



**Woman of the Year 2022**

**Jody Miller**

*Chair of the Dutchess County Commission  
on Human Rights*

Jody Miller is the executive director of the Dutchess County Commission on Human Rights, whose mission is defending human rights, bridging differences, and embracing diversity. She is co-founder of the 100 Cups of Coffee Transformative Dialogue Project that supports the conversations that people want to have thereby strengthening community interaction.

Prior to her current role, she served for 16 years as the executive director of the Mediation Center of Dutchess County. During this time, the center became known as a leader in creating cutting edge, diverse mediation programs and other programs that focus on self-determination and collaboration. She worked closely with courts and the community to develop and provide mediation. Mediation grew to include 16 town, village and city courts, Family Court and Surrogate's Court. In partnership with the domestic violence community, Jody and her team created the award winning, nationally known Domestic Violence and Mediation Safety Project, the first collaborative project of its kind. New initiatives included the Coalition on Elder Abuse in Dutchess County and the Anti-Bullying Initiative.

Jody has been an adjunct professor of mediation at the Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra University and is a Fellow with the Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation. She is a certified mediation trainer through the New York State Unified Court System's Office of Alternative Dispute Resolution Programs (ADR).

She has been a presenter at conferences throughout the United States, as well as in Italy, China and the Netherlands. Jody is the 2016 recipient of the Lawrence Cooke Peace Innovator Award from the New York State Dispute Resolution Association.

At this time in our history, Jody's role - especially in 2020 when she steered the community through a series of difficult discussions and issues including police reform - exemplifies AAUW leadership qualities and values. Jody is known for her creative work in developing and guiding programs providing a voice for women to move toward self-determination. Her work during the last 2 years on the Human Rights Commission directing community dialog is the essence of leadership as exemplified by AAUW.

# AAUW Woman of the Year

April 9, 2022

Jody Miller

Good afternoon. Thank you, Lara for that lovely introduction. Thank you to the Woman of the Year Committee and AAUW – Poughkeepsie Branch, for this incredible honor. On Dec. 22, as I was about to leave the office for vacation, I answered one last call – from Mary Lou Davis (from AAUW). She explained who she was and why she was calling – and I think for the first time in my life I was completely without any words-silence. I think she finally said something like, ‘Hello, are you there?’”

There are many people to thank. I would like to thank the Commission on Human Rights members who are here today and ask them to please stand and be recognized. It is through our work together since the Commission was re-established in 2016 by the County Executive and the DC legislature that I accept this award. The Commission members have been a joy and honor to work with over these past 5.5 years as we have born witness to the rise in acts of discrimination and hate. We have worked to respond in ways that empower people, support them and build community. Whether creating educational programs, social media campaigns, statements, listening sessions, dialogues and among others, I thank our Commission members for their commitment and tireless work on behalf of human rights in Dutchess County.

I’d like to thank my Mediation Center ‘family’ for being here today. I’ve spent most of my career in the mediation and conflict resolution field and our work together over many years has formed how I view the world and taught me a way of being that is an integral part of who I am. The staff, board and mediators have been an incredible group to be a part of.

Thank you to my Dutchess County colleagues who are here today. The care and dedication with which you do your work shows every day.

Thank you to my friends and family: Dear friends, Anne, Lorna, Lara, (Toni, Judy) all strong, remarkable accomplished women – I am in awe of each of you. I am grateful for your friendship and support.

To my children, Ashley and Cody, and their partners, Victoria and Mike. My brother, Chris and his wife Alyssa (who had to work today) and their children Madison, Carter, and Reagan. And I thank my mother, Gloria, who has been there with support and encouragement. I love you all.

Lastly, to my grandparents Jack & Esther Walton and my friend Edith Leeser – all of whom are with me in spirit – your influence on my life cannot be understated. My grandparents, who helped shape my strong identity. My friend Edith, who passed in 2020 at 95, who brought people together to celebrate life - last week we gathered to remember her with laughter and joy.

