

RIGHTS of WOMEN

celebrating
40
years
1975 – 2015

of helping women through the law



Jenny Earle became our first paid Project Officer in 1977 and later our Coordinator. *"My work focused on campaigning for women's rights with a bunch of very dynamic and committed feminists, churning out leaflets and newsletters, recruiting volunteers and setting up the advice service. It was very high energy and exciting. There were lots of battles to fight and we got stuck in."* Jenny worked on our campaigns for women's financial independence and supported women to bring claims under the new Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts. She went on to train as a solicitor and to volunteer with us. *"We do have more formal equality now but women are still massively disadvantaged and discriminated against."*



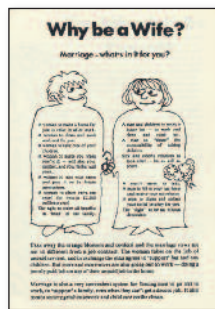
- Equality and discrimination law
- Family law
- Criminal law
- Immigration and asylum law

1975

Rights of Women is formed by a group of women legal workers in response to the fifth demand of the Women's Liberation Movement to help women find their way around the many man-made laws that affect them

1979

We campaign with the YBA Wife campaign against the discrimination faced by married women

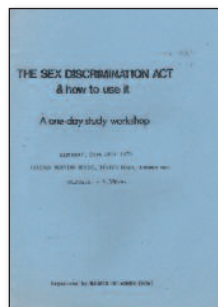


1976

The case of R v Morgan finds a man not guilty of rape if he honestly believes that the woman consents even if his belief was unreasonably held

1975

Sex Discrimination Act and Equal Pay Act are passed



1974

The National Women's Liberation Movement conference in Edinburgh makes its fifth demand – legal and financial independence for women

1981

We begin campaigning for the criminalisation of rape in marriage



1982

We form the Lesbian Custody Group in response to the discriminatory treatment of lesbian mothers in the family justice system

1984

Our members present a stale loaf of bread to the Secretary of State with the message "We are fed up with being fobbed off with crumbs from under men's tables – we want an independent income for women"



1980

The Court of Appeal dismisses a mother's appeal against a decision to grant custody to the father on the grounds that her lesbian relationship would put the child at risk

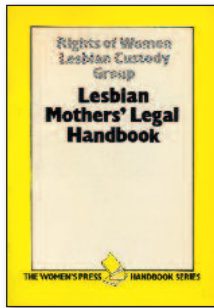
"We worked hard to expose the bias against women in family law and in the social security system."

Jenny Earle

Elizabeth Woodcraft was involved in our work between 1980 and 1995. As a family law barrister she volunteered on the advice line. "We advised on all sorts of issues on the advice line – divorce, child custody and access (as they were known then), maintenance, employment, immigration, crime, prostitution." She delivered advocacy workshops for new women lawyers. Later she was a member of our Policy Group and Chair of our Management Committee. "I am proud of the way in which Rights of Women has always brought together political activism, academic research and publications and worked and continues to work with practitioners in the field."

1986

We publish the *Lesbian Mothers' Legal Handbook*

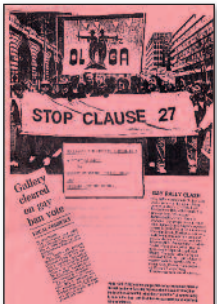


1987

We deliver a series of events on immigration law issues affecting women

1989

The Children Act 1989 is passed



1988

Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 prohibits the promotion of homosexuality in schools

1990

We respond to the Law Commission's consultation, Domestic Violence and the Occupation of the Family Home, calling for a coherent framework of civil and criminal remedies for domestic violence



1992

We publish a legal guide to the Children Act 1989

We work closely with Justice for Women and Southall Black Sisters on the legal treatment of women who killed their violent partners, including Sara Thornton and Kiranjit Ahluwalia

1992

At a retrial Kiranjit Ahluwalia is found guilty of manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility

1991

The case of *R v R* recognises marital rape as a crime

1990

The Social Security Act 1990 reforms entitlement to benefits based on prescribed conditions not related to sex or marital status

"Research was urgently needed to document the prejudice and bias used against lesbian mothers by the judiciary."

