



MEETINGS

In line with our principle of decentralised decision-making, it is essential to hold regular meetings with all involved in the W.A.O.

This takes shape mainly via support group meetings attended by workers, volunteers and residents alike. In support group meetings, we discuss all vital issues such as household problems, duty roster, fund-raising as well as general issues relating to women in society. Such general meetings form valuable avenues in which problems and issues at the Centre can be collectively ironed out. During the early months of operation, the workers had particularly found such decentralised meetings essential in handling the uncertainties and the seemingly insurmountable, which often confront any pioneering effort, such as the W.A.O.

At the beginning, meetings were held once every fortnight. Since April 1983, these meetings have been held monthly (i.e. on the last Monday of every month).

In all meetings, we are guided by the important philosophy of "decentralisation of knowledge" which can be stated as:

'All basic knowledge relevant to assisting women in need should be known to all members of the support group. The responsibility of workers who have specialised knowledge in the fields of psychology, law, social work, etc. is to spread this knowledge to all support group members rather than to retain a special status position as 'expert' in this area. This will encourage self-reliance and confidence in both the workers and the women.

activities of the wao

IN THE PAST 16 MONTHS, WAO HAS GIVEN REFUGE TO:

57 WOMEN & 75 CHILDREN,

AND RECEIVED PHONE CALLS FROM OVER:

**200 WOMEN FROM THE WHOLE
OF MALAYSIA & SINGAPORE.**

W.A.O. provides services to both residents and non-residents alike. Residence at the Centre is temporary until the crisis is resolved. But there is no stated maximum length of stay. Stay at the Centre and support services are offered free of charge. Generally, a woman who comes to the Centre can expect the following:

SUPPORT

A battered woman typically comes from a situation where her confidence and her self-esteem has been repeatedly undermined. Her story of mistreatment and abuse is often disbelieved or played down. At the W.A.C. (Women's Aid Centre), the first step is to trust the woman. Her view and understanding of her problem is accepted. Women are not required to go through an interview to determine whether they actually require our services. We feel that such an interview would be another form of external control over their lives, and go against our principle of self-help. Our approach aims at encouraging women to assess their own situation, and to gain self-confidence to take charge of their own lives.

INFORMATION

A woman asking for help must be informed of all her rights and options. This is obviously vital for making realistic decisions about her future. Workers/volunteers discuss with women their legal and financial problems. According to our records, most of all callers to the W.A.C. were unaware of their legal rights, of these more than half called specifically for legal information. (Callers include women who later came to stay.) The W.A.O. has a list of lawyers and agencies who will be able to help women take action on their future.

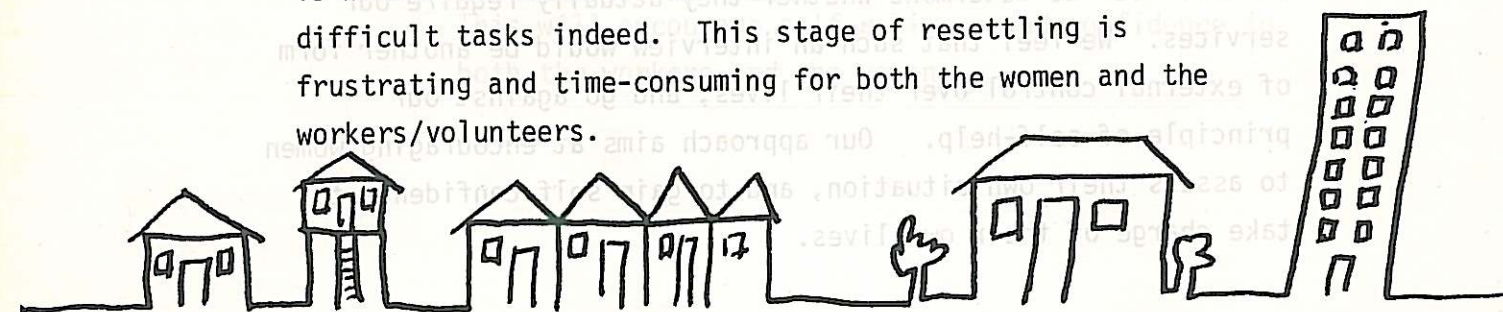
In addition, W.A.O. advises battered women to make police reports and keep records of injuries, all of which are required for subsequent legal action if and when these are taken.

ADVOCACY

Women are often intimidated by actions involving the law and the authorities. Visits to the police, the lawyers and the hospitals are a real ordeal and require both self-confidence and courage. That is why a W.A.O. worker accompanies the woman making such a visit, helping her to fill in the forms, translating for her and helping her with making a statement. The emotional support and assistance will help the woman to demystify the law and overcome any fears of the authorities' bureaucratic methods, to get the help and services she needs.

EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING

Finding suitable employment, and getting housing that is within the means of the women leaving the Centre, are difficult tasks indeed. This stage of resettling is frustrating and time-consuming for both the women and the workers/volunteers.



In 1982-1983, 17.5% of those who left the W.A.C. have found employment, mostly as domestic servants. But this type of work poses problems for the children as the job usually requires living in. Only 50% out of the total number of women who found work were reportedly happy with their jobs.

