

Women and Environments International Newsletter

Volume 2, Number 1, Winter 1978

This is the third issue of the Women and Environments International Newsletter. In the past few months a number of changes have occurred in the operation of the newsletter and they are reflected in this issue. We have received interim financial support from the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University for the printing of the next two issues. Without this support you would not be receiving this publication. In addition, we have added two new members to the publication staff: Jennifer Penney and Nancy Meloshe. Both are students working on the newsletter as part of their assistantship assignments within the Faculty. Their contribution to this issue has been substantial, including suggestions about new features, writing of articles, contribution of technical expertise in printing, and assistance in obtaining financial support for the printing of this issue.

We are presently considering the options for future funding of the newsletter. These include: obtaining seed money from some

granting agency, either private or governmental with an interest in this area: charging a subscription fee; or some combination of the above. If you have any comments on these options, or any funding suggestions other than these, please let us know. Several readers have contributed money to the support of the newsletter. We would like to thank them, and indicate that such voluntary contributions are always welcome.

In order to continue, the newsletter requires not only financial support, but also contributions of the time and interest from the readers, YOU! This issue has required that the staff put a considerable amount of effort into gathering information and putting together features. This may be necessary in order to give some examples of the types of features that we feel might be of interest to readers. However, our work must be supplemented by your response to the need for news items, feature articles, etc. We also need your feedback on the items we have included to date.

WOMEN'S SPACES

In this issue we have written about five innovative women's environments: The Women's Transit Authority, The Women's Cultural Center, The Women's Building, The Canadian Women's Educational Press, and the Women's School of Planning and Architecture. We asked the following questions in putting together this feature:

- What makes these spaces women's spaces?
- What needs do they fill that aren't met elsewhere?
- What makes these environments innovative?
- Do they have any special design features or aspects of the design and management process which are of interest?
- What are their funding sources?

We feel that spreading information about innovations in women's spaces might stimulate people's ideas about the kind of changes in environments that women are attempting to make elsewhere. These examples might be used to stimulate change in places where a similar need is identified, but a vision has not yet developed about what kinds of environments are needed or how a space might come to be.

You will notice that the environments featured in this issue include a wide range, all initiated by women of varying perspectives and political persuasions. We feel that presenting a wide range of alternatives is important for stimulating discussion about the kinds of environments that women want, in all their diversity. This is a feature which we would like to continue with your contributions on innovative women's spaces.

THE WOMEN'S TRANSIT AUTHORITY

A 1973 Rape Conference held in Madison, Wisconsin raised issues of concern for many women. One of these issues was related to the lack of public transportation facilities at night in the city of Madison. In spring 1973, a group of women responded to this issue by forming the Women's Transit Authority.

The transit service operates from the University of Wisconsin and is funded jointly by the University, the city of Madison and the county. It is a free automobile service offered to women within a four mile radius of the centre city. It operates every evening between the hours of 7 p.m. and 2 a.m. Women may use the service two ways — they may call to be picked up, or they may wait to be picked up at any 3 points in the University campus area.

Women drivers originally used their own cars to service clients but the Transit Authority now owns a fleet of three cars. Sue Greenwald of the Authority states that there is a consistent demand for the cars. She estimates that they service 75-85 women a night. Approximately 70% of the clients are students or are affiliated with the University.

An indication of real commitment by women to assist other women are the 100 volunteer women drivers. The Transit Authority is an innovative means of providing women with a safe and viable mode of transportation. It represents an alternative for women to the often limited urban public transportation system.

Contact:
Women's Transit Authority
University YWCA
306 North Brock Street
Madison Wisconsin
53715, U.S.A.

THE WOMEN'S CULTURAL CENTRE

The old Toronto City Morgue is undergoing a transition. On June 1, 1978 it will open its doors under a new name — The Women's Cultural Centre. A historic building originally constructed in 1907, the centre will provide 7500 square feet of "Womenspace" on three floors. When the Centre opens its doors, it will include: an art gallery, a reference library and reading room, a cabaret theatre, film theatre and lecture hall, a cafe and lounge (a meeting-place and thus the heart of the Centre), a kiosk selling prints, posters, books, etc., and studios and workshops.

