Celebrating Solutions Award
Nomination Form

Legal name of organization: WATCH
Year established: 1992

Program nominated for award (if different): _______ Year established: _______

Address: 608 Second Avenue South, Suite 465 Northstar East

City/State/ZIP code: Minneapolis, MN 55402

Contact person: Marna Anderson

Title: Executive Director

Phone number: (612) 341-2747, ext. 5 Fax number: (612) 339-1171

E-mail address: manderson@watchmn.org

Website address: www.watchmn.org

Brief description of the nominated program:
WATCH is a volunteer-based organization dedicated to improving the justice system's response to violence against women and children. Court monitoring is the primary strategy and organizational focus.

Geographical area served: Hennepin County, Minnesota

Is organization tax-exempt under IRS 501(c)(3) guidelines? ☑ yes _____ no

If no, is your organization a public agency/unit of government? _____ yes _____ no

Signature of contact person: Marna Anderson

Date: 9-14-06
The Mary Byron Foundation  
Celebrating Solutions Program Outline

1.) Describe the overall mission of your organization in five sentences or less.

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. WATCH was founded on the belief that courts exist to serve the public and the public has a right to observe and understand what happens there. Public participation in the courts leads to greater accountability.

2.) Describe the most innovative aspects of the program you are nominating.

Since 1993, WATCH has been a regular presence in Hennepin County (Minneapolis, Minnesota) courtrooms monitoring cases of domestic violence, child abuse and sexual assault. WATCH’s observations of the criminal justice system repeatedly raise concerns about its effectiveness in handling crimes against women and children. The presence of observers in the courtroom can promote accountability and serve as a strong reminder that the public has a vested interest in what happens there. By documenting the court’s response, reporting on its observations, and advocating for systemic improvements, court monitoring advances justice for victims of crime.

As the first court monitoring organization in the country focused on violence against women, WATCH quickly became a national model. After thirteen years of monitoring, WATCH is a leader in an ever-expanding effort to involve the public in improving the courts.

WATCH’s primary strategy for realizing its mission is daily monitoring of court proceedings and targeted research projects to examine patterns and trends that impede women’s safety. As daily observers of court proceedings, court monitoring groups are in a unique position to make recommendations for change. WATCH monitors cases in family court, domestic violence court and criminal court. In addition, we respond to requests from criminal justice personnel and advocates who ask that we monitor and/or investigate particular cases related to WATCH’s mission. Because WATCH monitors do not play a role in individual cases, and we are an independent entity, we can make recommendations that those closer to the cases sometimes cannot. When systemic, rather than individual, problems are identified, WATCH works with senior court staff and other community groups to strategize effective systemic solutions.

Because many professionals who come in contact with the courts see us as allies in promoting change, they provide us with information about ongoing problems. We then devise research projects targeting specific courts or types of hearings to document progress, enumerate successes and challenges and point the way to system improvements. In the past two years, WATCH completed the following targeted projects: reviewed the charging decisions in sexual assault cases; closely examined domestic violence court (and compared its effectiveness now to when we studied it in 2001), reviewed order for protection hearings; and studied the effect of victim impact statements. The specific outcomes of these projects provide detailed evidence of court monitoring’s effectiveness.
Building on these successes, WATCH is currently conducting a project, described below, to analyze the effectiveness of new legislation.

**Domestic assault strangulation project**
In 2005, a bill passed the Minnesota legislature that makes strangulation during a domestic assault a felony. Prior to this, most cases of strangulation were charged as misdemeanors, even though strangulation is one of the most lethal forms of domestic violence, and, according to the Hennepin County Fatality Review Team and others, is frequently a precursor to domestic homicide.

WATCH supported the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women’s legislative initiative to introduce and pass this law, and it went into effect almost a year ago. Since then, we have been working closely with probation, advocacy groups, and prosecutors to track these cases in Hennepin County and document the impact of the law in keeping victims safe.

WATCH court monitors find it is still common to see misdemeanor cases involving alleged strangulation. When this occurs, WATCH makes immediate contact with the prosecuting attorney, to question the charges and encourage they be upgraded if possible.