To work on human rights in Dutchess County – the home of Eleanor Roosevelt – is an honor and humbling. A woman of strength, character, courage, skill, and kindness, one of her greatest achievements was to lead more than 50 nations over 2 years to create the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) the first document of its kind that said human rights are inherent to all people. She became the first chair of the United Nation’s Human Rights Commission. She continued to work for human rights for the rest of her life. One of the first events that the Commission held upon its reestablishment was to celebrate International Human Rights Day, Dec. 10 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in collaboration with the FDR Presidential Library and Museum, Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill and United Nations Association – Mid Hudson Valley.

Human Rights is big – where to begin? It was something I thought about a lot as the Commission was being reestablished. One of Eleanor’s most famous quotes helped, “Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places

where every man, woman, and child seek equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.”

What would that look like right here in Dutchess County?

It wouldn't be long before our community would tell us what human rights meant – and our job was to listen. From the first call in August 2016 about anti-Semitic flyers posted in NE Dutchess County blaming Jews for 9/11, the call from a college administrator because a Muslim college student experienced threatening messages at their home, the first listening session where we learned that Latino students were being taunted and bullied because they were immigrants. What this meant for people that spoke with us is that they could tell their story to someone 'official,' and our role was to check in with them about what they wanted to see happen. Often it was to have the experience documented but take no action. We could document these acts of hate and bias. Other times we could help the person connect to a resource they were unaware of. When Pride flags were ripped down from businesses, we convened a listening session in the community. One result was to connect those affected to another resource – in this case the NYS Hate Crimes Taskforce. When the Unite the Right Rally was held in Charlottesville, we could convene a 100 Cups of Coffee dialogue for people to come together and process what this rally meant for them – and how they could go forward. When the calls about hate continued to come in, we collaborated with Orange and Ulster County Human Rights, to create a speaker Series, “Doing More Than Nothing About Hate & Discrimination: We are All in This Together,” because we understood the impact that hateful acts can have on a community. We sought to empower people affected by hate and discrimination, to educate about these issues and what helps (Speaker Series recordings are on our webpage, blue box events). When a Nazi flag was hung in a bedroom window and person after person called and told us they were angry and wanted it down, we convened a dialogue between local stakeholders to discuss their goal of the flag being taken down. It was during that conversation that a person in the group said he knew the person who had hung the flag and he could have a conversation with him. That conversation resulted in the flag, after a year of hanging in that window (this began before COVID and continued), the flag came down. These are a few examples of what human rights in small places close to home mean to us.

There is another Eleanor quote that I think about: “It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.”

During the first year of Covid, 2020, we learned about the impact on the Asian-American community, including someone who was rushed through a professional consultation because the person 'didn't want to catch Covid.' Last year, after 6 Asian-American women were murdered in GA and anti-Asian hate crimes had risen more than 150%, we met with local members of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community. We listened. We heard about people being spit on while walking down the street, while standing in a grocery line 6 ft. apart were told to 'get away from me' or received angry stares. We invited people to be speakers at our Speaker Series resulting in the 2 part Speaker Series, Anti-Asian Hate: Covid, Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders and Creating a Caring Community, the title created by the speakers themselves. We were asked about the definition of a hate crime, a question that had been asked by others who had been targets of hate and bias. We collaborated with the DA's office, NYS Police, the DC Sheriff's Office and the Jewish Federation to create a Hate Crime webinar for the public. We held virtual bystander intervention trainings because people who had been targeted told us that was something that helped when they had found these trainings on their own. These are some of the ways that we work to light a candle in the darkness.

And sometimes human rights work is behind the scenes to help people advance their work by connecting people or supporting access. A meeting of immigrant parents and service providers to learn about services for children with disabilities – working with the planning group and supporting their leadership, we were asked to help with accessing space so that the meeting could be held at a location that parents could walk to. For a Ramadan event organized by All for One, a connection to the person that could help with parking. This too, is human rights in small places close to home.