The Centre will provide a meeting place designed to encourage the communication and involvement of women. Educational and discussion programs at the Centre emphasizing issues of interest and concern to Canadian women will include seminars on topics as diverse as politics, economics, law and mental health. Studios, workshops, a lecture hall, and reference library have been designed for these purposes. As a fine arts centre, Canadian women artists will be able to display and perform their works in an art gallery, concert theater and film theater. Their skills and resources will be shared with the entire community.

The Women's Cultural Centre was initiated by a group of



The Women's Cultural Centre in Toronto

well-known, established Canadian women artists and performers. Through their contacts they formed a Board of Directors and Advisory Council which includes prominent architects, journalists, lawyers, business people and artists.

As a consequence, this group has been very successful in fundraising for the Centre. The Centre leases the building from the municipality at a nominal rate of \$1 a year on a 10-year lease with a 10-year renewal option. Cost of renovation to the building has been projected at \$250,000. All renovations are being done professionally. The Province of Ontario has allocated \$130,000 for the project and the Centre's Board of Directors hopes to raise the remaining funds through a national campaign. The campaign will be directed toward private organizations and government agencies which have an interest in advancing and securing the future of Canadian women artists. The Women's Cultural Centre has also held a Halloween Dance and a concert to raise funds.

Contact:
The Women's Cultural Centre
Helen Notzli
Harbourfront
Toronto, Ontario

CANADIAN WOMEN'S EDUCATIONAL PRESS

The Women's Press offices are a hodgepodge of old desks and stuffed chairs, shelves stacked precariously with files and papers and books, odd cups left forgotten, phones ringing, messages shouted from room to room. This first impression of disorder belies the steady production of high-quality books that the group has produced in the last five years. The Women's Press collective is one of those few feminist groups that has survived the differences, splits, and dissolutions which have characterized

much of the women's movement in the 1970's.

Not that the Press hasn't had its difficulties. The collective began as a group of writers working to publish *Women Unite!*, a collection of Canadian socialist-feminist articles. The process of editing and writing took two years. No professional publisher would touch it without demanding more editorial control than the women were willing to give up. A small "Local Initiatives Program" grant later and Canada had a new women's publishing house. The Press has grown and developed over five years. But, despite the relative stability of the group in publishing terms, its financial position has always been somewhat precarious. From an optimistic leasing of the whole top floor of an old, converted Toronto mansion, the collective has been forced to condense its activities into three crowded rooms, subletting the rest of the floor. For the Press, however, the physical environment is less a concern than the social, collective process which goes on within it.

SOCIALIST-FEMINIST PUBLISHING

Within the North American milieu of feminist publishing, the Canadian Women's Educational Press is relatively unique in its socialist-feminist perspective. As Brenda Roman, editor with the Press describes it, "We are not interested in helping women up the corporate ladder. Rather, we try to orient our publishing program to questions and issues affecting working-class women. In keeping with this perspective the *Everywoman's Almanac 1978*, a women's calendar, looks at the present economic crisis and how it particularly affects women. Also, the Press has two forthcoming books, *Getting Organized: A Workers Guide to Building a Union*, and *Good Day Care: Getting It, Keeping It, Fighting For It*. In the past, the collective has published an anthology of women at work, a history of prairie women in Canada, and *Population Target*, a study of population control in the Third World from an anti-imperialist perspective. They've also printed a more theoretical approach to feminist issues in *Marxism and Feminism*, and several children's books.

The process of publishing is regarded as a shared effort between the Press collective and the authors. Many people have illusions about Women's Press, however. Their relative success in the publishing field — twenty books in five years — has perhaps led to this problem. Because the Press has a business function, some people automatically distrust it. These misunderstandings can create tensions with people who expect a large financial return on their books, or a very large distribution. "But we're not in publishing to make money, and we don't really expect our writers to be either" says Brenda. The collective is very much a non-profit organization.