Challenges are two-fold. The statutory language is very specific, and intent to “impede normal breathing or circulation of the blood” must be proved. In addition, police or medical personnel may not be adequately trained in providing sufficiently detailed documentation of strangulation or related injuries. In some cases, a defendant may be charged with a felony, but plead guilty to a misdemeanor. So while the law is definitely an improvement, many barriers still remain for victims of strangulation.

**Our targeted review of six months of domestic strangulation cases will look at how the legislation is being implemented around the state.** In addition to paying close attention to cases heard in Hennepin County during the period, WATCH is coordinating information gathering with advocacy groups through the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women. The Coalition’s member programs serve women across the state and we want to learn what is occurring in other counties, identify trends and make comparisons. With this additional data, we will have a much clearer picture of how to proceed with policy makers, whether that means statutory language changes, additional training requirements, or other measures.

**Public engagement**
A key vehicle for communicating with the justice system and the broader public is the organization’s quarterly newsletter *WATCH Post*. In it we publish articles on current court and public policy issues, excerpts from monitoring notes, offender chronologies which detail a repeat abuser’s history through the criminal justice system, results of research projects, and summaries of formal reports.

The April 2006 *WATCH Post* focused on sexual assault cases, including the jurisdictional issues involved in adjudicating cases involving American Indian people or occurring on tribal lands. Family Court was the subject of the January 2006 issue, and those articles covered a lack of consistency as well as the suspicious attitudes and harsh treatment women sometimes receive from judges. That issue prompted many discussions among court personnel, some of whom disagreed with our analysis, and others who praised our forthrightness and clarity. The August issue included a summary of a collaborative project on the effects of victim impact.
statements on judges’ sentencing decisions and a summary of our 2006 study of domestic violence court.

It can be difficult to bring media attention to violence against women and children in the absence of a high profile murder or court decision. WATCH works diligently with local media to keep this issue in the forefront of the public’s attention, and submits press releases and opinion pieces to local papers. In May, WATCH staff was interviewed by WCCO-TV regarding judicial conduct and complaints. We released our report Victim Impact Statements—Do They Matter? in conjunction with National Night Out on August 1 and received coverage from Fox 9 News, Minnesota Public Radio, the Minneapolis Star Tribune the St. Paul Pioneer Press and Suburban Community Cable.

National technical assistance and training
WATCH strives to ensure that court monitoring is recognized as a critical component of an effective justice system, and that court monitoring projects across the country are well-connected to other programs dedicated to the same goals. In 2006 WATCH is working to:

- build stronger relationships among court monitoring groups
- increase the number of jurisdictions employing court monitoring to improve their justice systems
- strengthen the relationships between court monitoring groups and other organizations committed to addressing violence against women through more effective coordination and ongoing evaluation of their efforts
- assist existing and emerging programs to be more effective

3.) Describe your program’s implementation. What barriers did your organization have to overcome? How did you marshal the necessary resources for implementation?

In November 1991, Jean Broderick was raped and murdered in her home by a recently paroled sex offender. In response, a group of community women set out to find a way to address what they saw as a lax, “revolving door” justice system. Patterned after Mothers Against Drunk Driving, WATCH set out to bring a public eye to justice by training volunteers to monitor court hearings and report on what they saw.

To lay the groundwork, WATCH founders spent the first year meeting with justice system personnel and advocacy groups to identify the most pressing concerns with these cases, as well as to promote the idea of public involvement and public accountability of the courts. On an ongoing basis, WATCH considers it critically important to maintain constructive relationships with individuals and organizations dedicated to the same goals. These relationships form the basis of our power to command attention and action for our recommendations.

The first volunteers entered Hennepin County courts in March 1993 and WATCH has had a daily presence there since. In collaboration with women’s advocacy groups and supportive individuals within the justice system, WATCH has put forward initiatives to improve the system’s response to cases of domestic and sexual violence against women and children. Sometimes behind the scenes, sometimes with the support of the bench, sometimes
employing public pressure and targeted media attention, WATCH has strategically influenced Hennepin County courts to do a better job ensuring women’s safety.

4.) How do you know your program works? Please cite two examples.

