

## DIVERSITY EQUITY AND INCLUSION 2021

### ANNUAL REPORT

The spring of 2020 stirred an awakening in the hearts and minds of the women leaders in our AAUW Branch. The seemingly endless stream of episodes of Racial and social injustices which peppered across our media screens touched us in a way that compelled us to ask, “Why?” We not only began to examine the status of equity in our nation, but we questioned the diversity within our organization. It became evident that we needed to look at our branch in terms of inclusion.

We concluded that the committee, formerly known as “The Diversity Committee”, needed to evolve into something more than it had been before. The focus of the mission of the committee had to be reexamined and so a new Mission Statement was constructed. That mission statement is summarized below.

“ The Poughkeepsie Branch of AAUW, Inc. encourages and supports a diverse and inclusive membership. Through its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, we commit to create open and safe dialog opportunities for social justice, bias, equity and culture issues. The focus will be to dissolve the barriers that limit the aspirations of women and girls.”

Within its first two meetings, it became clear to the committee that the title “Diversity Committee” was limiting. The membership needed the group to achieve objectives far beyond appreciating diversity. After exploring the orientation of both the National and State organizations, it was agreed to expand the title of the committee to include equity and inclusion. The executive board of our branch agreed to rename the committee “The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee”.

The call for committee membership volunteers yielded 30 interested participants and far more supporters. At present, 26 very active members of the committee remain. Committee members are connected in “Pods” to maintain connections and initiative support. Meetings are held monthly (the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday) and are open to anyone who wishes to attend. Members stay informed through both the pod system and through regular minutes reports.

A set of goals and objectives have been constructed by the committee. These goals inspire our activities and initiatives. They include the following.

1. To create abundant, welcoming spaces and opportunities within the membership community
2. To form community connections which further the AAUW mission and serve as a reliable source for social justice
3. To provide educational resources and information to membership and others concerning diversity, equity and inclusion
4. To highlight and support community progress in the areas of diversity, equity and inclusion with the objective of being allies in pursuit of social justice

Committee plans include several initiatives.

1. The “Sum of Us”, by Heather McGhee, book discussion. This opportunity for open dialog has become a forum for the discussion of ideas and experiences as well as an provide insight into our nation’s history.

2. The committee is collaborating with Dutchess Community College through a student mentoring program.
3. Connections with various LGBTQ+ communities are being investigated.
4. A project to acknowledge the various cultural celebrations within our communities has begun with collecting information and communicating with community organizations.
5. An ever-expanding library of information, organization connections and literature has begun being organized.
6. The membership has been asked to supply the committee with any community organization to which they have connections so that a list can be kept.
7. A list of minority owned businesses will also be kept to inform the membership.
8. Periodic discussion circles that offer the opportunity to dialog about current related events and/or deal with clarifying history or social issues.
9. The committee plans to work with the membership committee to create a more diverse membership and create a wider representation in its membership.

This list of goals has already begun to be fulfilled. Each has a partnership of specific members who lead the initiative and who will lead it to success. We anticipate adding to the list of specific activities in the future.

This new picture of this committee speaks to a spirit of activism and an openness to get involved with the issues of the day. It invites our membership to inform their curiosity and educate themselves concerning the issues relevant to diversity, equity and inclusion. We wish to encourage expressing ideas and cultivating openminded thinking through discussion opportunities.

We are committed to enhancing the reputation of our Branch as an entity which is an organization actively connected to its community in terms of social justice.

Sincerely submitted,

Gwen Higgins, Chair