Distribution of books has been difficult in the past, though it is becoming easier. At first the Press was regarded by some bookstores as a fly-by-night operation. Its present production of four or five books a year has tended to correct that image. Over the past five years the Press has steadily increased its volume of sales and now has sales representation right across Canada as well as in the U.S. Large publishing firms, however, have larger amounts of capital with which to push and promote their books. The Press still counts very heavily on being part of the women's movement, on word-of-mouth advertising, and on good reviews.

Like most Canadian publishers, Women's Press gets grants from the Canada Council, and some from the Ontario Arts Council. But these grants are proportionate to the numbers of

books published, and the total number of pages produced. This clearly favours the large publishers. Basically the books support the Women's Press and so far they don't do it well enough. The collective has discussed the possibility of trying to establish a contributions system, but have not yet ventured into this area.

COLLECTIVITY IN WRITING, ORGANIZATION

Perhaps the most interesting feature of Women's Press is its day-to-day collective operation. Unlike many organizations which call themselves collectives, but end up functioning in *de facto* hierarchies, Press members continuously work to maintain collective decisions, responsibilities, and work-sharing. There are eighteen members of the group including three on full salary and one part-time staffer. Many of the unpaid collective members spend time in the office, helping to maintain the ongoing functions of the publishing operation.

Manuscripts, both solicited and unsolicited, come into the Press and are assigned to one of the following committees: adult fiction, children's literature, or social issues. The committee members read the material, meet to discuss it with the authors and may propose to the collective as a whole that the book be developed for publication, usually with certain revisions. The editor meets frequently with the authors to help with the development of the manuscript. The collective work continues right up to the printing of the final manuscript.

This process is seen as necessary not only because most of the writers are first-time authors, but because Women's Press values the generation of collective research and writing as a political and social goal. Some of the books published by the Press are initiated by the collective members who determined the need for a particular type of book, and sought out the kind of women they thought could do it.

All the books published by the Press are produced by the staff in the Press offices. This entails getting the copy ready for the printer. There are two staff people responsible for typesetting and layout, and a group of press members designs all the books. This practice is unusual for a publishing house and places a heavy responsibility on those press members involved in this aspect of Press work. By doing all the typesetting, layout, and design themselves, costs are cut and production process becomes part of the overall collective responsibility.

In an interview with *The Other Woman*, a Toronto feminist newspaper, the Women's Press summed up their project at the end of five years of publishing. "As one of the few socialist feminist presses in North America, we feel a certain responsibility to keep raising some basic and essential questions. A few women continue to make it in the big world, and since International Women's Year, those women have been focussed on by the media out of proportion to their numbers. The fact is that the majority of women continue to be oppressed and exploited in our system. Economically, women are in a more tenuous situation than they've been for years. We feel that we can publish a wide variety of materials — and in all of these books confront what we see to be the primary reason for women's oppression."

Contact:
Canadian Women's Educational Press
280 Bloor St. W.
Toronto, Ontario

THE WOMEN'S BUILDING

The Woman's Building, located north of downtown Los Angeles, California, is a public center for women's culture. During the four years of its development, the Woman's Building has been the focus for national conferences, local workshops and classes. Their facilities include a graphic center, a slide registry of women's visual art, a performance space, classroom and meeting space. Major educational programs include the Extension Program (quarterly 8-week classes on week nights, and one-day weekend workshops), the Feminist Studio Workshop and the Summer Art Program.

The Woman's Building presently occupies a three storey warehouse. In four months over 2,500 people helped to build this public center on three floors of undifferentiated space. They participated in the process of designing, cleaning, scraping and painting. Design emphasis was placed on open forms and generous circulation spaces as places of conversation, protest and celebration.