One way WATCH evaluates its impact is through the testimonies of advocates, court personnel, prosecutors, and judges. For example, last spring, a judge contacted WATCH after we had made inquiries into how a case was handled. He captured WATCH’s role when he said, “I think that contacts from you [to the city attorney’s office] can in many ways be much more effective than contacts from us. Sometimes they view us as just being overly critical or pushing them or interfering with their areas of discretion. So, I really appreciate you doing that.”

Another way we document our impact is through the results of special projects. In October 2004, WATCH completed its review of 300 order for protection (OFP) hearings held in Hennepin County in the spring of that year. The report, which can be found at www.watchmn.org, contains extensive recommendations for improving OFP proceedings.

The Hennepin County Family Violence Coordinating Council (FVCC) and its Civil Committee are multi-disciplinary groups with primary responsibility for instituting change within the civil justice system. The Civil Committee adopted our recommendations as its annual work plan and the chair recently enumerated ten changes that have resulted.

One that directly relates to women’s safety is an improvement in the monitored waiting rooms (which separate OFP petitioners and respondents who are waiting to be called for hearings). Upon WATCH’s recommendation, the county has made CDs and written information explaining the OFP process available in six languages in both waiting rooms. Another is the establishment of an agreement with all law enforcement agencies in the county for recovering firearms surrendered as a result of orders for protection being issued.

In 2004 WATCH was recognized by the Minnesota Women's Consortium as an exemplary organization working for justice and also received a Community Leadership award from the Hennepin County Attorney's office. In 1999, we received the Ms Foundation for Women’s Women of Vision award.

5.) Who are your key partners? What are their roles?

WATCH collaborates with other groups to achieve success. Key partnerships include: Battered Women’s Legal Advocacy Project; Battered Women’s Justice Project; Casa de Esperanza; Domestic Abuse Project; Hennepin County Bar Association; Hennepin County Domestic Assault Service Center; Hennepin County Family Violence Coordinating Council; Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights; Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault; Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women; Minnesota Women’s Consortium; and the Sheila Wellstone Institute.

Partnerships take many forms, for example: a staff member of Casa de Esperanza joined WATCH’s board to assist us to become more aware of specific barriers facing Latino families in the justice system; the Domestic Abuse Project and Domestic Abuse Service
Center frequently contact WATCH about specific cases which require monitoring, as well as larger trends requiring in-depth documentation via special monitoring projects. With the Hennepin County Bar Association and Minneapolis League of Women Voters, WATCH co-sponsors judicial election forums to educate the community about judicial elections and candidates. WATCH and the Battered Women’s Justice Project co-sponsor training sessions and conferences aimed at strengthening the coordinated community response to domestic violence. WATCH contributes to policy initiatives of the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women and the Minnesota Coalition against Sexual Assault and coordinates research projects with their member programs around the state.

6.) Could/should your program be replicated in other areas of the country? How and why?

Yes. WATCH has assisted numerous groups to adapt or replicate our program.

In 2001 WATCH published the start-up manual Developing a Court Monitoring Program to guide others interested in using court monitoring as a tool for improving the justice system’s response to cases of violence against women. Since that publication, WATCH has distributed over 400 manuals, responded to numerous inquires for training, and provided phone and on-site technical assistance to groups around the country and other countries as well.

In the past year and a half, groups or individuals representing seventeen states have contacted WATCH for information about starting a court monitoring program. The groups are interested in starting a monitoring project to address judicial accountability and demeanor, to improve the situation for battered women in family and criminal courts, to increase the conviction rates of batterers and sex offenders, and to gather data on the experience of victims in the courtroom. The majority of callers looking for WATCH’s assistance represent battered women’s shelters, statewide coalitions, and members of coordinated community response teams.

A revised training manual will be available in September 2006. With it, WATCH is launching outreach efforts to promote court monitoring across the country as an effective systems change strategy. In addition to the training manual and technical assistance to court monitoring programs, WATCH is initiating e-mail and web-based information sharing among monitoring groups across the country. We are currently pursuing funding options for this expansion, including through the federal Office of Violence against Women.
WATCH

Finalist for the *Celebrating Solutions Award*

**Attachments and supplemental information**

1) Letters of support from the following three organizations are included as attachments: the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women, a partnering organization; the Domestic Abuse Project, a victim services organization; and Minneapolis Mayor R. T. Rybak, an elected official.

