

# Use of Centre Facilities Group Rooms or Sessional Space Policy

**Revised 2008**

## **PHILOSOPHY**

Illawarra Women's Health Centre considers that it is important to provide space for women to meet. This is in line with the service's objectives, for example:

- providing a non-profit comprehensive feminist health care service
- promoting primary health care
- supporting self-determination for women
- encouraging community development.

In addition, the building is a 'public' one, and as such should be used to the fullest extent, including after hours, providing the activities are not inconsistent with the philosophy and objectives of the service (*see attached Appendix 3*).

## **POLICY**

### **Eligibility**

The centre is for women only. Our funding is to provide services 'for women by women'. Only women will be eligible to use the centre and its facilities.

Group or other space may be made available to community groups or agencies when available, for activities consistent with the philosophy and objectives of the centre.

**Vilification of any ethnic or cultural groups or sub-groups will not be tolerated. Any groups or individuals who express sentiments which are recognised as vilification will not be welcome in the centre, and will be asked to leave.** Women may have their own opinions in this regard of course, but public expression of personal opinion which amounts to vilification will not be tolerated. This centre is considered public space for this purpose.

By vilification, we mean any act or action that could encourage hatred, serious contempt, or severe ridicule of a particular group, eg a particular ethnic group, lesbians, intellectually disabled women, etc.

**Access & Equity** - how we promote use of the premises in a fair way.

One of the objectives of the centre, and our philosophy, is to make it as easy as possible for groups of women and individual women in our community to come into the centre, and to use its services and facilities. We will always try to assist community groups to get the days/sessions they would like in the centre.

### **Priority**

Priority for space will first be given to staff of the centre for groups, courses and programs that they are facilitating.

Community groups will be welcome wherever they can be fitted in, ie on the days and times that they require where possible, or as otherwise negotiated. We will try to be as helpful as possible in this regard, but sometimes there will be a big demand on rooms, and a system of prioritising will need to be undertaken.

- The highest priority will be staff-facilitated programs and/or groups.

**Other considerations** for accepting some groups over others will include:

- groups which come under the centre's current *service plan priorities* (ie our target groups for the year)
- groups which fit in with the objects of the constitution
- groups which have a *social action* function for the benefit of women as a whole will be a priority, as a main function of this centre is the feminist work of striving to change the status of women in society, and to continue to fight for women's rights.

Groups which have had use of the rooms for a long time already, may need to choose another day or another venue (we would help with this process).

### **Agreements**

Groups, other agencies or private practitioners wishing to use the centre rooms for on-going meetings, sessions, workshops, especially for after hours use, will be asked to provide information about the group for the centre's records, and will be required to sign an agreement about the use of the premises, eg regarding security, cleanliness etc. (*see attached Appendix 1 application form, and Appendix 2 List of Requirements*).

One-off meetings or workshops will not need a written agreement.

### **Duration of Agreements**

Agreements will often specify the period, ie a 6 week workshop or group for one school term, or something similar.

If the situation is that of an on-going group, such as a social group or support group, the agreement will need to be made for a limited agreed period such as 6 months, or a school term, and then re-negotiated. The centre needs to keep some flexibility and control over space in order to maintain a fair system, and have space for our own centre-based activities and programs.

### **Men in the centre** (*See also separate Women's Safe Space Policy*)

The centre is run by women for women. We work hard to make it a welcoming and safe space for women, and as such it is not a space for men, and men are encouraged to respect this situation. Men wanting to contact women in groups or workshops need to enquire at reception, and a staff member will go into the group with a message. Men are not allowed to walk into the group rooms at any time. There are occasional exceptions which are defined in the Women's Safe Space Policy, eg tradesmen, or men who are employees of other agencies coming to meetings here or, occasionally, male trainers.

### **Costs**

Private practitioners using the centre rooms will be charged a fee for rent, *or* some 'in kind' provision may be made, such as providing places for centre clients in the activity.

### **Community Groups**

Depending on the resources of the group, the centre may request a donation towards centre running costs. This is purely because we run on a tight budget, and welcome any donations that can come our way. However, we will not let this stand in the way of access to the centre.

