



WATCH *Report*

August 2002

2002 COURT MONITORING SURVEY

REPORT ON 2002 COURT MONITORING SURVEY

By Suzanne Elwell, Executive Director

This report contains the results of a national court monitoring survey conducted by WATCH in the Spring of 2002. There were three goals for this effort: (1) to determine the extent and nature of court monitoring in the country, (2) to create an up-to-date list of court monitoring programs, and (3) to gauge the interest in forming a national court monitoring association. WATCH is pleased to report that all three of these goals were achieved.

What do we look like?

The results of the survey confirm what many of you already know—court monitoring efforts typically take place within a nonprofit domestic violence or sexual assault organization, with a limited number of staff devoted to the project, and the support of a group of volunteer monitors. Court monitoring is a relatively new systems accountability strategy—most organizations were formed since 1996—and is present in at least 21 separate states and two provinces in Canada.

Creating a current roster

Through internet searches, word-of-mouth, our own records, and many telephone calls, WATCH was able to identify 39 existing or former court monitoring organizations, most of which completed the survey. We recognize that despite our digging we may not have identified all court monitoring programs that are out there, but we believe that we have captured the vast majority of the programs and that the survey gives a good indication of the nature of current court monitoring efforts. We plan to continue to seek out information on existing programs so that we can keep this roster current. *Your assistance in this effort would be greatly appreciated!*

Forming an association

We were pleased to see overwhelming support for the concept of forming a national association of court monitoring organizations. The few organizations that responded “maybe” cited cost as a factor in their decision to participate in an association. This unambiguous support is just the first step. Now there are many questions to be addressed, such as what will this association look like, what are the goals, what kind of activities will take place, and who can be a member (just organizations committed to violence against women issues or all types of court monitoring organizations?). To answer these and other questions, WATCH would like to facilitate the formation of an advisory group of court monitoring organizations. And to do this, of course, takes time and money. Consequently, WATCH has started to submit organizational development grants to large national foundations to fund the planning of a national association, including costs to support an advisory group. We anticipate that this group would meet via telephone conferences, as well as once in person. The basic grant that we have written includes travel expenses for members of the advisory group, as well as postage, consultant, and telephone expenses.

We firmly believe that an association must meet the needs of its members, so we are committed to getting input and participation both through the advisory group and directly from potential member organizations. Down the road we anticipate that we will be sending you yet another survey that will solicit your views on what this organization should look like and what kind of benefits should be available to member organizations. In the meantime, we welcome any comments or questions regarding this effort.

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The mission of WATCH is to make the justice system more effective and responsive in handling cases of violence, particularly against women and children, and to create a more informed and involved public.

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2002, WATCH conducted a survey of court monitoring organizations to determine the types of organizations that exist and to gauge the interest in forming a national court monitoring association. The survey was sent to all known court monitoring organizations as well as individuals and organizations that had purchased WATCH's court monitoring start-up manual. Survey respondents were also asked to pass along the names of other organizations that they were aware of so that we could reach as many organizations as possible. As a result of this process, WATCH identified 39 court watch organizations. Thirty-three of these (including WATCH) responded to the survey.

As a result of this survey, WATCH was able to develop a picture of the types of court watch programs that have been formed or are being formed. This report summarizes the results of the court monitoring survey.

FORMATION AND CURRENT STATUS OF COURT MONITORING PROGRAMS

Most court monitoring programs were formed after 1995: of the 33 respondents, 42% of the programs were started between 1996 and 2000, and another 27% were formed in 2001-2002. There are 28 current programs, either as ongoing programs or programs in development; 3 programs were special, limited-term projects that have ended; and 2 programs were discontinued due to lack

of resources. Of the two programs that were discontinued, one was relatively short-lived, lasting only 7 months, and the other had been in existence from 1996 to 2002. Currently programs exist in 21 different states and in two provinces in Canada.

STATUS OF COURT MONITORING PROGRAMS

	#
Program/project still exists	20
Special project done	3
Ongoing project stopped	2
Has taken place on & off	2
In development	6
Total	33

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PROGRAMS

	Total survey respondents	Existing projects only
Total number of states with court monitoring program	24	21
States with one program	19	16
States with two programs	3	5
States with three programs	2	0
Number of programs in Canada	2	2

DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAMS

Organizational structure

Most (82%) court monitoring programs "live" within a nonprofit domestic violence organization, sexual assault organization, or a community coordinating council. Only three programs are independent nonprofit organizations separate from any other private or public entity, and one organization was described as an "independent, privately owned company." None of the court monitoring programs was part of a governmental organization.

YEAR PROGRAM FORMED

Year formed	Number (#)	Percent (%)
1970s	2	6%
1980s	2	6%
1990-1995	3	9%
1996-2000	14	42%
2001	5	15%
2002	4	12%
No answer	3	9%
Total	33	100%

SURVEY RESULTS, CONTINUED

WHERE DOES THE PROGRAM "LIVE"?