Lynne Harne

Lynne Harne was our Research and Policy Officer from 1983 to 1985 when she was author of our 1984 research *Lesbian Mothers on Trial* and the *Lesbian Mothers' Handbook*. She returned as Policy Officer in the mid 1990s and set up the Best Interests Campaign, campaigning on domestic violence and child contact. She remained a member of our Lesbian Custody Group and then Policy Group until the late 1990s whilst working as an academic. *"Family law does not recognise that women and children are disproportionately affected by male domestic and sexual violence and legal changes in terms of shared parenting and the welfare principle following separation have made matters worse for many women."*



1995

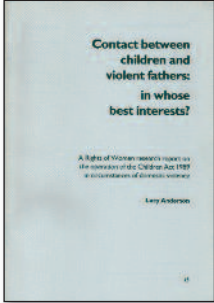
The Family Law Act 1995 creates a new framework of protection from domestic violence including new non-molestation and occupation orders

1995

Sara Thornton's conviction for murdering her violent husband is quashed

1997

As part of our Best Interests Campaign we publish a research report *Contact between children and violent fathers: in whose best interests?*



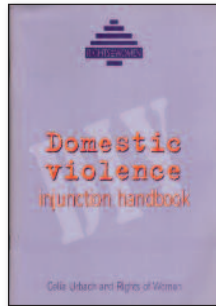
"Access to justice was and remains a key legal challenge for women. Rights of Women helps women access the law by other means than through lawyers."

Ranjit Kaur

Ranjit Kaur was our first Director from 2000 to 2007. Under her leadership our services were developed and our commitment to addressing violence against women was strengthened. *"The issues we focused on were largely determined by the issues women shared on our advice line and our advice services developed substantially over the years."* Our specialist criminal law advice service for women affected by violence was established in 2005 and won the Lilit Award for best voluntary sector violence against women project. Ranjit ensured that the organisation focused on women's rights as a human rights issue and on the particular needs of Black and Minority Ethnic women, organising our national conferences *Women's Rights are Human Rights* in 2000 and *BMER women and violence: where's the justice?* in 2007.

2000

Our *Domestic Violence DIY Injunction Handbook* is published in response to the number of women unable to afford to pay for legal representation



2005

With Lord Lester and BME women's organisations we draft a new civil law remedy for forced marriage

We campaign with Southall Black Sisters to end the no recourse to public funds rule

2003

Our research *Access to Justice: A report on women's access to free legal advice* is published

2004

The Civil Partnership Act 2004 creates new legal recognition of lesbian couples including rights in relation to children



2003

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 introduces a new legal test for consent in sexual violence cases

2003

Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 is repealed

2002

The Domestic Violence Concession is introduced for women on spouse visas applying for indefinite leave to remain



"Rights of Women has influenced the changes made to domestic violence injunctions in the mid 1990s and later legislation."

Lynne Harne

Emma Scott started volunteering on our advice line in 1999 whilst working as a family lawyer in practice. She joined the staff team as Legal Officer in 2003 and in 2008 became our Director. *“Over the past few years we have worked hard to address the very real barriers that women face in accessing the laws Rights of Women has fought so hard over the years to improve.”* Most recently Emma has led the development of our services to support women with an insecure immigration status affected by violence and our legal challenge of the domestic violence gateway for family law legal aid. *“The loss of legal aid has been devastating for so many women. We are committed to finding ways to ensure that women have access to the remedies which bring them safety and justice and to campaigning for change.”*

2006

From Report to Court: a handbook for adult survivors of sexual violence is published

“Keep campaigning, educating, asking the questions, reminding women what is possible.”