Housing is even more of a problem. Rents are high and beyond the means of the women. Adequate accommodation was only found for 10 of the 37 women who needed it. Through the newspapers and informal contact, W.A.C. attempts to find housing for the women. Often a whole volunteer team is mobilised to look for a house for a single ex-resident and her children. Volunteers help out with transport and with cleaning out the place when the ex-resident has successfully found a suitable house.

W.A.O. also helps women moving out with small loans to tide them over until the first salary is received. 3 women leaving for an independent home have received this aid. In addition, attempts are made to provide her with as much furniture and kitchen utensils as we can get hold of.

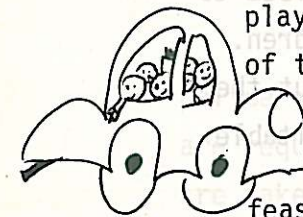
CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

On the average, there are up to 16 children at the Centre at any one time. Some of the children who are from outside the KL-PJ area continue schooling only after transfers have been made. Others are forced to stay away from schools to avoid harassment by their fathers. The children often tend to feel neglected since all initial efforts are concentrated on the more immediate needs of the mother.



Lessons and tuition for the children are obviously very necessary. Some volunteers are able to do this for the children. But sadly, because of the shortage of labour and time, schooling within the Centre cannot be organised on a regular basis. We certainly need to attend to this problem urgently.

At the Centre now there is a supply of toys - thanks to MANZA which gave W.A.O. all the equipment from their play centre. But again, the children need supervision under a play leader. We also have, on order, a climbing frame, out of the grant from the High Commission of Canada.



We also try to take the children out as often as is feasible. Trips to the nearby parks are organised by some of our volunteers, with treats of ice-cream and hamburgers. A PJ Service Club has helped on two occasions by taking the kids out for lunch and games. Accompanied by some residents and a volunteer, the children went for an exciting expedition to the zoo. In all these cases, providing motor transport proved to be the main problem.

In the coming year, we plan to form a sub-group of volunteers to take charge of children's activities. A special children's sub-group will better enable W.A.C. to care for the well-being of the children.

INFORMING THE PUBLIC

The W.A.O. considers educating the public about the seriousness of violence to women as one of its most important functions.

In the first place, it is obviously essential to bring to the notice not only of individuals but also other social services and organisations, the fact of the prevalence of domestic violence in Malaysia. We earnestly hope that better understanding and greater awareness of the problems faced by



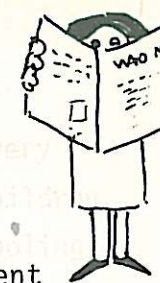
women will impel these organisations to provide more positive support and help to women. In any case, bringing the issue of violence within the family into the open will dispel some of the guilt and shame experienced by women. Battered women, in coming forward to seek help and advice, have made a giant step towards changing their situation. We believe it is the responsibility of all who care to render assistance and support to battered women, and to collectively minimise, if not eliminate, domestic violence in our society.

At the same time, we wish to publicise the services of the W.A.O., if only to make it easier for women who need help to contact us.

The W.A.O. has produced a number of pamphlets on the services provided by the Centre. These are distributed among the support group and women using the Centre. It is apparent that we need to produce more pamphlets on other specific problems, to be made available to clinics, hospitals and other welfare agencies.

A booklet on the rights of battered women is being planned. It deals with emergency advice and legal issues relating to child custody, marital reconciliation and divorce proceedings. We are awaiting confirmation of the recently proposed law, so that we can include this latest information in the booklet.

Another important way of making the public aware of the W.A.O. is to give talks to various social organisations. Both volunteers and the two workers have been active in this. In the last year, we have been invited to speak before such diverse groups as the University Women's Association, University of Malaya Social Service Club, MTUC Women's Section, Methodist Women's Association, East Meets West Club, etc.



W.A.O. NEWS

As the W.A.O. grew, the telephone became an inefficient system for organising events and keeping everyone informed. In April this year, an internal newsletter was started. The newsletter keeps members informed of all W.A.O. activities as well as any other activities which may be of interest to the members. The second aim of the newsletter is to print articles and stories relating to the issue of women in general. These were either taken from other publications, or less often, contributed by members. The monthly newsletter is produced by one of the two workers, although support group members have done some issues.

FUND-RAISING



The bulk of the funds to the W.A.O. have come from direct donations or grants, as well as money raised by other organisations through their activities.

However, we are also actively involved in our own fund-raising projects. These were the much publicised jumble sales, one in June and another in November 1983. Old clothes and other items were collected. The Malay Mail, the Star, the New Straits Times, not to mention the Nanyang Siang Pao, kindly featured articles to announce the event. On both occasions, the support group and residents spent days sorting out the items an arduous task that demanded patience and hard work. The two jumble sales were held in Petaling Gardens Girls' School in Petaling Jaya and at the Girl Guides Hall in Brickfields respectively.

We collected about \$10,000 from the events. Perhaps more than that, the jumble sales created a community gotong-royong spirit, involving volunteers and residents in common endeavour.