	#	%
In a program through a local domestic violence coordinating council	7	21%
In a program in a non-profit organization	20	61%
In a program in a governmental organization	0	0%
It is an independent non-profit devoted primarily to court monitoring	3	9%
Other: (private company, League of Women Voters)	2	6%
Still in formation	1	3%
Total	33	100%

Cases monitored and organizational focus

The majority (76%) of the survey respondents indicated that they monitor domestic violence cases. Of these, most (71%) also monitor order for protection/restraining order cases.

TYPES OF CASES MONITORED

	#	%
Domestic violence	25	76%
Stalking	16	48%
Child abuse	7	21%
Sexual assault/abuse	15	45%
Order for protection/restraining orders	19	58%
Other family law	3	9%
Prostitution	2	6%
Other (all types of cases, drugs, drunk driving)	8	24%

Note: Organizations may monitor a variety of types of cases.

Of the 33 respondents, 18 (51%) monitor cases of violence against women only, 4 groups (12%) monitor all types of cases, one group (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) monitors impaired driving cases only, and one program is still in its formation stage and hasn't decided yet.

ORGANIZATIONAL FOCUS

	#	%
Domestic violence only	10	27%
DV and sexual assault only	8	24%
DV, sexual assault and child abuse	7	21%
Orders for protection/restraining orders only	2	6%
All types of cases	4	12%
Other specialty cases (drunk driving)	1	3%
Undecided	1	3%
Total	33	100%

Staffing

The survey revealed that for the most part, a typical court monitoring program has a small paid staff and volunteer pool of under 30. Most programs have either one or two full-time employees *or* one or two part-time employees. Only 4 programs (13%) reported having both full-time *and* part-time staff devoted to the program. These 4 programs also had the largest staffs of all the respondents.

Eighty-three percent of the programs have volunteers with the average number of volunteers being 25. Four programs reported being solely run by volunteers.

In 43% of the programs, the coordinator/director had other non-court monitoring responsibilities in the organization in addition to the court monitoring program.

Monitoring frequency

Court monitoring was reported by all respondents as a primary program activity, with differing levels of frequency.

FREQUENCY OF MONITORING

	#	%
Every day	11	33%
2-4 times a week	14	42%
About once a week	3	9%
2-3 times a month	2	6%
Fewer than 2 times per month	0	0%
Special project only	1	3%
Still in formation--undecided	2	3%
Total	33	100%

Other activities

Most programs do not limit their efforts to monitoring proceedings. The majority of programs engage in other types of advocacy and education.

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SURVEY REPORT, CONTINUED

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What next

The first step is planning an association, and the second step is its formation. WATCH will continue to write organizational grants to get us started on the first step. If you are interested in participating on the advisory group, please complete the enclosed form. When the times comes (*i.e.*, we have secured money), we will start the process of forming an advisory group, with the goal of having participation from various parts of the country and various types of organizations. We understand that the second step also will require money—potential legal expenses, initial administrative costs, etc.—so eventually we will have to write grants for those as well. Although the future is not clear, our hope is that planning and initial start-up costs will be funded by grants so that we can keep costs down and membership affordable. **W**

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WATCH was created in 1992 as a community response to the growing number of news reports of a lax, revolving-door justice system that failed to respond seriously to crimes of violence against women and children.

WATCH is a volunteer-based, nonprofit organization that monitors cases of domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse and neglect in Hennepin County, Minnesota. WATCH seeks to improve the justice system's handling of cases of violence against women and children. The presence of volunteers and staff in the courtroom, combined with careful research, specific recommendations, and thoughtful reporting, have allowed WATCH to be a catalyst for improvement and change by the judiciary and other professionals working within the criminal justice system.

SURVEY RESULTS, CONTINUED

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OTHER PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

	#	%
Attend local committee meetings	18	62%
Direct advocacy	16	55%
Research projects	14	48%
Community education/outreach	20	69%
Other	8	28%
Total who responded to question	29	100%

Newsletter

Half of the respondents indicated they have a newsletter. Of these, 38% have a newsletter devoted only to court monitoring, and 63% report on their court monitoring activities in an agency/organization newsletter.

Future plans

Most (64%) of the current operating court monitoring programs indicated that they have plans for expansion, 32% indicated that they plan to maintain the status quo, and only one indicated a reduction.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE?

	#	%
Expansion	14	64%
Reduction	1	5%
Status quo	7	32%
Total current/operating programs	22	100%

INTEREST IN NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

There is clear support from the survey respondents for the formation of a national association of court monitoring organizations. Twenty-six (84%) of the respondents who answered this question indicated they would be interested in joining an association, and the five (16%) maybe responses cited the cost as a consideration for them. Many survey respondents wrote enthusiastic comments about the concept of an association and their interest in joining. There were no respondents who said they would not like to join an association.

Survey respondents were asked to rank the factors about an association that would influence their decision to join. The top three factors were: networking opportunity, formation of a resource clearinghouse, and specialized trainings. The survey respondents were overwhelmingly in favor of attending a conference on court monitoring, with the only "maybe" responses accompanied by a concern for cost of travel. **W**