SPACE PROPOSAL

Having talked to women workers of the women's place, both past and present, as well as with women who use the space, we wanted to point out why this proposal is totally unacceptable.

While recognising the overall inadequate situation regarding space in the co-op, and particularly Aine's needs in the office, we want to highlight that the wider implications of such a proposal go a lot further than just practical considerations of space.

For example:

What about co-op policy with regard to women as the single largest minority group in society as a whole?

What about recognising women's special needs, and catering for them within the co-op structure?

At whose costs are the gains in space to be made?

Considering the implications of this proposal and how much it will limit the workings and development of the women's place, how much space is there for the women's place at all within the co-op, and how much committment to its aims?

What questions does this raise about the power structure in the co-op and about women's position within it?

This proposal, or our need to respond to it/defend our position because of it, seems to represent further pressure on the part of the co-op, or certain co-op members, to demand explanantions or justifiactions by women in the women's place as to what we are doing, how we function, etc. This pressure might come from real concerns and up to a point is acceptable as part of the co-op workings, but it doesn't come across in a way that's easy to respond to and it represents a constant drain on our energies and our abilities to get on and work as a women's centre. It doesn't seem appropriate to discuss this proposal in terms of who needs the space most, but more to question why it's become the "obvious" choice to take-over one of the women's place rooms.

Writing this as a response to the proposal about space is only a beginning, or only a surface look at the feelings and issues involved, hopefully as a start to further discussions.....

Having said we didn't want practical considerations to be the main discussion here, we have written out a number of important points in relation to the women's place and its workings.

2017.21.2.859A

1. Money making aspect

The women's place depends on the second room as a means of funds. Room hire is our most consistent source of income. We regularly have 2 groups meeting on a Thursday night. There are individuals who hire the room on a continual basis specifically because that room does offer the peace and quiet that they require.
Considering the library etc., this room is definately the most appropriate to use for room hire where no member/worker is present.

2.Information service

We envisage that this room in the women's place will house the information service. The funding proposal that has been submitted to various Government bodies includes this room. It is unrealistic to believe that we will receive aid or indeed custom for one noisey, overcrowded, multi-functional room.
The aim of the women's place is to expand our services and involvement, with the possibility of a full-time worker. The only way we can realistically foresee this is through aid from funding.

3. Confidentiality

Every week there are several occasions when individual women seek support in confidential surroundings. Without the space for this, this service would be seriously curtailed.Surely it does not need to be pointed out that in any information service or service offering advice that there is always space put aside for people to discuss matters of a confidential nature.

Women with children

The women's centre needs a toilet and sink to cater for the needs of women with children. If the women's place is to continue to support the needs of women who are breast feeding or nappy changing, we have to have the use of this room. This is a service that is being used more and more, and the co-op is one of the few (only?) cafe in town that can offer such space to women with children/babies.

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Space for administration work

There is a very real need for a quiet/separate office space from the front room to do administration work. There is a constant stream of women in and out using the library, seeking advice and information, wanting support etc. This side of our work is very different from that of administration and it is impossible to co-ordinate these two aspects within the one room. From the point of view of getting work done, this cannot be over-emphasised.

Nature of the women's place

There are a lot of women in Cork and outside who depend on the space or the use of space that the women's place offers. This varies from time to time and from individual needs, but the women's place is alot of things to a lot of women. These things cannot all exist within the space of one room or two small ones which cannot offer much. It would be disasterous for the women's place to loose space when it needs it now more than ever considering our wish to expand, and the very importnat fact that this is now the only women's centre in the Republic.

The Women's Place is a project of the Quay Co-op

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