The Woman's Building was created without large gifts or grants from either private individuals and corporations or federal and state agencies. Project grants had been received but economic support for the ever increasing administrative strain was and continues to be lacking. Sheila Levrant de Brettville one of the founders of the center stated in "The Woman's Building: A Case Study in Urban Innovation" that the sheer existence and persistence of the Woman's Building is expressive of the vitality of the second wave of feminism. The orientation, accomplishments and difficulties of this building can provide a useful model for women elsewhere who might create a new independent cultural and feminist institution. As the goal of this institution is to project women's culture into the public sphere, the more women can group together to locate and create this culture, the more likely we can have a positive affect on the society at large."

Contact:

The Woman's Building
1727 N. Spring St.
Los Angeles, California
90012.

WOMEN'S SCHOOL OF PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE

"The stereotypes about women that pass through urban planning minds are too frightful to touch on a hot summer day — among these stereotypes are the assumptions that women stay at home, that everybody lives in a nuclear family, that everybody wants as many bathrooms as there are bedrooms (meaning more housework and more consumption), that a man needs an "extra place" for a study, but a woman doesn't" (Noel Phyllis Birkby, Los Angeles Times, August 1976).

Birkby, a New York architect who teaches at Brooklyn's Pratt Institute, is one of the seven founders / co-ordinators of the Women's School of Planning and Architecture, the first such school founded, funded and run by and for women. The reasons for the creation of the school are twofold — to create a personally supportive environment for the free exchange of ideas and knowledge; and to encourage both personal and professional

growth through a fuller integration of values and identities as women, with values and identities as designers.

The first session of WSPA was held during August 1975, in Maine and the second session during August 1976, in California. More than 50 women gathered together for each intensive two-week session. The sessions included discussion of such diverse subjects as the politics and ideology of the planning process, women and built environment, a feminist analysis of design method and content, energy-conscious design, writing for designers, woodworking techniques, design and construction of architectural tapestry.

The School is a response to the growing dissatisfaction with the architectural profession. The profession has remained male-dominated due to traditional barriers of entry for women. As a result, many women feel that the profession has not been sensitive to the needs of women users of buildings. Little design consideration has been given for example to the physical barriers for women accompanied by young children in carriages; the physical isolation of suburban women and effectively designed birth environments for women. It is for these reasons that so called "alternative institutions" for women have been created by women.

Ellen Perry Berkely, one of the founders / co-ordinators believes that the women's school of planning and architecture has meant different things to different people. In a recent article "A Feminist Critique of Architecture" she stated, "For some it has been an impetus for major change in professional direction. For others, it has opened up the responsibilities of a supportive community. For those of us involved as co-ordinators, it has been an occasionally agonizing attempt to create a new model of education, of community, of organization, of professional responsibility." It seems that for women architects, the school represents a move toward a new definition of professionalism.

WSPA is currently planning another two week session for August 1978, in Rhode Island. In addition, a special weekend session will be held at that time for those interested in a shorter session.

For further information contact:

Women's School of Planning and Architecture
Box 311
Shaftsbury, Vermont
05262, U.S.A.

letters

Appropriately enough, following on the last article the letter printed below outlines some plans for an August, 1978 session by the Women's School of Planning and Architecture.

Dear Friends:

This interim report was written for all past participants of WSPA, and for all who have inquired about our future plans. We have had continuing and enthusiastic response from many of you and we would like to tell you of recent developments regarding the next WSPA session.

The result of our questionnaire survey encourages us to plan a two-week session in August 1978 somewhere between New York City and Boston. We are tentatively thinking of a format that will allow women to share ideas and information at the level that their time and resources will allow. Some women may choose to participate in a full two-week session; others may join in a special weekend at the mid-point of the two-week session. Special programs for the overlapping weekend can make this time a rich experience for all. We still envision the creation of a WSPA community and a WSPA network as one of the major accomplishments of our time together. The dual format simply allows many more women than ever before to be a part of a growing WSPA.

