

Stand Up to Domestic Violence: Family Court Watch Initiative Report 2016

Ann Pinna, Chair (ajpinna@aol.com)

The Stand Up to Domestic Violence-Family Court Watch Initiative is still going strong. Ever since 2011, trained AAUW members have been going into Family Court on a monthly basis for the purpose of making sure that women are being treated fairly and justly in cases of domestic violence. Court monitors document systemic issues of concern and bias in the local justice system that result in the re-victimization of women and children who have suffered domestic abuse. As a result of a thorough analysis of their collected data, monitors meet with Family Court judges to discuss ways improvements can be made within the court system.

On March 31, 2016, the Court Watch team held a day-long training for new monitors at the Boardman Road Library. Speakers included Leah Feldman, Director for the Center for Victim Safety and Support of Family Services; Eric Knapp, Esq., Family Court Bureau Chief, Office of the Public Defender, Dutchess County; and Lawrence Moore, Esq., Senior Assistant Public Defender. Other speakers and participants in the court monitoring training sessions included veteran monitors Sandy Lash, Mara Goldstone, Elaine Andersen, Flo Mondanaro, Sandy Sherman, Joanne Dyson, Margaret Nijhuis, Liz Graham, and Ann Pinna.

New members welcomed to the Court Monitoring Team this year include JoAnne Abraskin, Susie Blecker, Mary Lou Davis, Goldy Safirstein, and Rae Slingerland.

Our collaboration with The Fund for Modern Courts in New York City came to an end in September. Denise Kronstadt, Deputy Executive Director/Director of Advocacy and Policy for the Fund for Modern Courts is in the process of writing a report based on a year of observations by AAUW court monitors in particular, and, once the report has been vetted and approved by our monitoring team, will share the Fund's Report with the 4 current judges on the bench in Family Court today. A similar sharing of information was the "brown bag" lunch held in 2013 when monitors shared their findings with the 3 sitting judges at that time. Similarly, it is the hope that our recent observations and quantitative analysis of our observations will be accepted by the judges and incorporated into the judicial system as a means of improving it and changing areas of concern related to the fair treatment of women and domestic violence.

The Court Watch Initiative is proud to have worked in collaboration with The Fund for Modern Courts in NYC and the Dutchess County Family Court justice system toward greater accountability, public awareness, and community involvement for positive social change and the greater goal of ending domestic violence.

We hope our 5 newly-trained monitors, together with our 8 dedicated and loyal veterans, can continue our mission to help others in need of advocacy and to substantiate their "voice." We look forward to another fruitful and productive year ahead.