This year the Commission is learning more about housing – given the crisis that we are in. I receive more calls from people about housing than I ever have. People with disabilities losing their housing due to rent increases who cannot find another place to go that is affordable and accessible. Child care workers, home health aides, restaurant and retail workers. The county just released a housing study and I encourage you to learn more about this important issue. A question: how does your town or village zoning allow people in or keep people out through the type of housing that's allowed? This too, is human rights in small places close to home.

When I think about how Eleanor Roosevelt got it done - the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) done, after WWII and on the precipice of the Cold War, it is remarkable. Yes, she convened several work sessions with many meetings over that two-year period. And yet, after long days of meetings, she would invite people for dinner or tea. She kept talking with them, engaging with them, including those who were challenging. I'm certain that these dinners and teas were just as important as the formal meetings to the success of the UDHR.

We don't need have international platform to stand up for human rights. Each of us has influence – that we can use for good. Whether it be through one-on-one conversations, within or between groups, or in myriad other ways, we each can use our influence to address these challenges – human rights in small places close to home.

I leave you with the Eleanor Roosevelt quote hanging in my office, “The Way to Begin is to Begin.”

Thank you.

## Dutchess County Commission on Human Rights Director Honored with “Woman of the Year” Award

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### Dutchess County Commission on Human Rights Director Honored with “Woman of the Year” Award

Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro congratulates Jody Miller, Executive Director of the Dutchess County Commission on Human Rights, who has been honored as 2022 Woman of the Year by the American Association of University Women (AAUW). Each year, AAUW’s Poughkeepsie Branch selects a local woman to honor as the Woman of the Year. This award is given to women who exemplify the goals stated in AAUW’s mission statement, which is to advance gender equity for women and girls through research, education, and advocacy.

Dutchess County Executive Marcus J. Molinaro said, “Congratulations to Jody Miller on this well-deserved award. She has been instrumental in creating positive change in our community. Jody and the entire Commission on Human Rights strive every day to bring equality to all and make a better future for generations to come. Thank you to Jody for all she does to help keep our community strong and united.”

Jody Miller serves as the Executive Director of the Dutchess County Commission on Human Rights, whose mission is defending human rights, bridging differences, and embracing diversity. She was appointed to this position by County Executive Molinaro in 2016 and was instrumental in the reconstruction of the Human Rights Commission. Prior to her current role, she served for sixteen years as the Executive Director of the Mediation Center of Dutchess County, where she helped create many new and diverse mediation programs that are utilized in many courts. She also headed new initiatives including the Coalition on Elder Abuse in Dutchess County and the Anti-Bullying initiative. Jody is a certified mediation trainer through New York State Unified Court System’s Office of Alternative Dispute Resolution Programs (ADR) and has been a presenter at many conferences around the globe.



*The American Association of University Women’s  
2022 “Woman of the Year” Award Recipient Jody Miller*

AAUW chose Ms. Miller to be the 2022 Woman of the Year due to her hard work and compassion. Over the past few years, Miller has steered the community through a series of discussion topics such as police reform as well as coordinated events such as the “United Against Hate March” which called for equality and inclusion for all. Her work leading the Commission’s community dialogue virtual events over the past two years demonstrates the essence of leadership that AAUW strives for.

Ms. Miller said, “I am honored to be recognized by such an impactful organization as the American Association of University Women. I want to thank the Dutchess County Commission on Human Rights for their amazing

work where we have created programs and events that have supported and strengthened our community. With the state our country and world are in, it is more important than ever to join together and work to make the world a more inclusive place for all.”

The American Association of University Women, Poughkeepsie Branch was founded in 1925 and has been active in the areas of education, international understanding, community needs, the arts, and the status of women since. The branch promotes education in many ways such as supporting two-yearly Dutchess Community College scholarships for female students who plan to continue to a four-year degree.

To learn more about the Dutchess County Commission on Human Rights visit: [dutchessny.gov/humanrights](https://dutchessny.gov/humanrights).