For the next session we have broadly fastened upon the theme "The Working and Living Environments." We plan to explore how these environments in their physical, psychological, social and economic complexities relate to one another and most specifically to women. How can we, as women, integrate these two environments in our lives? What does dwelling — work — success — mean to us? We want to learn about specific situations. How have these issues been addressed and solved in our society, and other societies, in the past and today? (For example we are looking forward to having a report from a group of women architects, including past participants, who have just returned from China.) We want to become better informed by asking representatives of government agencies, planning boards, industry and financing establishments this question: How can we influence policy and better realize our projects? We want to think about how architecture is changing and how we, as women, want it to change.

We would like to bring in some women as special resources to be with us for the full session or for as brief a time as an afternoon, a few days, or whatever seems appropriate. If you would like to recommend yourself, or any other women, please let us know. We are particularly interested in finding a woman who would like to plan and handle our day care program.

We are attempting to lower the cost of attendance — but our fees reflect the fact that we have no grants or endowment. Women needing scholarships should find these themselves. Students might first look to their schools. Ideally each school should fund at least one student, perhaps calling WSPA '78 a conference and requiring a report after the session is over. Talk to your Dean (or employer) as soon as possible. Our preliminary planning suggests that the cost range might be for the two week session: \$375 to \$435, and for the weekend only: \$70 to \$100.

We want to encourage your continued and valued suggestions and comments on any of the above ideas. Please let us hear from you by the first of February. We are trying to keep paperwork and postage to a minimum, therefore we will not be sending out step by step reports as our planning proceeds, but we will send replies and applications for the next session to anyone who sends two self-addressed stamped envelopes.

the Women's School of Planning and Architecture

NEWS - REVIEWS

• *Rebecca Dreis*, a Masters student in the Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara, is conducting research on *Women's Transit Service* across the United States.

• *Louise Atkins*, a Masters student in Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Waterloo is conducting research on *Professional Women Planners in Canada*. She is examining the employment inequities between male and female Canadian planners. Anyone wishing to submit or receive additional information should contact: Louise Atkins, 27 Young St. W., Waterloo, Ontario.

• *Novia Carter*, Associate Professor, School of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, N2L 3G1, is currently planning a course "*Women's Interests in the Planning, Design and Environmental Fields*." She would appreciate receiving course outlines, references from others who have given or taken courses on this topic.

• *University of Manitoba, Festival of Life and Learning*, February 23-25, 1978. Panel "*The Built Environment: Women's Perceptions, Needs, Interventions*." Participants are: Carol Geller, Director, Human Rights Commission, Saskatchewan; Novia Carter, Professor, School of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Waterloo; Susanna Torré, Architect; Gerda R. Wekerle, Assistant Professor, York University.

• Paper Session — "*Spatial Inequality in American Urban Life: Consequences for Women*" organized by David Popenoe, Rutgers University and Gerda Wekerle, York University, *American Sociological Association*, September 5-9, 1978, San Francisco.

EDRA 8 — WORKSHOP ON WOMEN

At the Environmental Design Research Association Conference, April 18-20, 1977, University of Illinois, a workshop was given to discuss general issues concerning women and the environment. The following is a summary report which was contributed by the workshop co-ordinator, Anne-Marie Pollowy.

(1) Environmental design is conceived in terms of a single predominant, non-differentiated user group. Little or no consideration is given to women as a specific user group with differing requirements.

Recommendation: Environmental design should provide for the needs of all user groups. Women should not be considered as an undifferentiated group.

(2) Sex-role stereotypes are perpetuated in environmental research through the use of sexist terminology and concepts. For example, assertive and / or aggressive behaviors are still described as "male behavior", while reserved or non-outgoing behavior is considered to be "female behavior."

new network participants

Recommendation: Individuals and groups engaged in environmental research, design and writing should replace gender-role stereotyping in literature and research by non-judgemental performance standards.

