

The Story of Rooms of our Own

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How it all started



Save the
Lambeth
Women's
Project!



Save the
Jagonari
Centre!



Save the
Feminist
Library



Save the
Women's
Library

So many Women's Projects needing saving due to loss of funding, asset sales ...
Huge campaigns were mounted but we lost nearly all of them

Our Solution

We got sick of trying to save things And mostly failing 😞 Especially after we lost the Women's Library in Whitechapel. A group of us founded Rooms of our Own



Wonderful cartoon created for the Save TWL campaign by Jacky Fleming. LSE takes the contents of the Women's Library to Holborn.

We came up with a new model. We would no longer rely on government, local authorities, universities, schools, NHS to provide spaces for us which could be taken away at any time. We would build and own and manage buildings that we OWNED IN PERPETUITY.

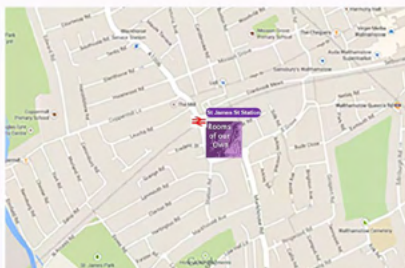
We called a conference with Queen Mary University of London of a whole range of women and women's organisations to find out what was needed. DID we still need a physical building in the days of the internet? SHOULD the building be women-only throughout, or allow men and boys in to some areas on some occasions? What kinds of activities did women want to take place? What kind of a building did they imagine? How should the building be run? We gathered all the ideas from the conference and moved to the next stage.

We worked with developers, quantity surveyors, architects, planners and regeneration experts to create a model we thought would work. We would find a site (at the time the Localism Act was encouraging public bodies to offer first refusal to community organisations when disposing of assets) and construct housing to cross-subsidise the build of the Women's Centre. The figures showed that we should get a turnkey development that would be ours in perpetuity.

The name of our organisation comes from the essay "A Room of One's Own" by Virginia Woolf, in which the author argues that a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to be a successful author. We have borrowed this concept, and extended it to assert that the women's movement needs spaces of its own in order to grow and succeed.



We found a site!



We found an ideal site in Walthamstow. 47 housing units would give us a “free” centre that would be ours in perpetuity.

London Borough of Waltham Forest had long been seeking a suitable community use for this disused car park. It was right next to a station, one of the key requirements identified in our research. LBWF offered us the site at less than the market value to be paid off on completion of the project.

We obtained a £165,000 grant from the GLA Community Right to Build programme. We engaged Anne Thorne Architects. We found a female developer, Thornsett. We agreed Heads of Terms with LBWF property Department. We had over 40 organisations signed up to take space in the building, including a couple of valuable anchor tenants.



Then a new portfolio holder came into post who reneged on the agreement.....



**WFWN International Women's Day 2014
when all was looking positive for Rooms of our Own in Walthamstow**



We had an exhibition of works by women artists on the hoardings surrounding our site as part of the E17 Art Trail.



We were all astonished and devastated. How could LBWF renege on the agreement when we had SO much support? No reason was ever given. (The site remained empty for several years, and was then given to CRATE.)

We did not give up.

- We petitioned, lobbied, had meetings, involved the GLA.
- We set up a neighbourhood forum
- We liaised with developers who had been given permission to build nearby to see if we could use Section 106 route.
- We organised a major event, A Taste of Rooms of our Own, to demonstrate what the Centre would bring to the borough.

Programme for A Taste of Rooms of our Own

2.30	Keynote speech by London Assembly Member Jennette Arnold
2.50	Benefits of a Women's Centre for LBWF. Launch of report by Liz Mackie of Shared Enterprise
3.00	Proposals for the Centre. Presentation by our architects, Anne Thorne Architects LLP
3.30	Violence against Women and Girls. Cllr Karen Bellamy, LBWF lead on VAWG
3.55	Break
4.15	Women in Business. Karen Flint from NDP and Debra Oakaby from CoachMeSmart
4.35	Benefits of Creches for Women. Anne Nkune from Bloomsbury Babies
5.00	Co-operative Housing for Older Women. Angela Ratcliffe from OWCH

WORKSHOPS

3.00	Objectification of Women in the Media Betiel Baraki from OBJECT
4.00	Young Feminist Activism Nadia Baksh from Waltham Forest Women's Network
5.00	Changing Roles of Women Making a community quilt with Significant Seams