Elizabeth Woodcraft

2008

We join the Demand Change campaign and lobby for a new criminal offence to tackle the demand for prostitution

2012

In partnership with CWASU we publish *Picking up the pieces: domestic violence and child contact* which confirms that little has changed in women’s experiences of family justice since 1997



2015

In partnership with Imkaan we publish a research report *This is not my destiny. Reflecting on responses to forced marriage*

2014

We bring a legal challenge against the Secretary of State for Justice about the domestic violence evidence criteria for family law legal aid

2012

The Destitute Domestic Violence Concession is introduced for migrant women on spouse visas affected by violence who would not previously be eligible for public funds



2009

The Policing and Crime Act 2009 creates a new criminal offence of paying for sex with someone who is controlled for gain

2013

The Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act removes legal aid in key areas for women including family and immigration law

Sophia Raja is a trainee solicitor and a member of our Board Advisory Group. *“Having worked as a Domestic Violence Advocate, I have supported and admired the work of Rights of Women for many years. I can speak first hand of the importance of the organisation’s training and information for professionals.”* With other members of the Board Advisory Group, Sophia supports the development and delivery of our services for women with her expertise and commitment to women’s access to justice. *“Giving women knowledge and understanding of the law and their rights is the bare minimum required to enable them to protect themselves and assert their legal rights.”*

2007

Forced Marriage Protection Orders are introduced in the civil courts



2014

A new criminal offence of forced marriage is introduced

2015

Coercive control is criminalised in the Serious Crime Act 2015

Rights of Women past and present

The following text is taken from a 1977 leaflet explaining our work and we reflect on how our current status and activities has built on those foundations.

WHY WE DECIDED TO HAVE A ROW

In 1975 a group of women legal workers got together because they felt there was a need for some kind of organisation to help women find their way around the many man-made laws that affect them. A conference was held and it was decided to work towards setting up a women's legal resource centre which would provide help and information on the law and legal services for individual women and for women's organisations. We also realised that there was a need to campaign to win a better deal for women as both consumers of, and workers in, the law.

In 2015 Rights of Women has a team of women lawyers who deliver a range of services aimed at helping women through the law supported by over 40 volunteer women solicitors and barristers. Our specialist legal advice services and publications provide thousands of women with information about the law and their legal rights each year.

We also continue to campaign on key legal issues affecting women including family law and domestic violence, women's access to justice and the rights of vulnerable migrant women.

ROW
Rights of Women

"Many women just didn't know what their rights were or how to enforce them, how to challenge discrimination and oppressive family law and child maintenance systems. That's why our advice service was so important."

Jenny Earle, Project Officer and Coordinator 1977-1979

WHAT AND WHERE IS ROW TODAY

Over the past two years we have slowly begun to build a women's legal resource centre. As a collective of legal workers we have held regular meetings to discuss legislation and decisions made by courts and tribunals that affect women. We have also gained encouragement and support from each other as women working in a male dominated profession.

We have found an office, and run a regular advice session there once a week. As a result of a grant from the Equal Opportunities Commission we have been able to employ two workers and can now carry out research, publish a regular bulletin and actively plan campaigns.

Previously an Industrial and Provident Society, in 2012 Rights of Women became a registered charity and is governed by a Board of Trustees. A newly established Board Advisory Group of women lawyers and academics echoes the work of our previous Policy Groups and meets regularly to discuss developments and current issues in the law for women, guiding and supporting the focus of our work.

Since 1984 we have been based at Tindlemanor, a building housing women's organisations near Old Street in London including Imkaan, Latin American Women's Rights Service and Women for Refugee Women.

"Working in such close proximity to so many of our key partners informs and inspires our work every day."

Emma Scott, Director

Rights
Of
Women



ROW publishes a regular bi-monthly bulletin which contains details of new and proposed legislation, tribunal and court cases affecting women, books and pamphlets recently published and information about ROW workshops, conferences etc. If you would like to subscribe to the ROW Bulletin (£1 a year, or what you can afford) drop us a line and we will put you on the mailing list.

"Too many women don't know their rights, only the myths that may have been fed to them. When you know where you stand, you can decide what the next step to take is. The Rights of Women website can really help with that."

