



Feminist Library Newsletter

No. 30 Autumn 2018



Help the Feminist Library raise £30,000 for a New Home

It's official! The Feminist Library is finally moving!!!!

We now need your support more than ever. We urgently need to raise £30,000 for a new home, as we need to leave our current premises in Spring 2019. Please help us protect this vital community resource by donating.

Donate to our crowdfunder (from 16th October until 9th December 2018).

www.crowdfunder.co.uk/help-the-feminist-library-build-its-new-home

Become a Friend and give a monthly donation

The Library receives no external governmental funding and relies solely on the support of our volunteers and community. To support our long term future become a Friend.

<http://feministlibrary.co.uk/support/friends-scheme/>

Our Urgent Need to Move

The Library has had various homes over the years, but has never had a both stable and adequate space for its valuable collection. Our current building is now due for redevelopment and we do urgently need to move. Happily, after a long search, Southwark Council have offered us a new building to rent in Peckham. The building has great potential and we would really like to make this

a reality. However it is very expensive to move a library!

We have no choice but to leave our current premises in Spring 2019 and need to fundraise urgently - we need to raise at least £30,000 for the project. Without any external funding we are counting on the community's support to make this happen. If not we may have to close.

Help us save the Feminist Library by contributing to this goal! Your money will go towards fitting out the new space, the move itself, and the legal costs that come with a massive logistical project that is moving a library.

Our Vision for the New Building

The new space is part of the Sojourner Truth Community Centre, named after the famous African-American activist and abolitionist. It's located on Sumner Road in Peckham and is completely wheelchair accessible.



Our vision is to give the Library the secure home for the future that it rightly deserves! The new space is 1500sq ft, which is 50% bigger than our current cramped premises. This will enable us to protect and build on our priceless collection and expand our vibrant community events programme.

It will give us substantial shelving space, office space, a kitchen to provide food at our community events and a gallery wall space to show feminist art works. It even backs up onto a park, so we can have community picnics in there!

HI-VIS!

The Feminist Library are working with a fabulous design collective called HI-VIS! to redesign the new space. We caught up with founder Martha Rawlinson, who told us a bit more about its history.

Inspired by the feminist design groups set up in 1980s (such as the Women's Design Service (WDS), and Matrix Feminist Design Cooperative), and burnt out and frustrated with the continued patriarchal elitism of the architectural profession, I founded HI-VIS! in November 2016. The aims and uses of the group have evolved since then, but crucially it acts as a useful network to bring like-minded women and non-binary designers (regardless of qualification) together, encouraging support and possible collaboration.

In our man-made environment, determined by male designers and policymakers throughout history, the rare work of others has gone uncredited. Built space is often gendered, and the express wishes of women about the arrangement of their homes and workplaces and the shape of the city have been persistently overlooked and dismissed. This concern was central to the foundation of HI-VIS!.

Meanwhile, the profession of architecture is still very much an old-boys gentlemen's club. In the UK it is a profession whose constituents not only remain predominately white, middle-class and male, but continue to perpetuate a homogenised professional monoculture that alienates and limits access to those who exist outside of these identities. The gender pay-gap in our field is large and widening. Attempts to change this culture from the inside out will always be of limited success - when a structure is entirely rotten, we can only demolish and start again!

HI-VIS! became involved in the Feminist Library's relocation in early 2017, when the library was

set to relocate to OKRS studios at The Livesey Estate on the Old Kent Road. We felt that we could offer real help to find elegant ways to house the important collection in such a small and difficult space, and approached the library at the 2016 Winter Fayre. We soon found the project also offered the opportunity for us to collaborate on the construction with friends at Power Project in their Peckham workshop for female and non-binary individuals.



We see the move as an opportunity for the Library to create a beautiful, accessible, feminist public space that feels like a truly loving home for the collection of books and ephemera, and staff and visitors; entirely designed and built by women and non-binary folks. The new premises and hall offered by Southwark Council at the Sojourner Truth Centre offer us a very real and exciting opportunity for us to make this happen together.

Feminist Peckham

As we are moving to Peckham, a brand new area for us after 30+ years on Westminster Bridge Road, one of our management team Magda Oldziejewska decided to investigate the feminist history of the area.



When I found out that our new space was going to be in Peckham, my first reaction, I have to admit, was that of fear - we're moving further out in South London and we're not going to be as accessible as we used to be, I thought. But then, as I talked to more and more of our volunteers, it turned out that they pretty much all agreed - Peckham is fun, local for most of them, and a vibrant community hub for London, so the Library should fit right in. We've always had a history of working not just with the feminist, but also wider local and activist community.