(3) Given that women are relegated to positions of power over minimal resources, there is a lack of women in genuine policy-making positions.

Recommendation: Women are to be encouraged to consider all their contributions within a given situation even if it is made on a voluntary basis (not salaried). They should assert their right to policy-making positions based on the quality of the above contributions. To encourage the participation of women in policy-making, they should be encouraged to acquire the skills needed for such involvement through special training.

(4) Women, particularly students and younger graduates lack a variety of identifiable role models.

Recommendation: Women should be employed in a variety of positions in areas where a considerable number of female students occur. This applies to schools of architecture, planning, environmental design, urban studies, etc.

The workshop members believe that there is a continuing need for a communication and support network to allow the larger female membership to know what is happening and who is doing what. To this effect a questionnaire was circulated at the conference and included in the April edition of this newsletter. The responses will be compiled and distributed to all participants of the workshop. Additional copies will be available from Anne-Marie Pollowy. The workshop members have decided to schedule another meeting for EDRA 9. Specific topic suggestions are requested and should be sent to: Anne-Marie Pollowy, Faculte de l'Aménagement, Université de Montreal, Quebec H3C 3J7.

Women and Environments International Newsletter

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We are interested in hearing more from you, and in widening the Women and Environments Network. If you are interested in participating in our information-sharing network, please send us your name, address, and a note outlining the nature of your interest.

Helen C., Abell
Box 7
Stouffville, Ontario
L0H 1L0

Interest: Women in agriculture, Women and development

Rae Andre
521 Elizabeth No. 1
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104

Book on homemakers changing status (work in progress)

Eugenie L. Birch
Briarcliff College
Briarcliff Manor
New York, N.Y. 10510
U.S.A.

Interests: Women and housing, women and urbanization. Member: Institute for Research in History (Urban History Group): Columbia University seminar on the history of the city.

Shela Levrant de Bretteville
c/o The Woman's Building
1727 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles 90012

Interests: Sexual politics and the environments, symbolic values in the environment, creating and transmitting woman's culture through environment form.

Lydia Burton
8 Admiral Road
Toronto, Ontario M5R 2L5

Interests: Attitudes toward and alternations in the status and role of women in society a) as reflected in fiction b) as displayed in the urban environment c) women as developers of counter culture.

Deborah Allen Carey
6473 17th N.W.
Seattle, Washington, 98117
U.S.A.

Interests: Member, Sisters of A Human Environment; self-help housing; women in Architecture; International Congress of Women Architects & Planners in Seattle 1979.

Professor Galen Cranz
Department of Architecture
University of California,
Berkeley, California

Interests: Women and Parks; housing for the elderly.

Mrs. Ann Cropper
Chriswell House
Edenbridge
Kent, England TN8 5PR

Interests: Status of Women in the European Economic Communities. Women Living in hostile environments. Preparing an article on Northern Ireland and the "Peace Women".

Rebecca Dreis
Sociology Dept.
U. C. Santa Barbara
Goleta, Calif. 9307
U.S.A.

Interests: Women and transportation esp. supplemental transportation for women; women and the natural environment.

Winnie Farnsworth
55 Uxbridge Crescent
Hazeldean, Ontario
K2L 1P6

Office: Public Service Commission
4C East
Sir Charles Tupper
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0M2

Professor Sylvia, F. Fava
78-12 35th Avenue
Jackson Heights
New York, N.Y. 11372
U.S.A.

Interests: Women and urban sociology; megalopolis and women's opportunities; women in suburbia; sex differences in urban and suburban activity patterns. Urban and suburban ecological patterns and their implications for the status of women.