Annalisa Barbieri, Guardian columnist and Rights of Women Patron

ROW is specifically a women's organisation. We see ourselves as part of and responsible to the women's liberation movement. We work closely with other groups concerned with issues affecting women (such as National Women's Aid Federation, Rape Crisis Centre) and with organisations concerned with the law (e.g. law centres, Legal Action Group).



"Each week I hear from women confused as to their rights and afraid of the law as it affects their lives. If I was unable to refer them to Rights of Women they would be lost. And the need is not decreasing, it is growing all the time."

Denise Robertson, broadcaster and Rights of Women Patron

We continue to publish legal guides and information on key areas of law for women. Over the years publications including our *Domestic Violence DIY Injunction Handbook* and *Seeking Refuge: A handbook for asylum-seeking women* have enabled women to navigate complex legal proceedings to find safety and justice. In 2015 we will launch a new publication *Child arrangements and domestic violence: a handbook for women*.

Our website, re-launched in 2014, houses up to date information on family law, criminal law and immigration and asylum law for women as well as our research reports, responses to consultations and position statements. It is an important resource for individual women and the professionals who support them as well as academics, journalists and activists.

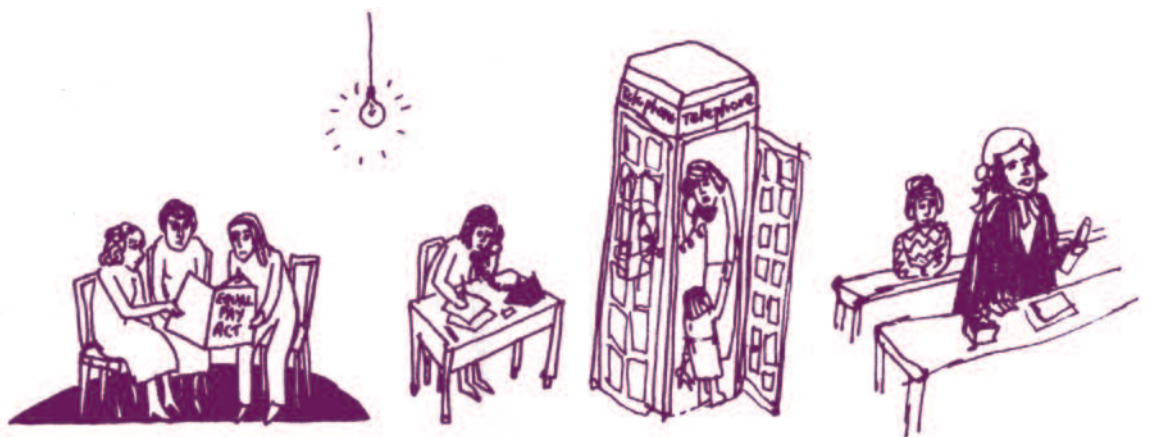
Our training courses and events keep professionals working with women up to date with developments in law and legal policy issues affecting women. This year we are delivering training on the new criminal offence of coercive control and holding a national conference to explore changes to the family justice system and its response to domestic violence.



Rights of Women remains committed to delivering services for women by women. We know that women value the safe women-only space our advice lines offer. Since 2012 we have also been developing our work with young women, starting with the publication of *Your body, your rights, your life* in partnership with The Haven Paddington.

We continue to work closely in partnership with Women's Aid Federation of England, Welsh Women's Aid and Rape Crisis. In London we are members of the London Violence Against Women and Girls Consortium and nationally we work with organisations including BAWSO, DeafHope and Apna Haq.

In our campaigning work we also continue to work with lawyers' organisations including the Law Society, Legal Aid Practitioners' Group and Resolution.



"This is a moment to celebrate the hard work and successes of the organisation and everyone involved. However, it is also a time to focus on the challenges women face and the growing importance of the organisation going forward."

Sophia Raja, Board Advisory Group member

Find out more about our work and how you can get involved on our website

www.rightsofwomen.org.uk

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