And then, by complete coincidence, I started reading a book about the history of the feminist movement - *Sweet Freedom* - and found out that one of the first Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) consciousness raising (CR) groups in the country formed in Peckham Rye - which just happens to be the new local area for the Feminist Library! Which, on top of the fact that the new community centre that we're moving into is named after an amazing 19th century woman abolitionist and feminist - Sojourner Truth - and that it's shared with a number of other women-centred organisations, makes me feel like the new Feminist Library space is somehow meant to be!

Following my little discovery of Peckham's feminist history, I have decided to do a bit more digging and started by speaking to Gail, one of our trustees and original founders of the Feminist Library (yes, that's right, in 1975!), who has told me about Hazel, who was a member of that memorable first CR group in Peckham, and a friend of a friend, but has unfortunately now passed away; and about Ruth, who was also local and one of the first paid workers at the Feminist Library in the 80s... Such a small world! One of my favourite things about the Feminist Library is that it's full of those stories of women - more and less known - those in and those behind the books.

Trying to trace down the history of feminist Peckham a bit further, I came across several stories of the threat of eviction against the Feminist Library that we faced two years ago, covered widely in the local as well as national press. I also found out, from the Women's Liberation Music Archive pages,

that Hazel, apart from founding the WLM CR group in Peckham Rye, was also the founder of the first London Women's Liberation Rock Bands out there. I was also reminded of the Peckham Black Women's Centre, which was shut down in 1990 - one of the many memorable losses for the feminist movement, in terms of spaces, over the 30+ years since the abolition of the GLC. The Feminist Library holds a protest 'tombstone' (made out of Styrofoam) for the Centre in its collection.

Circling back to now and the new Feminist Library space, the inspiration for the community centre that we're moving to, Sojourner Truth, was ahead of her time, in a number of extraordinary ways. She was a women's rights activist and an abolitionist, before black women had any rights. She won the first court case of its kind at the time: against a white man for the right to her child. She authored one of the most famous speeches in history: *Ain't I a Woman*, which has become almost a legend since - with many versions of the original speech being reported for years afterwards, and numerous books under the same title published by inspired women ever since. The legend of Sojourner Truth herself made its way to the furthest corners of the world, including Peckham, inspiring, among others, the people who named the Community Centre the Library is moving to.

And there's more to feminist Peckham, still today. There's the awesome women of colour collective, gal-dems, based in Peckham Levels. How about a feminist café? 2 Girls' Café, in Peckham Rye, ticks many boxes - apart from its obvious nods to feminism in its name and dishes, it is zero waste and very vegan friendly. It used to also be, until recently, the home of Lerryn's - another women-run community café, which unfortunately is no more... Aaina, a women's training and empowerment service, is one of the groups sharing the space in Sojourner Truth Community Centre. And soon enough - some six or so months from now, the Feminist Library will be there too!

Peckham is an exciting place for the Library to move to for many other reasons: the area is full of great community hubs, such as Peckham Platform, DIY Space for London and the Sojourner Truth Community Centre, which is just about to become an even more vibrant centre for community activity, with the Feminist Library moving into it, and bringing with it the numerous user groups who include creative collectives and individuals, grassroots activists, feminist and community organisations, among others. The friendly South London Gallery will now also be just a stone's throw away from us, further growing our potential for future community and creative collaborations in the local area. Peckham is also home to fantastic, community-led, creative initiatives, like the Peckham Festival, which this year features Peckham Platform alongside our friend, zine maker, Soofiya, among many other fantastic workshops, talks and fun events. Other great upcoming local events include local history events and the new Anti-Art Fair.

The Feminist Library is hoping to be able to expand its community collaboration initiatives, with a new, larger space for events at Sojourner Truth Centre, as well as a rotating exhibition space. If you're a local community organisation looking for a space to organise your meetings and/or events from, get in touch with us! We are planning to continue to use our space as a community hub and invite new community groups to get involved. Whether you want to run internal organising meetings for your activist group or public events, we strive to be open and accessible to everyone, so do let us know if you're interested! Contact admin@feministlibrary.co.uk.

The Feminist Library, 5a Westminster Bridge Rd, London SE1 7XW.

Opening Hours: Tuesday 7-9 pm, Wednesday 2-6pm, Thursday 7-9pm, Friday 11-5pm and Saturday 10-12pm. We are also open outside these hours by appointment only. Our premises are beyond our control you have to climb six stairs to access the lift. Phone 020 7261 0875

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