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Women's Liberation Halfway House

The Women's Liberation Halfway House was the first women's refuge in Victoria. It was established in Melbourne in 1974 by a group of activists in the WLM who set up the refuge in response to the need that was evident by the huge number of phone calls to the WL Centre from women experiencing domestic violence.

Halfway House was set up without funding. A woman kindly donated her house in Kew rent-free for the first twelve months and there was a roster system of volunteers to keep the house open and functioning. A lot of women from across Melbourne were involved with the refuge in the early years with a lot of activity around family violence and related social issues. From the beginning there were always more women and children needing the refuge than Halfway House could possibly provide shelter for. Gradually, more women's groups were formed to set up refuges in other suburbs and Halfway House acted as a radical feminist example of what could be achieved by women determined to address issues of safety and equity for women.

After some piece-meal funding from various philanthropic trusts and government departments Halfway House, along with several other Victorian refuges that had been set up in the meantime, received full government funding with matched grants from the federal and state governments in the federal Budget of 1977.

For the next two years Halfway House in conjunction with the other refuges in the Victorian Women's Refuge Group (VWRG) dictated the terms of what constituted a refuge and refused to officially give any government department the addresses of any of the refuges on the grounds of safety and anonymity of the residents and to resist interference by government bureaucrats. As a result the Women's Refuge Referral Service was set up in 1979 and funded in 1980 to provide an essential referral service to refuges. By the end of 1979 there were 16 funded refuges around Victoria and more to come.

As well as providing a refuge for women and children fleeing family violence, Halfway House was established with a view to compiling research into violence in the family and related social issues including housing, welfare, incest and sexual abuse. It was always understood that

the refuge would play a part in changing the social conditions that allowed for such violence and abuse of women and children in the first place.

In the late 1980s Halfway House focused on the needs of non-English speaking background women and related issues, such as immigration. And in 2004 was still providing a radical approach to providing a much-needed refuge for women and children.