2) WATCH's 501©3 letter is attached.

3) Last year's program budget is attached.

4)

a) In general, WATCH does not have "clients" in the traditional sense of many nonprofits. However, through our work we seek to serve victims of crime, the Hennepin County Criminal Justice System, and the public. WATCH serves victims of crime in general by working for a criminal justice system that holds perpetrators of violence accountable and views the safety of the victim and the public as paramount. We serve the Hennepin County Criminal Justice System by reporting back on the effectiveness and efficiency of system operations and making recommendations for improvement. And we serve the larger community by educating the public in order to create a better understanding of the courts and issues of justice, and by making the judicial system more accessible and accountable to the public. The population of Hennepin County is 1.1 million.

b) Past awards and recognition include the following:
   
   - *Community Leadership* award, Hennepin County Attorney’s Office, 2004
   - Recognized by the Minnesota Women’s Consortium as an exemplary organization working for justice, 2004
   - Featured in *50 Strategies to Prevent Domestic Violence*, National Crime Prevention Council, 2002
   - *Gloria Steinem Women of Vision* award, MS Foundation, 1999

c) Given the resources, we would like our national replication to include regional-based trainings and technical assistance. This would allow jurisdictions in close proximity to one another the opportunity to work collectively to improve system policies and procedures. We also see the need to coordinate monitoring projects that could be conducted in multiple jurisdictions around the country to compare court system practices and learn from the jurisdictions most effective in holding abusers accountable. A joint nationwide monitoring project could lead public policy changes and increased awareness on domestic violence.

**Responses to questions**

1) Every weekday, two to five volunteers monitor Hennepin County courts. They carry WATCH's signature red clipboards to serve as a reminder to members of the justice system that they are accountable to the public they serve. WATCH
recruits volunteers to ensure diverse perspectives. Shahidah Maayif, WATCH's volunteer coordinator, is responsible for recruitment, training and supervision of volunteers and interns. She recruits from the community colleges, state universities, law schools, service organizations and organizations serving communities of color. WATCH holds three volunteer trainings per year. In 2006, ninety-one volunteers donated 2,358 hours monitoring 5,945 hearings. Based on our experience thus far, we do not anticipate a shortage of volunteers.

2) WATCH's early monitoring forms asked volunteers for their general impressions of courtroom proceedings. Over the years, we have gathered more specific information such as the case outcome, whether or not an interpreter was requested and available, whether or not the hearing started on time, the apparent race of the defendant and victim, and the demeanor of court personnel. This provides more information for us to identify problematic trends that we can then address through a more targeted monitoring effort.

3) Attached are reports of the three most recent monitoring projects WATCH has conducted: Effect of Victim Impact Statements on Sentencing; Domestic Violence Court; and The Impact of Minnesota's Felony Strangulation Law. All of our reports are available at our website: www.watchmn.org.

4) The two most recent issues of the WATCH Post are included as attachments, along with our revised training manual Developing a Court Monitoring Program.

5) We recommend that court monitoring groups work to develop relationships with local media by providing information on domestic violence and the effectiveness of court monitoring. We also encourage groups to discuss how cases of domestic violence are handled in the media. This includes calling when the coverage is well done and making suggestions about how to improve coverage that is misleading or sensational. We recommend that court monitoring groups approach the media cautiously. Our training manual includes a section on media relations that provides examples of how and when to use media, including sample media materials and coverage WATCH has received.
## WATCH National Expansion & Replication Program Budget

**Fiscal Year 2007 (July 1, 1006 to June 30, 2007)**

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September 14, 2006

The Mary Byron Foundation
10401 Linn Station Road
Louisville, Kentucky 40223-3842

Dear Selection Committee:

I am writing to nominate WATCH, a court monitoring organization, for a Celebrating Solutions award. Operating since 1992, WATCH is the first court monitoring organization in the U.S. focused on cases of violence against women and children. As Managing Attorney of the Victim Services Division of the Hennepin County Attorney’s Office, I see the positive influence court monitors have on the justice system. WATCH deserves to be recognized for their innovative program and I thank you for your careful consideration of this nomination.

