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For immediate release

Homes for women workers: lost suffragette history discovered

A £79,500 Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant has been awarded to a London housing association to research its recently discovered archives that for the first time link the women's suffrage campaign with housing.

Women's Pioneer Housing uncovered the long lost archives in its own safe last year, with more surfacing this year. An early examination of material dating back to 1920 has confirmed anecdotal reports passed down through the years of its suffragette heritage.

It shows that some of its founders had been suffragette members of the Pankhurst's inner circle at the militant Women's Social & Political Union. Others had been leading lights of the more law-abiding suffragists, led by Millicent Fawcett.

Their unlikely alliance in 1920 suggests both sides were equally alarmed by a post-war housing crisis causing unprecedented levels of homelessness for single working women.

'Immediately after the First World War there was, as now, an acute shortage of decent rented homes in London,' said Women's Pioneer chief executive Denise Fowler.

'One in three women had been left with no choice but to support themselves but even those returning from duties at the front line of war were at the back of the housing queue, paid far less than men and publicly and callously vilified for "stealing jobs from returning heroes".'

'Nearly 100 years later London again has an acute shortage of truly affordable homes and the 20.5% gender pay gap for London women in full-time work - the highest of any British region - makes the problem here so much worse.

'We're delighted to be able to put to fantastic use money raised by National Lottery players to bring our history out of the shadows and hope it will focus attention on a problem that continues to severely disadvantage women today.'

The grant, made possible by National Lottery players, will pay for Women's Pioneer's historical records to be digitised and made available to the public via a new online exhibition, telling the story of the organisation.

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The history will also be portrayed through a 30-minute video, revealing the roles of some of the UK's best known suffragists but many others long forgotten and the hundreds of women it housed or employed in the interwar years.

With the help of experts working on the Royal Holloway, University of London Citizens project, this lost chapter in suffrage history will also be used for new educational materials, for school-age pupils and members of the public signing up for an online learning course.

Over the next 12 months, a team of volunteers will research the archive material to build up a full picture of Women's Pioneer's unique early years.

Women's Pioneer is looking to recruit the volunteers from among its own tenants and others living in and around the west London neighbourhoods where it still owns and rents out grand houses bought and converted into flats between 1921 and World War Two.

The Heritage Lottery Fund grant includes a substantial chunk of money for training the volunteers in skills that should prove useful to job seekers.

Women's Pioneer will also be offering work experience and support to women leaving prison, nominated by national charity Working Chance.

Recruitment will start in December, with the project due to complete at the end of 2018.

ENDS

Further information

For further information, images and interviews please contact freelance consultant Lisa Thompson on 01732 750 433 or 07885 519 117 or thompsonstwo@icloud.com

Notes to the editor

About Women's Pioneer Housing

Women's Pioneer Housing is London's largest provider of low cost rented homes to women and women-headed households priced out of London's housing market.

It manages over 1000 homes in Kensington & Chelsea, Hammersmith & Fulham, Westminster, Wandsworth, Ealing, Harrow and Hillingdon and is one of the few social housing landlords still building new homes in central London.

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Women and housing: the statistics

Women in Britain still earn less than men. In London the statistics are at an extreme.

- The pay gap for women in full-time work in London is 20.5% compared with 13.9% across the UK. The gender pay gap measures the difference in pay for the same work.
- Fewer women than men are in paid employment, with women's employment in London the second lowest in the UK after northern Ireland. Only 65.8% of London women are in paid work compared with 79.9% of men.
- The gender pay gap and low levels of paid work affect BAME women disproportionately, with just 56% in work, compared with 72% of BAME men, 72% of white women and 83% of white men.
- A Fawcett Society survey of low paid women found nearly one in three (31.8%) of those in London are on zero-hours contracts, compared with 13.9% for the UK.
- Women's homelessness is rising, with 12% of rough sleepers being women. Many have mental health problems or are vulnerable due to drug or alcohol abuse or sexual assault. But for one in three the sole cause of their homelessness is an acute shortage of homes with a reasonable rent.
- The true homelessness figure is likely to be higher as women sofa-surf rather than risk the dangers of street homelessness or mixed gender hostels. Women are more likely to endure domestic violence to avoid homelessness, with high risk victims waiting an average of 2.3 years before seeking help.
- Women's pensions are significantly lower than men's, caused by the gender pay gap and, for many women, career breaks taken to care for children, older or disabled relatives. Fewer than half (46%) qualify for a full state pension against 80% of men

Sources: ONS and Fawcett Society

About the Heritage Lottery Fund

Thanks to National Lottery players, we invest money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. www.hlf.org.uk. Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and use #HLFsupported and #NationalLottery.