, Canberra Australian Capital Territory Australia
Occupation	Women's refuge

Summary

Beryl Women’s Refuge was the first women’s refuge for women and children escaping domestic violence in the ACT. It provided accommodation and a range of legal, welfare and health services to a diverse range of clients.

Details

Inspired by the feminists who established the Elsie Women’s Refuge in Sydney, Julia Ryan, Elizabeth ‘Biff’ Ward, Pamela Oldmeadow and other members Women’s Liberation in Canberra formed a Refuge Committee in 1974 to investigate through local welfare organisations the need for a similar refuge for victims of domestic violence in the ACT. Their evidence-based funding submission to the Commonwealth Department of the Capital Territory resulted in the lease of a three-bedroom house in Adams Place Watson and a grant of $4,000 towards its running costs. On 8 March 1975 Pat Bryant, wife of Gordon Bryant the Minister for the Capital Territory in the Whitlam Government, officially opened the Canberra Women’s Refuge and handed its keys to veteran feminist and abortion law reform advocate, Beryl Henderson. In 1989, the refuge was renamed Beryl Refuge Inc. in her honour. Originally staffed by trained volunteers from Canberra Women’s Liberation and Women’s Electoral Lobby, it was managed by a Collective of the Refuge Committee, operating by consensus decision-making.

In May 1976 the refuge moved to a two-storied duplex in Kingston, provided rent-free for two years by a Canberra businessperson, and received government funding for paid staff. Initially, all homeless women were accepted into the refuge but on 8 August 1983, Toora, a separate refuge for single women, was opened, allowing Beryl to focus on women with children.

In July 1986 the Incest Centre (now Canberra Rape Crisis Centre) was established, initially as a subsidiary of the Canberra Women’s Refuge. In 1990 Beryl opened a halfway house for women and children awaiting priority government housing. A $40,000 government grant in 2001 allowed Beryl to run children-focussed programs and in 2004 further funding permitted the provision of a twelve-month outreach program for former clients.

On 19 December 2005, Beryl Refuge Inc. was renamed Beryl Women Inc. In response to significant cuts in government funding the management of Beryl transitioned in April 2007 from a collective to a committee model of governance. Beryl increasingly employed ethnically diverse staff to better reflect the diversity of their clients and created two designated positions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

In 2015 Aboriginal woman Robyn Martin, Beryl’s Manager from 2005, was named ACT Woman of the Year.

Published resources

Edited Book
Opening a new door : the herstory of Beryl Women Inc. 1975 - 2015, Choudhury, Farzana, 2015, http://www.beryl.org.au/assets/beryl-herstory-book.pdf

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

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

Elba Cruz-Zavalla interviewed by Ann-Mari Jordens [sound recording]

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection
Papers of Julia Ryan, 1947-1982 [manuscript]

ACT Heritage Library
Woman sorting clothes in the lounge room of a Canberra women's refuge

Bedroom at the Canberra Women's Refuge, Watson, which is being used by an adult and five children

National Gallery of Australia, Research Library Archive
Escargo-go with Domestic Dirt - Canberra Women's Refuge Dinner Dance 1982

NULL
Red Fems Collection - NJSN_AC-007

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