

Court Watch Article for AAUW Newsletter –“Update & Looking Forward” - Spring 2018

By Ann Pinna, AAUW Court Watch Chair

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AAUW Court Watch is alive and well and continues to advocate for women’s rights ever since its inception in 2010. We go to court throughout the year, even in the summer. Our team of 11 monitors attends Family Court on a regular basis, observing court cases, noting and tallying issues of concern, and, ultimately, ensuring women are treated fairly and justly, especially in cases of domestic violence.

News of our success continues to spread as other organizations have become interested in duplicating our program. As a result of Sandy Lash’s Court Watch talk in 2016 at the AAUW Leadership Conference in Casenovia, NY, the AAUW Westchester branch invited her to speak at their February monthly meeting. Since then, they have expressed interest in creating their own Court Watch program and, when they are ready, both Sandy Lash and Ann Pinna will help them organize a Court Watch program of their own. In fact, our former partner, The Fund for Modern Courts in NYC, said they will be happy to participate, if needed.

It is quite heartening to find that other organizations are consistently interested in learning more about our program and seeking advice for the creation of their own court monitoring team. We have been happy to give them advice and assistance and share our training documents and methods with them.

In order to keep our Court Watch team more informed and effective, we continue to invite expert speakers to our meetings. On April 10, Anne Negrin, formerly a member of the Domestic Abuse Response Team for the Town of Poughkeepsie Police for ten years and a previous facilitator for a weekly support group for survivors of domestic abuse, shared her experiences with our team in order to provide us with a greater understanding of how abused women navigate through the judicial system.

We are expecting Carl S. Chu, Esq., to come to our May meeting and speak about his role as Attorney for the Child. Many on our team see Attorney Chu in court on a regular basis and we hope to learn a great deal of information from his years of experience dealing with children and families challenged with domestic abuse.

On a somewhat regular basis, team members also meet to share court room experiences with one another. Recently, our team gathered at Table Talk Diner where team members shared experiences and issues related to our court room observations. Besides discussing and answering questions of concern, team members were able to offer advice and provide others with helpful hints and suggestions for improvement.

Our Court Watch Team continues to update and share information with one another, while, at the same time, seeks the advice and expertise of attorneys, advocates, police, and mediators to help us improve and achieve our goal. Team members consistently strive to become better informed and to acquire the tools and strategies we need to do a better and more effective job in order to ensure that our ultimate goal is achieved---making the justice system fair and equitable for all.

*Ann Pinna- March 21, 2018*