You Can’t Beat a Woman refuge history project



Women and children in a refuge in the 1970s Women's Aid

You Can’t Beat a Woman is a two-year project run by Colchester and Tendring Women's Refuge, based in the East of England.

The project focuses on the history of the local campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s, led by women calling for public condemnation of domestic violence and demanding protection for its victims. The women set out to establish refuges providing temporary accommodation for women and their children, and were to have a major impact on women’s rights, feminist movements and local heritage.

Thanks to National Lottery players, Colchester and Tendring Women's Refuge and London Black Women’s Project will explore and preserve the memories of the women who pioneered the refuge movement in the East of England and East London.

The project will record interviews with founding members of Colchester and Tendring Women's Refuge and six other nearby refuges, together with founding members of services at London Black Women’s Project in East London. By documenting the similarities and differences between these groups, the project will provide a nuanced historical account of the creation and organisation of refuges in both areas.

Alongside a newly developed website and curated exhibition, the project will help the local community to understand its hidden refuge heritage through a programme of talks. To ensure that these memories are preserved for future generations, the collected oral histories will be kept with the Essex Sound and Video Archive and Eastside Community History.

Commenting on the award, June Freeman, trustee of Colchester and Tendring Women's Refuge, said: "Domestic violence continues to plague our society so we're very pleased to have been awarded this grant by HLF. It will enable us to record the stories of the women who got together to set up refuges for abused women and helped to place the issue of violence against women firmly on the social agenda."

Baljit Banga, Director of London Black Women's Project, said: "Black women were a critical part of the struggle for women's rights in this country. One way that they participated was by developing specialist women's refuges to serve the needs of black minority ethnic women and their children surviving domestic violence who had limited access to generic provision. This project will remind us of the contribution that black women made to the refuge movement."

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of HLF East of England, said: "HLF is proud to support this important project exploring the history of UK domestic violence refuges and the women's rights movement. Thanks to National Lottery players, Colchester and Tendring Women's Refuge and London Black Women's Project will uncover the experiences of women who pioneered the movement and share their stories of courage and hope as they campaigned to raise public awareness of domestic violence."

Further information

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