In addition to the impact of daily monitoring, WATCH conducts special monitoring projects which help to identify gaps in the system that hinder victim safety and offender accountability. Victim advocates and county attorneys appreciate the presence of courtroom monitors; the presence of WATCH monitors can influence individual cases, inform public policy, and increase public awareness on the prevalence of domestic violence in our community. Additionally, WATCH promotes its court monitoring model around the country as an effective tool to improve the justice system.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to nominate WATCH for the Mary Byron Foundation’s Celebrating Solutions award. Please feel free to contact me at 612-348-5355 if you would like additional information.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Lolita Ulloa
Managing Attorney
Victim Services Division

cc: Marna Anderson, WATCH Executive Director
May 1, 2007

The Mary Byron Foundation
10401 Linn Station Road
Louisville, Kentucky 40223-3842

Dear Selection Committee:

I am writing to provide a letter of support for WATCH, a court monitoring organization, for a Celebrating Solutions award. Operating since 1992, WATCH is the first court monitoring organization in the U.S. focused on cases of violence against women and children. As Director of the Domestic Abuse Project, I consider WATCH a critical ally in efforts to monitor the court system to enhance victim safety and defendant accountability.

Founded in 1979, the Domestic Abuse Project provides therapy and criminal court legal advocacy services to more than 8,000 men, women and children a year in Minneapolis, MN. DAP is a recognized leader in the field of domestic violence, being the first domestic abuse therapy program in Minnesota and having the oldest, most documented and researched criminal justice intervention project in the country (National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Domestic Violence: State of the Art Court Practices, 1992). Based on a nineteen year partnership with Jeff Edleson, Ph.D., University of Minnesota School of Social Work, DAP has engaged in research and evaluation testing the effectiveness of our programs in ending domestic violence. This documentation has resulted in more than 13 articles in professional journals and the production of manuals for practitioners for work with abusive men, battered women, child witnesses of domestic violence (4-18 years old), abusive adolescent boys, women who use violence and evaluation of domestic violence programs. These manuals have been disseminated around the world and are responsible for therapy groups in Israel, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Moldova, Rumania, Albania and in the United States.

I provide all the above background, to demonstrate over 28 years of work in our community to create a coordinating community response to domestic violence. Before the inception of WATCH, DAP advocates had to confront individual judges about actions that were uninformed or even dangerous in domestic assault cases. When the judge failed to respond to feedback, as the director of DAP I would approach the chief judge with our concerns. If the chief judge's assessment agreed with our concerns, he/she would talk with the individual judge. In too many cases this role of system monitoring resulted in retaliation in small and significant ways. Advocates would be confronted with comments like, "I suppose if I don't watch what I say the advocate will report me", or the next battered woman would be denied her order for protection because the advocate supporting her was the "DAP advocate". Our concerns about patterns of behavior were dismissed as "anecdotal information" based on a few battered women.

As an independent organization, WATCH has been extremely successful at documenting domestic assault cases, their outcomes and systems players involved. This information is chronicled in a public newsletter to inform the public about the workings of our system, as well as to hold our system accountable for their actions or failure to act. WATCH has also researched best practices in other jurisdictions that can be viewed as potential solutions and highlighted them under recommendations. Such thorough documentation and evaluation has resulted in change. This change has occurred at the individual, system and public
policy levels. WATCH has also documented successes in our court system. In 2006 Minnesota passed legislation making strangulation during a domestic assault a felony level offense. WATCH was able to document the successful implementation of this statute from effective police reports through successful prosecution.

As director of DAP, I have the opportunity to be on research grant review panels for the Office of Violence Against Women at the National Institute of Justice. From that national vantage point, I know the work of WATCH is innovative and unique. Based on conversations with my colleagues nationally, I know WATCH is frequently sought after to provide technical assistance and support to programs across the country who are attempting to create court monitoring programs.