### **Hours of use**

The centre is closed each day from 1.00pm - 2.00pm. Morning groups need to finish by about 12.30pm, to enable the centre to be closed on time at 1.00pm. Afternoon groups generally cannot start before 2.00pm.

### **Storage**

The centre does not have very much storage space, and therefore will not undertake to provide space for storage of group equipment etc.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Group spokeswomen/contact person**

Each group must nominate a woman who can give her contact details, ie address and phone number. If these details change, or the contact person changes, the centre must be informed of the changes.

If the activity is an after-hours one, this woman will also be responsible for the security of the centre, and this includes ensuring that the building is closed up properly (all windows, all doors), the alarm system is activated correctly, and all group property is dealt with properly on each occasion.

### **The Group as a whole**

All group members must be aware of this policy, and share the responsibility for keeping the group to the agreement, eg cleaning up after use of the rooms, supervising children, not supporting vilification whilst here in the centre, and so on.

### **Reception staff**

Reception workers will take bookings for one-off room-bookings, ie for one workshop or one meeting.

Women wishing to conduct a program, course, group or on-going booking need to complete an ***application form***, which is available from reception staff.

### **Centre Staff**

Centre staff all support this policy of welcoming community groups into the centre. If there is a great demand on rooms, (as may happen at the beginning of the year or at the end of winter when the warmer weather starts again), the centre staff will discuss the situation at a staff meeting, and will prioritise as described previously in this policy.

Please note also that Centre staff have workplans and run to a tight work program. There will always be someone who is able to assist with your enquiries, but particular staff members are not available on the spot. They generally need to stick with their planned activities for the day.

If you would like to talk with a particular staff member, an appointment will sometimes be necessary. You may leave a message at Reception, and the staff member will contact you, if they can, while you're still in the centre, or else by phone within 48 hours.

### **Manager**

It is the responsibility of the Manager to monitor the group-room policy. The Manager will see all applications for room bookings, and will negotiate with group contact women, and make mutually agreeable arrangements where possible. As stated above, if demand is high, the applications will go to a staff meeting for discussion about priorities.

For after-hours groups, the Manager will arrange a code number for access and closing up, will explain the system to the new user, and will inform the security company about new arrangements.

The Manager will also act on relevant concerns or complaints. (*See separate Complaints Policy*).

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **Assistance with completing application forms**

If the group spokeswomen/contact person needs assistance with completing the application form, understanding this policy, or talking through the application, please ask at reception, and a centre worker will be found to help you.

### **Security: Alarm System**

This centre has an alarm system and is monitored by a security company. The spokeswoman for an after-hours group needs to have this system explained to her. (See also Responsibilities above).

### **General**

Visitors to the centre are welcome to use the kitchen and toilet facilities.

### **Children**

Children are very welcome in the centre. However, children must be supervised whilst in the centre, and how this will happen needs to be indicated in the application form.

Community groups must make their own arrangements for toys and child supervision.

### **Use of phones, computers, photocopying etc.**

Groups will not have access to any of these facilities after-hours.

We welcome your use of our facilities in office hours when they are available, preferably with advance warning. Charges may apply to phone and photocopying, depending on amount and regularity of need.

### **Emergencies**

Because of the layout of the building, evacuation in the event of fire is easy. There are 5 main external doors which are not dead-locked, so there will be no problem getting out. The exits are illuminated and there are evacuation maps on the walls.

**There will be no access to telephones after hours, so groups may wish to consider what action they can take in an emergency situation.** Some options include the use of mobile phones within the group, going to the Warilla police station which is virtually next door, approaching a neighbouring house to ring 000.

**All groups need to consider the situation regarding emergencies, before commencing to meet, especially if after-hours.**

### **Concerns or complaints about our service, rooms, equipment etc.**

Firstly, please bring it to the attention of reception staff who will note the matter and then bring it to the attention of the Manager. The Manager will contact you to discuss your concerns, and take action to resolve the matter. She will also explain our overall Complaints Policy, and the different options you have with regard to making a complaint. Our aim is to resolve complaints as quickly as possible to the agreement of those concerned, in a helpful manner, and without aggression or on-going conflict.

**The next review of this policy will be undertaken by 2010**