



DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION SERVICES

DAIS Court Watch Program

Volunteer Position Description

Goals

The DAIS Court Watch program observes Dane County restraining order hearings to establish a data-driven analysis of the court system's advancement of victim safety and perpetrator accountability in intimate partner domestic violence cases. The program goals include:

- Improve the experience of victims of domestic violence seeking a restraining order.
- Inform how advocates prepare victims for the court process.
- Provide information to stakeholders in the community, including the judges, on trends related to the court systems handling of domestic violence and harassment injunction cases.
- Partner with stakeholders in the legal system to identify recommendations for improved responses to domestic violence and harassment cases, which may include topics for judicial training, process improvements, or other actions.

History

Court Watch programs exist throughout the country; some are programs operate from victim service agencies and others are entirely separate non-profit organizations. DAIS has operated a Court Watch program on an intermittent basis since at least 2003. The program has primarily been staffed by DAIS Legal Program staff and DAIS interns. The most recent time period of injunction hearing observations was 2017-18 and a report outlining the process was provided to the Legal Issues Subcommittee in March 2019.

Program Scope

The DAIS Court Watch program is specifically focused on Domestic Abuse and Harassment injunctions because the responsiveness of the court system in these hearings is so closely tied to victim safety. Because DAIS doesn't have specific funding for this program, the program does not have the capacity to observe Family Court or other hearings and is limited to injunctions only.

Methods

DAIS staff and volunteers observe restraining order hearings with the goal of observing 2-3 times per week. Observers will attend a minimum of three cycles of the judge rotation so each judge will be observed for three weeks before data is summarized. The data is gathered through a tracking form and entered into a database for analysis. Data gathered includes both objective data and subjective data on the court proceedings. Due to limited capacity, a review of the petition won't occur with each case, though in certain cases this practice will be included to provide the observer with greater clarity on the circumstances of proceeding.

Community Engagement

The Court Watch program involves an Advisory Group comprised of stakeholders from the victim services organizations to provide consultation to DAIS on the program's methods and to support further collaboration with the community. A summary report that outlines findings and recommendations on areas of improvement for the court system's approach to restraining order cases will be provided to the Advisory Group, the Legal Issues Subcommittee of the Dane County Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence, and the judges and other interested court personnel.

Training dates:

Court Watch specific training (6 hours):

- Monday, September 20th 6-8 pm
- Tuesday, September 21st 6-8 pm

Court Watch Observations:

Pick two dates. Shifts are from 8 am to 12 pm

- Wednesday, September 22nd
- Friday, September 24th
- Monday, September 27th
- Wednesday, September 29th
- Friday, October 1st

First day of observation:

Monday, October 4th, 2021