

Annie Kenney Young Women's Refuge

1978 – 2009

Other Names: • Annie Kenney

Details

Annie Kenney Young Women's Refuge opened in Hobart in 1978. It was a feminist initiative that provided emergency accommodation and support to young homeless women, many of whom were under 18. In 2009, the collective running the Refuge disbanded and the funding was returned to the Tasmanian Government for reallocation.

Annie Kenney was established after welfare workers at the Hobart Women's Shelter became concerned about the number of homeless young women seeking help there. At the time, the only alternative was the receiving homes and institutions run by the Social Welfare Department or Church homes. According to *House full of women*, written by Anne Collins and Jane Dunsford, the problem with these institutions was that they had an 'authoritarian' attitude towards the young women that they accommodated. A group of welfare workers with a feminist approach, known as the Youth Shelter Committee, formed to provide alternative crisis accommodation.

According to Collins and Dunsford, in the 1970s, workers at feminist women's refuges criticised a family structure that promoted inequality between men, women, and children and in this way encouraged and concealed violence. They sought to promote the equality of women.

Feminist workers encouraged women to consider their own position within the family and to try to seek alternatives which would enable them to control their bodies and their lives. They felt that until all women had the means to do this, the causes of domestic violence, and violence towards women outside the family, could not be seriously confronted.

At their request, the Hobart Women's Shelter applied to the Commonwealth government's Women's Shelter Program for funds to run a shelter for young women up to 20 years old. The application set out three main principles:

1. *Every person has the right to have food, warmth and shelter whether this is the nuclear family setting or some other situation.*
2. *When a teenager is forced to leave home for whatever reason he/she should have access to care which is suitable to his/her needs.*
3. *Every teenager has the right to self determination: that is to participate in decisions about situations which will affect them and the right of access to services which will support them, particularly when they are young.*

The submission reflected the values of the Hobart Women's Shelter which saw the family as a potentially oppressive environment for both women and children:

In particular, the value that a women's shelter should identify with women's oppression in order to encourage women to claim their independence and self identity was incorporated into the functioning of Annie Kenney. In this respect young women were seen to be oppressed within the family structure as were women with children escaping family violence. Despite their age, it was believed society should recognise young women as individuals in their own right apart from their parents. They should be able to participate in decisions about situations that affect them and have rightful access to services that support them.

Annie Kenney was originally an annex of the Hobart Women's Shelter. It became incorporated in its own right in February 1981. The new constitution stated that the Refuge was run by a collective, known as the Working Collective, of workers and residents which had the power to appoint workers and decide who could live at Annie Kenney. The Working Collective answered to regular meetings with the Broader Collective which was made up of Women's Shelter workers, ex-workers and ex-residents of Annie Kenney, and interested feminists. By operating as a collective, workers hoped to break down the traditional relationship of welfare worker and recipient that left the recipient powerless.

In the interests of collectivity, although the workers retained the keys and carried out administrative tasks, residents were able to write in the day books and attend meetings. Some enjoyed this while others found it intimidating. One former resident said that:

You could have your say but you were scared in case you said something wrong...especially if you're not really sure what feminism is.

Other difficulties included maintaining privacy, a rapid turnover of young women that prevented them from understanding the culture, and a lack of interest from some in participating.

Workers took on tasks in rotation, on the basis that if they settled into one role for too long it would become a source of power. This, in combination with the collective decision making process, appealed to some workers. One said that:

You are able to exchange the ideas you have with other people, able to learn skills from each other and exchange those skills. The decision making process is one where everybody gets to have a say and you get to discuss the issues.

The rules, which were kept to a minimum, stipulated that there was to be no violence, no visits by men unless the collective agreed because of a specific purpose such as maintenance, no alcohol or drugs (except for prescription drugs), that household chores had to be done daily, and that the young women had to be home by midnight during the week and two am at weekends.

The household was run communally with everyone carrying out the cleaning, cooking and shopping. This did not always go well. One worker described it as a 'day to day battle' to get the housework done. One frustrated resident wrote in the day book that:

I am not cleaning this place up again. Only my mess that I make, OK? I spent six hours cleaning up, now look at it. OK? Workers: I try to go by the rules of cleaning up but no way, anymore.

Occasionally former residents became workers. This could work well if they had sorted out their own problems. However, others found it difficult to change roles or gain the emotional distance needed to be effective.

Workers at Annie Kenney opposed the widely held view that many teenage girls in care were 'maladjusted'. They did not agree with 'rehabilitation ideology' which emphasised reform of the girls. Instead they saw them as in need of support to develop their independence. They usually needed to do this away from their families who were often the source of their difficulties. In this respect, the workers at Annie Kenney differed from policy in the Social Welfare Department. Such policy viewed troubled teenagers as 'maladjusted' and sought to rehabilitate them within the context of their families.

Criticisms of Annie Kenney by the Department included a perception that the feminist beliefs of the workers took precedence over the girls, that they were too close to the girls, and that no files were kept. However, in the absence of suitable places for teenage girls, the Department preferred to keep Annie Kenney going. Some individual child welfare officers within the Department supported the aims of Annie Kenney.

According to Collins and Dunsford, workers and residents at Annie Kenney were frequently subjected to criticism from the wider community and sexual harassment. The criticism was contradictory. On the one hand, since some of the workers were lesbians, they were suspected of trying to 'pervert' the girls. On the other, Annie Kenney was seen as a 'whorehouse'. Men sometimes turned up believing the refuge to be a brothel. These misconceptions could have a damaging effect on the young women who lived there.

Annie Kenney Refuge was run by a collective. In 2009, the collective disbanded and the funding was returned to the Tasmanian Government for reallocation by Homes Tasmania.

Gallery



Annie Kenney Young Women's Refuge Logo

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Hobart Women's Shelter \(c. 1972 - current\)](#)

Annie Kenney was an annex of the Hobart Women's Shelter between 1978 and 1981.

Related Events

- [Investigation of the care and treatment of "socially maladjusted teenage girls", Sub-Committee of the Tasmanian Branch of the Australian Institute of Welfare Officers \(c. 1975\)](#)

This report shows that the Social Welfare Department saw troubled teenage girls as 'maladjusted' and in need of rehabilitation, a view that workers at Annie Kenney opposed.

Related Organisations

- [Social Welfare Department, State of Tasmania \(1961 - 1983\)](#)

Workers at Annie Kenney opposed policies at the Social Welfare Department that saw teenage girls as 'maladjusted' and in need of rehabilitation. They disagreed with the Department's emphasis on the family as the main focus of the rehabilitation.

Records

For more information and to access your records, follow the links below:

Records held by other organisations

- [Correspondence Files \(1919 - 1998\)](#)
- [Ministerial Files-Unregistered \(1982 - 1985\)](#)

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