- Ms. Fran Goldberg
1117-35 Cedarcroft Blvd.
Willowdale, Ontario
M2R 2Z4
- Peter K. Gunderson
Geography and Environmental Sci.
4200 Farm Hill Blvd.
Canada College
Redwood City, Calif. 95061
- Sandra Margaret Hawkins
585 O'Connor Street No. 13
Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5R2
- Dolores Hayden
8318 Ridpath Dr.
Los Angeles Calif. 90046
- Marjorie Hoog
Urban Deadline Architects
2248 Broadway
New York, N.Y. 10024
- Anne Ironside
6296 Churchill
Vancouver, B.C. V6P 5B3
- Risa Palm
Department of Geography
University of California
Berkeley, California
- Barbara H. Rosenthal
American Society of Planning
Officials
1313 E. 60th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60637
U.S.A.
- Myra Schiff
Dept. of Urban and Regional
Planning
University of Toronto
230 College Street
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A1
- Marilyn Silberfein
Dept. of Geography
Temple University
Philadelphia, Pa. 19122
- Lois Steinberg
424 Melrose Street
Chicago, Illinois 60657
U.S.A.
- Jane Poroy Takahashi
1600 Pacific Highway
San Diego, Calif. 92101
- Ann Tyler Fathy
828 Silvergate Ave.
San Diego, Calif. 92101
U.S.A.
- Jane K. Webb
Assistant Professor
Urban Studies
Wheaton College
Norton, Mass. 02766
U.S.A.
- Interests: Crime Prevention and Environmental Design; victimization of women and families. Wants newsletter to share information job opportunities.
- Interests: Especially interested in women in time-space constraints framework. Particularly interested in suburban women and the built environment.
- User participation and control in the process of Housing. Women in social transition and housing as facilitator of that process.
- Interests: Women and housing, especially forms of collective housing in urban and suburban areas which are designed with the need of the working women in mind.
- Interests: Current women's architecture the "Kitchen-garden" movement of the 1890's in the New York and Boston areas and particularly its relationship to the feminist cause.
- Centre for continuing Education
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, B.C. V6R 1W5
- Interests: Media and Public Education on Environmental Issues.
- Interests: Planned environments, housing and other aspects of the physical environment. Also interested in socialization of women, sex roles, societal patterns, and the process of change. Would be very interested in seeing any literature or bibliographic you may have, and a description of what the network is doing and had done.
- Interests: Neighborhood Planning for women, especially as to facilitate their return to work.
- Interests: Constraints on female mobility in traditional rural societies
- Interests: Women's role in decision making re local community services (urban, suburban) particularly education. Also interested in medical and other community based services.
- Interests: Planning for economically and socially balanced communities. Citizen participation in planning process.
- Office: County of San Diego
Integrated Planning Office
County Administrative Center
1600 Pacific Highway
Sand Diego, Calif. 92101
- Interests: Increasing the impact of women: identifying and planning for women's needs.
- Interests: Research on women in urban historical research or the absence of, women involved in neighborhood protests; the impact of Environmental or community decisions on the neighbourhood networks either by external or internal forces, particularly on these corporate, political decisions have a negative affect on the social and physical environment.
- Professor Janet Abu-Lughod
Department of Sociology
Northwestern University
Evanston, Ill. 60201
- Louise Atkins
27 Young Street, West
Waterloo, Ontario
- Professor Mark Baldassare
Dept. of Sociology
University of California
Los Angeles 90024
- Mildred Berman
Dept. of Geography
Salem State College
Salem, Mass. 01970
- Dr. Jessie Bernard
Apt. 110
4200 Cathedral Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20016
- Judith Bernstein
Apt. 7, 459 Landfair Ave.
Los Angeles, Calif. 90024
- Grace Black Adar
Women's Advisor
Personnel Service Branch
Ministry of The Environment
135 St. Clair Ave.
Toronto, M4V 1P5
- Susan Blumenthal
Graduate Student
City Planning
Cornell University
Box 485
Etna, New York 13062
- Professor Elise Boulding
890 Willowbrook Road
Boulder, Colorado 80309
- Norman Bryant
215 Gladstone Ave.
Apt. No. 4
Ottawa, Ontario
- Pat Burnett
the University of Oklahoma
455 West Lindsey, Room 8004
Norman, Oklahoma
- Carol A. Carlson
3203 Sepulveda Blvd.
Apartment 3
Los Angeles, Calif. 90034
- Ms. Barbara Carroll
CMHC Ontario Regional Office
145 King St., West
Suite 1108
Toronto, Ontario
- Kwok B. Chan
Dept. of Sociology
5th Floor Ross Bldg.
York University
Downsview, Ontario
- Sharon Davidoff
C%O K.C.M.
1917 1st Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98101
- Nellien C. de Ruiter, c.i.
Chopinlaan 71
Voorschoten, Netherlands
- Professor John Edwards
Dept. of Sociology
Virginia Polytechnic Institute
Blacksburg, Va. 24061
- Jolinda Fernhout
Freeman Hall
Wellesley College
Wellesley, Mass. 02181
- Kris Furlough
Human Rights Programme
Secretary of State Dept.
66 Slater Street
Ottawa, Ontario
- Ms. Eva Gamarnikow
215 Stapleton Hall Road
London N4, England
- Dr. Rosalie G. Genovese
17 Selborne Chase
Fairport, N.Y. 14450
- Joan Goldstein
E-14 Lakeview Terrace
Princeton, N.J. 08540
- Gilda Stern Good
Planning Research and Services
National Capital Commission
48 Rideau
Ottawa-Hull, Canada
- Marie Hartman
Dept. of Geography
Portland State University
P.O. Box 751
Portland, Oregon 97207
- Blanche Hersh, Coordinator
Women's Studies Program
Northeastern Illinois University
5500 N. St. Louis Ave.
Chicago, Illinois 60625
- Charmaine Hitchcox
50 21st Ave.
San Francisco, Calif. 94121
- Professor Carolyn Hock
Department of Geography
Johns Hopkins University
Baltimore, Maryland
- Rosaria Hodgdan
Dept. of Architecture
Eugene, Oregon 97403
- Ron Kellestine
1500-55 Caldwell Ave.
Ottawa, Ontario
- Joan M. McHardy
33 Isabella, Apt. 2808
Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2P7
- Bonnie McKenzie
53 Chelsea Ave.
Toronto, Ontario M6P 1B9
- Mary F. Meloshe
10 Driveway No. 1605
Ottawa, Ontario
- Grace Rodwell Muncaster
84 Forest Hill Road
Toronto, Ontario M4V 2L5
- Barbara Petrocci
308 Founders College
York University