7.0	Natural Voices Choir
7.30	Boirennach Theatre Group
8.00	Ros Kane
8.30	She17

Photographer Stephanie Waterman
Creche by Grace Chambers of Loriamahgrace Childcare Agency
Feminist Art Exhibition curated by Neesha Badhan

The Roller Coaster of the Next Few Years

Once it became clear that the new portfolio holder would not yield to any representations, we started to look elsewhere. We continued to focus on finding a public body that was willing to allocate no longer needed assets or a space within a regeneration scheme. Nearly all public bodies were originally very enthusiastic about the idea, but no sites materialised.

We are now thinking we need to raise the money ourselves first and then identify a site and buy it!

Introductions to key Haringey people by Michael Polledri of Lea Valley Estates. Much regeneration planned. Several councillors very enthusiastic. Head of VAWG keen to locate with us. Possible sites identified. THEN Haringey decide to give all their assets to LendLease.

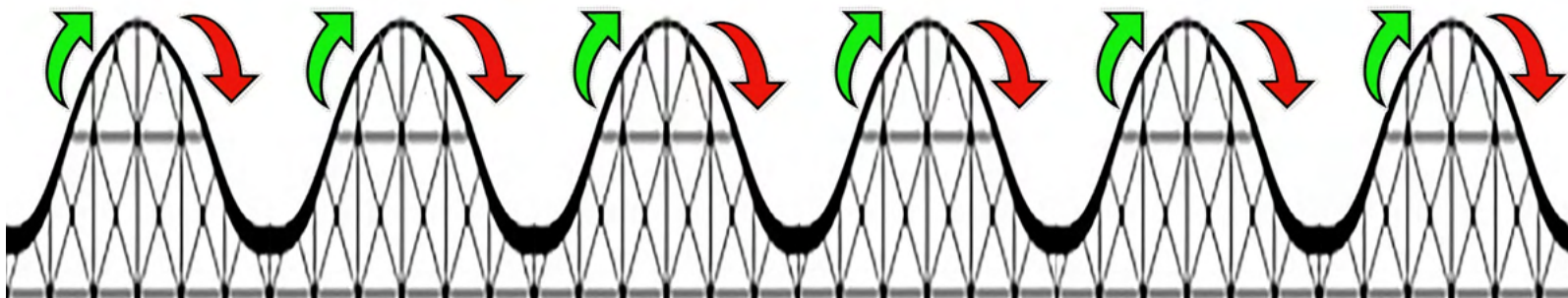
Had some very productive meetings with TfL. Head of their property division says they have many surplus sites near stations, sure they can identify something. Wait and wait. Chase a lot. Eventually TfL decide to hand all their sites to GLA.

Met with various GLA people. Jennette Arnold AM a patron at the time. Lots of meetings. Participated in the Examination in Public of the London Plan.. Decision that Small Sites programme is only for housing and not for other community led projects.

