

VWHC interview with Cathy Stewart 23/7/74

N: Can you give me a short history of the collective?

C: Well, I wasn't involved at the beginning, I've only been involved for the last year. My understanding of what happened was that there were some women who were involved in The Women's Place, realizing that they didn't know very much about their own bodies, became interested in finding out more about their own bodies. After they had found out quite a bit, and done their own study, and started to get into that, sometime after that they started getting doctors involved, and started working toward the idea of a self-help clinic. That is sort of where it originally started, and out of that original experience, emerged feelings of dissatisfaction with the present health care system, and those kinds of things. Then they amalgamated with the Broadway abortion counselling service, and they became situated on east 18th.

N: What are the major changes you've seen in the Collective since you've been involved?

C: I think the main changes I've seen have been in terms of consciousness. There really has been an increase of political consciousness, in particular, and that the process has been very much ongoing from day to day. For example, moving to the Seymour clinic, and now that we're moving out of there, both of those things are very ~~informative~~ instrumental in raising people's consciousness, and making ^{us} them think about the political implications of what we're doing. I was really frustrated when I first came, I felt really frustrated, because I felt like it was a very political thing, but people didn't seem to be aware of that. They didn't seem to be tuned in to how much more political it had to be, and how it couldn't remain separate, like, what are the implications of maintaining an alternative service, without increasing it to the point that it's a threat to the status quo, or doing other things to threaten the status quo. And so, now that we've threatened the status quo, and it's quite evident that we are a threat to the status quo, seeing as we are being kicked out of Seymour, that's really exciting, and that really has made people aware. I think people are more aware of the whole extent of what a Collective means, and beginning to understand what socialism means. One of the things that's been at a personal level, a change from an emphasis on task to personal interaction, and understanding people's feelings as they go through this whole process.

N: What other changes have you perceived?

2 VWHC interview with Cathy Stewart 23/7/74

C: well, there's been structural changes, like the co-ordinating committee is a change, and certainly the salaries . . . around some structural and attitudinal change and value change, and certainly brought up different things, they started questioning a lot more what they were doing in terms of task, and being a lot more aware of what other people were doing, that has increased people questioning what we are doing. You know, you're not as inclined to question what volunteers are doing, you're sort of grateful that all these people are donating their time. Once people are getting paid, The evaluation process, which for a while was unspoken, has become much more explicit.

N: That's coming out in the salary meeting and so on. The thing of contracts which has come up is very interesting.

C: I found that very frightening at first, the whole salary thing, is a thing, it would bring out the worst in some people, but I think that those are things that have to be worked out, on a long term basis, and in terms of a larger social change, especially when they're not looking at salaries and money in the same way in other parts of society, it really is quite a revolutionary thing.

N: Seems that if it is going to maintain itself, if people are going to have the time to do it, there has to be some sort of monetary input. It's been interesting to see how ambivalent people are about that, and it has to do with the problem of volunteers versus paid people. What kinds of changes would you like to see in the future?

C: Not being as involved in the Collective right now, it's hard for me to project into the future. I would like to see increased political consciousness, for sure. I would like to see it become increasingly political, and that's happening. I'm not too sure where I want the collective to go, like I'm not sure whether I want it to become more collective or less collective. I'm not too sure whether I want people to branch out more into the community, or whether they should really try to extend what the Collective means, and to become more collective, collective in a wider sense of their life style, and in their life commitment. I think that's exciting also a little scary, also, in terms of the outer society . . . I've said this in the thing I wrote up in the newsletter, that if you continue to try to make