

# The South House

By Sofia Reiner

For my practicum placement, I was working with The South House throughout the semester. The South House is a student-funded and volunteer-driven sexual and gender resource center at Dalhousie University. It was originally named the Dalhousie Women's Centre, and it was founded in recognition of women's common and diverse needs. Their mission and mandate recognizes that "you cannot work for a society free of sexism and patriarchy without also working for a society free of all forms of oppression. Therefore, the South House supports women and all people dealing with oppression on the basis of sexuality and gender."

The South House, located at Seymour St., serves Dalhousie University, the University of King's College, and the general Halifax Regional Municipality, they welcome everyone to their services! All levied full and part-time students from Dalhousie University and University of King's College are members of the South House. However, anyone in the community who wishes to join may do so by paying an annual membership fee, however this fee may be waived at the Board's discretion in some cases.

According to the South House, they "exist primarily to support, empower, and lend a voice to gender-oppressed people, and those looking to support and work in solidarity with them". They value intersectionality, and therefore are: confidential, non-judgmental, feminist, body positive, queer and trans positive, pro-choice, sex positive, non-heterosexist, anti-racist, and wheelchair accessible. The South House embraces diversity, and stands in solidarity against all forms of oppression and actively work to maintain a safe space for all oppressed individuals.

The South House affirms the right of every individual to access accurate, unbiased information about sex, sexuality, and sexual health. It offers several resources relating to social

justice in a variety of media, such as brochures, videos, magazines, and a book library that contains a vast range of topics. Most of their resources are on sexual health, anti-oppression, reproductive justice, student politics, Queer and Trans 101, and comprehensive community referral guides. In addition, they provide a range of free menstrual supplies, safer sex products, and pregnancy tests.

The South House aims to provide resources, bursaries, and referral services, as well as a safe space for people to meet and organize. It can also offer a free meeting space to anti-oppression groups, at the discretion of the Board; as well as a wide range of workshops and educational programs, available upon request. The staff and volunteers are extremely friendly and supportive, they will listen and put you in touch with the right people. The South House has great opportunities to connect with like-minded community members and feminists.

When I first learned I was going to be paired up with the South House for the semester I was happy and excited. I already admired their ideology and work, I just hadn't had the chance to become involved with them. However, this course provided me the unique opportunity to work closely with the center, and it was a great experience. The South House only has two full-time staff members, an Outreach Coordinator, Rebecca Stuckey, and an Administrative and Volunteer Coordinator, Carmella Farahbakhsh. I was working with and under the supervision of Carmella.

I had my first meeting with Carmella during the summer, we discussed general ideas and the various possibilities of what I could be doing with them. Carmella told me that I could do anything I wanted, which was both great and challenging. I enjoyed the freedom and flexibility, but felt some insecurity and uncertainty of what to do. I spent the remaining of the summer researching the work the South House does and trying to find inspiration for my project. On the first week of class, Carmella and I met again to discuss my possible project. We shared our thoughts and brainstormed ideas, in the end it was originally decided that I would work on an

awareness campaign relating to rape culture, as well as helping out at the South House with events and other tasks.

After the second meeting, I focused on researching about rape culture and awareness campaigns ideas. Rape culture is a complex set of beliefs that create an environment in which sexual violence is prevalent and normalized. My goal was to bring to attention that rape culture goes beyond sexual consent, it is present in our everyday lives, and perpetuated through the use of misogynistic language, objectification of bodies, and glamorization of violence. I worked on defining key terms to understanding the effects of rape culture, such as: sexual assault, coercion, sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, consent, and bodily autonomy (the right to self-governance over one's own body without external influence or coercion).

I had many ideas for an extensive awareness campaign, but I had to face the realities of an extremely busy semester, and had to settle for a more feasible project instead. Carmella and I decided that I could facilitate a group discussion around the theme of rape culture during a Feminist Hangout Crew event, as well as add resources to the South House around the same theme. The Feminist Hangout Crew is an event hosted by the South House throughout the school year where you can “come hangout to meet new friends, eat delicious snacks, and talk through feminist ideas and topics”. It a very positive environment where you can have interesting discussions with interesting people.

I made a brochure with the theme of consent culture compiled with the research I did previously. It was named Consent Culture, and it included its definition as “a culture in which asking for consent is normalized and condoned in popular culture. It is respecting the person's response even if it isn't the response you had hoped for. We will live in a consent culture when we no longer objectify people and we treat them as valuable and worthy of respect regardless of their

sexuality/sexual interest. Consent culture is believing that everyone has the right over their own bodily autonomies and understanding that each person knows what is best for themselves”. As well as a definition of the terms mentioned above. In addition, it talked about the power of language and its role in rape culture, statistics about police-reported sexual assault in Nova Scotia, advice on how to combat rape culture, and resources for survivors/victims and allies at Dalhousie and HRM.

I was very happy with both the discussion group and the brochure! I got to do more extended research on a theme that interests me, as well as add a resource to the South House. Because the Feminist Hangout Crew that I helped facilitate was close to the end of the semester, only five people came, but that gave us the opportunity to talk more and go deeper into discussion themes that we preferred. In addition to my project, I assisted in a free clothing-swap event early in the semester, and spent a few days sitting house for them.

I am so happy I decided to take this course; it was a unique opportunity for Political Science and Gender and Women’s Studies students to gain some experience that is completely different from the average lecture class. Students were able to work on real projects with a variety of options of interesting organizations to choose from according to your field of preference. Since those two programs don’t have a co-op option at Dalhousie, this course provides students the ability to see how working for such organizations would be, and add a great advantage to their resumes.

I loved my experience at the South House, it is amazing to see such a positive and encouraging space! I met wonderful people and had stimulating conversations during the time I spent there. I am moved by all the people who stand in solidarity against oppression, and genuinely happy that spaces such as the South House exist and are becoming more commonplace. I really wish I had more time to work on my project and eventually done a more extensive awareness

campaign on campus regarding rape culture as I originally intended to do. Hopefully I have the opportunity to do something similar if I continue to frequent the South House. I am very excited to begin volunteering for them during the next semester!

#### Bibliography

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