Uncovering the stories of women who pioneered



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

In the late 1960s, the UK women’s liberation movement emerged as a force for change. Alongside campaigning for women’s rights, the movement also drew attention to women’s home lives and to the issue of domestic violence.

At this time domestic violence was rarely talked about and what happened behind closed doors stayed private. However, this was beginning to change and in 1971, the first UK women’s refuge opened its doors in Chiswick, London.

Women and children experiencing domestic violence finally had somewhere safe to go, and for the first time, many heard the comforting words: "It’s not your fault".

Thanks to National Lottery players, two refuges in two different regions will come together to bring to light the history of women's refuge work and its impact on the survivors who have used refuge services.

Colchester and Tendring Women's Refuge, based in the East of England, has received a £66,500 grant from HLF for the two-year project entitled You Can’t Beat a Woman, working in partnership with London Black Women’s Project based in East London.

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.

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>
> *June Freeman, trustee of Colchester and Tendring Women's Refuge*

The project will also 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. 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 communities to understand refuge heritage through a programme of talks. To ensure that these memories are preserved, the collected oral histories will be kept with the Essex Sound and Video Archive and Eastside Community History.

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.”