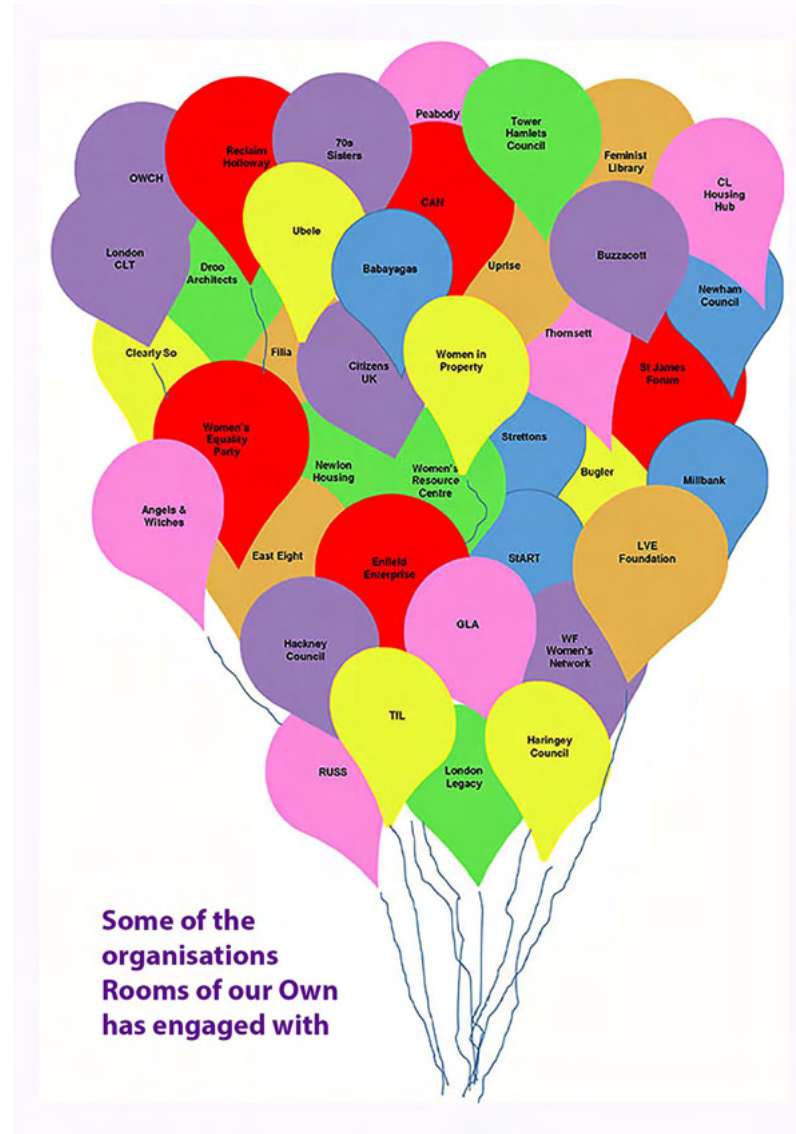
Met few times with John Biggs, Mayor of Tower Hamlets, who had been very supportive of Save the Women's Library campaign. We discussed with London CLT possibility of buying Southern Grove together. LBTH decide they need that site for themselves. Nothing else available.

Went to a lot of meetings in relation to the Holloway Prison Site. Tried to explain how we could use Rooms of our Own's existing model to secure a building that the group would own in perpetuity. However it was decided to work only with women who had been in the prison or worked there to develop the project..

We were encouraged to approach Barking & Dagenham. We partnered with NIA. BeFirst were enthusiastic as were various councillors, local organisations and MPs. However councillor in charge eventually said this was not a model they wanted in the borough.



The Story of Rooms of our Own



ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! No more roller coasters! Let's do this OURSELVES

Rooms of our Own has registered a BenCom (Community Benefit Society) Rooms London which is allowed to issue COMMUNITY SHARES. You can find out more information here:-

<https://www.uk.coop/start-new-co-op/support/community-shares/about>



A Community Share means you will be a part-owner of the Women's Centre and shareholders manage it collectively in perpetuity.



Instead of constantly trying to persuade public bodies to allocate a site for us to purchase, and thereby give us time to organise the funding

LET'S DO THIS OURSELVES!

We need to find 10,000 women, across the UK, or even internationally, to buy a £100 community share. Who thinks that might be possible? How many women are here at FILIA who might be able to afford that?? £1mn would allow us to leverage sufficient funds from other sources to buy a site. The model then kicks in and the project is self-funding from then on. If it doesn't work out as we hope then all monies would of course be returned and there will be legal documentation to ensure that happens.



We believe that even in these days of the internet, social media, zoom meetings there is something rather wonderful and different about women being together in a physical space. We believe that if we can create one Rooms of our Own and bring together women working on all aspects of campaigning, supporting, debating, creating, this will provide a model for many more Centres to follow.

**We need a team of women with the
passion and time to deliver our**

COMMUNITY SHARE OFFER

If you have expertise in any of the following areas or can
source others who do, please use the QR code or email us
at roomso4own@gmail.com to volunteer.

Legal • Fundraising • PR • Marketing • Graphic design
Sales • Customer Relations systems • Social media
Finance • Community Engagement • Press • Crowdfunding

THANK YOU!





An example of Alexandra's recent work

**We are absolutely
delighted that
Alexandra Gallagher**

<https://www.alexandragallagherart.com>
**has agreed to create a
bespoke artwork for us.**

**Every woman buying a
share will have her name
on a "tile" in the "mosaic".**

**This will be a virtual
mosaic on our website to
begin with, but eventually
will be hung in the
reception area of
Rooms of our Own
Women's Centre**