

# **HAWKESBURY AREA WOMEN'S AND KIDS SERVICES COLLECTIVE INC.**

## **BROAD GUIDING PHILOSOPHY**

Feminist philosophy aims at restoring equal power, status and opportunity to women within society.

Our society is based on patriarchal standards and values, where power and opportunity are in the hands of men, usually white men. This has affected women's lives in every way - in the home, within the family, in employment, legally, financially, spiritually, in relationship to their health (physically, emotionally and psychologically), socially and intellectually. In short, the patriarchal way of being - has domination over society from small issues to large.

Women have been conditioned by these values and have often internalized them - that is, we have learned many values and accepted many philosophies that are not to our benefit. These philosophies often do not serve the needs of women and children.

In general, the systems under which we live are designed to exclude women or discriminate against us as a group.

This contrasts with what we are taught is the foundation of our society - one of the strongest messages we hear about Western democracy is that it ensures equality for all people. Yet what we experience as women, and what minority groups also experience, is that we are definitely not treated as equal.

Overall, we receive lower status, as is evident for example in unequal income and women's extremely low representation in all decision-making structures.

The range of options or life choices open to women are limited. The major fairy-tale image most young women receive is that they will finish school, work a few years, marry, have children and live happily ever after.

For most women this is simply not the case. Many continue to work, or need to recommence work, in order to supplement an income, or because they are single parents. Other women never marry or have children and are responsible for their own support.

Women often find they have limited options because of the subjects they have learned at school. Often women are discouraged from pursuing particular subjects and careers and find themselves caught in jobs which are boring, have limited promotional opportunities, are being phased out due to technological changes, or are poorly paid with unsuitable work conditions. This is further complicated by inadequate opportunities.

In order to develop a wider range of choices, it is vital for us to understand how our lives have been conditioned and why, and to develop skills to deal with and change our situations.

It would seem from historical evidence that in the past, a woman was considered to be the possession of her husband, while a child had no separate rights from her parents. Most of this has

been reflected within our legal system and has only been challenged and changes made within our recent past. These attitudes and beliefs are still held by many sections of society today.

In traditional marriage ceremonies the woman vowed obedience to her husband that is based on the biblical claim that the male should dominate the female. This has been further upheld legally where a husband has had the right to 'discipline' his wife if necessary. The law turned a blind eye to the fact that this 'disciplining' was often being carried out violently and grossly disproportionately to the woman's actions. Only since active lobbying by different women as individuals and groups has the legal system been forced to begin evaluating and changing its attitude.

In trying to establish a more equitable culture (based on values and philosophies which are not oppressive to women and children) and extract ourselves from a dominant male culture, feminists have set up various services as a practical solution to some of these issues. In this way we can provide alternative solutions to victims of the system, as well as explore how women could operate services together.

The HAWKS Collective enacts this philosophy through the provision of all of its services to women and children in the Hawkesbury.

The HAWKS Collective will work to ensure that all aspects of our services, management practices and community activities will challenge discrimination in all of its forms ie. promote anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-ageist and anti-homophobic practice.