I thank you for the opportunity to acknowledge and recommend the wonderful work of WATCH. What WATCH has contributed to the field of domestic violence and to the individual safety of scores of battered women and their children through their systems change work locally and nationally cannot be underestimated. WATCH is more than deserving of this award and is the SOLUTION to a closed system we had been unable to penetrate for two decades. Please recognize their contributions by awarding them this support so they have the increased capacity to reach more communities with their tools.

Sincerely,

Carol Arthur
Executive Director
612-874-7063, ext. 209
carthur@mnadap.org
May 4, 2007

The Mary Byron Foundation
10401 Linn Station Road
Louisville, Kentucky 40223-3842

Dear Selection Committee:

I understand that WATCH, a court monitoring organization based in Minneapolis, has been selected as a finalist for your Celebrating Solutions award. As Mayor of Minneapolis, I enthusiastically endorse your choice; as a citizen of Hennepin County, where WATCH is a credible and respected presence in the courthouse, I gratefully encourage your support.

WATCH’s presence in Hennepin County courtrooms, coupled with responsible research and recommendations, has helped create a justice system that does a better job of protecting victims of domestic violence and holding abusers accountable for their actions. For example, WATCH was instrumental in establishing the Domestic Violence Court, a specialized court for misdemeanor assaults. In the seven years that this court has been in existence, dismissal rates for domestic assaults have been reduced by 28%. Thanks to WATCH, the DV court judges clearly explain no contact orders to defendants, clerks make a daily statement regarding courtroom delays, and deputies are empowered to arrest anyone who violates a no-contact order in the courtroom.

WATCH’s 2004 monitoring of order for protection court has also led to improved services for individuals with English as a second language. At WATCH’s recommendation, the courts provide a written and audio description of civil court proceedings in nine languages and the Minnesota Supreme Court has agreed to translate the order for protection forms into the nine most commonly spoken languages in our county.

WATCH works collaboratively with other non-profit organizations, as well as city and county agencies, to identify gaps in the system that prevent safety and protection of battered women and their children. Their reports offer responsible solutions instead of criticism and blame. Because of this measured and collaborative approach, WATCH was able to assemble the first Hennepin County Fatality Review Team, and to get it funded at the state legislature.

WATCH’s approach to changing the justice system is innovative, yet very simple. The public’s presence serves to hold officials accountable for their decisions and actions. This is a model that WATCH is now replicating throughout the country with its National Association of Court Monitoring Programs.

As Mayor of Minneapolis, I’m proud to claim WATCH as one of our many homegrown success stories, and hope that you will honor their accomplishments with a Celebrating Solutions award.

Sincerely,

Mayor R. T. Rybak
City of Minneapolis
cc: Marna Anderson, WATCH Executive Director
May 4, 2007

The Mary Byron Foundation
10401 Linn Station Road
Louisville, Kentucky 40223-3842

Dear Selection Committee:

I am writing on behalf of WATCH, a finalist for the Celebrating Solutions award. I wholeheartedly support the work of WATCH and encourage you to recognize their innovative approach to improving the justice system for battered women and their children.

The Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women (MCBW) is a statewide membership organization of 95 local, regional, and statewide programs advocating on behalf of battered women and their children. Founded in 1978 to provide a statewide voice for battered women, Coalition member programs include shelters and safe homes, community advocacy programs, criminal justice intervention projects, state and national training and technical assistance organizations addressing domestic violence and organizations focused on homelessness and human rights advocacy.

As the first court monitoring organization in the U.S. to focus on crimes of violence against women and as an active member of the Coalition, WATCH provides valuable information to our membership regarding the experiences of battered women in Hennepin County courts, the largest county in our state. The anecdotal information and research data compiled by WATCH has served MCBW as we pursue public policy initiatives to strengthen domestic abuse laws and increase penalties for repeat abusers in Minnesota. In addition, WATCH provides skilled leadership statewide on using court monitoring as an effective tool in changing institutional policy and practice to increase safety for victims and hold offenders accountable.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to recommend WATCH for this award.

Sincerely,

Cynthia K. Cook, Executive Director