

Women's Health West

Working in a feminist organisation: an audit

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women's **health** west - equity and justice for women in the west

Overview

- Detail the three year process Women's Health West undertook to develop a feminist audit tool kit
- Principles and defining features of a contemporary feminist organisation
- Challenges, reflections and key areas for action



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Women's Health West

- Established in 1987 as the feminist women's health service for the western metropolitan region of Melbourne
- Vision: Equity and justice for women in the west
- Mission: We work together for change – by supporting women and their children to lead safe and healthy lives, and changing the conditions that cause and maintain inequity and injustice



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Organisational strategic planning process 2009 - 2012

We agreed that WHW required a:

- Shared understanding of feminism
- Clear set of statements of workplace practices and behaviours that we define as feminist
- Benchmark document that allows us to measure these practices and behaviours



Developing our shared understanding of feminism

Defining feminism....

'The personal is political'

'Smash patriarchy and end capitalism'

'Stands for other women's rights – united'

'Protest – take to the streets!'

'Values women's lives and experiences'

'Being a feminist 24/7'

(WHW staff workshop, September 2009)



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Statements relating to feminist theory, actions, processes and behaviours for five areas of workplace practice:

- Our work as an organisation
- With clients and community women
- As managers
- Our work within teams
- Our individual responsibility for building a feminist culture at WHW

'Claiming and maintaining a feminist analysis and ideology that is derived from the lived experiences of women'

'Challenging views and behaviour that colludes in women's oppression'

'Emphasis of cooperative, collaborative and transparent decision-making'

(WHW feminist audit tool)

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Challenges, reflections and key considerations for action



'The problem with a collective structure was the power was hidden. Some women had extraordinary power that was never acknowledged. I don't think a hierarchy is inconsistent with feminist practice ... What collectives did offer us was being able to pull apart what is feminist management. Is it that no one has the power? Or is it that we are absolutely clear about where it exists and how it's used?'

'A feminist manager must be transparent, open, fair, equitable and cognisant of power. I prefer collective decision-making but I need to be clear when that can't happen, clear that I have power and own it and ensure it's not oppressive of others'

(WHW management workshop, 2013)

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Tool kit for working in a feminist organisation

Six modules that include:

1. The development of the feminist organisation tool kit
2. Women's Health West's feminist beginnings
3. Feminist theoretical perspectives: An overview
4. Our organisational understanding of feminism
5. Working in a feminist organisation: An audit
6. A snap shot of five areas of feminist workplace practice

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