Professor David Popenoe
92 Moore Street
Princeton, N.J. 08540

Ceta Ramkhalawansingh
62 Beverley Street
Toronto, Ontario

Dr. S. Rothschild
Wayne State University
College of Liberal Arts
Department of Sociology
Detroit, Michigan 48202

Dr. Marion Shepherd
Office of the Advisor on Status of Women
N917 Ross Building
York University
Downsview, Ontario
Professor Arthur Shostack
Department of Sociology
Temple University
Philadelphia, Pa.

Alice Scourby, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
103 Lee Roads
Garden City, N.Y. 11530

Joan Forrester Spracue
22 Anthony Street
Newport, R.I. 02840

Professor Clare Stapleton
Department of Geography
University of Wisconsin
Madison, Wisconsin

Sharon E. Sutton, R.A.
Centre for the Study of Women
Graduate School
City University of N.Y.
33 West 42nd Street
N.Y., N.Y. 10036

Jane Syngé
Associate Professor
Department of Sociology
McMaster University
1280 Main Street West
Hamilton, Ontario L8S 4M4

Susana Torr e
39 W. 59th Street
New York, N.Y. 10019

Helen Notzl
The Women's Cultural Centre
Harbourfront
Toronto, Ontario

Karla Werner
Mosstena backen 3
12432 Bandhagen, Stockholm
Sweden

Mrs. G. Wiltshire
President, Provincial Council of Women
of Ontario
492 Cooper Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1R 5H9

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4700 Keele Street
Downsview, Ontario M3J 2R2