

Awareness Harmony Acceptance
Advocates



AHA Advocate Talk: Holly Kearl



Samantha Ellison: How did American Association of University Women get started and can you talk a little about AAUW's mission?

Holly Kearl: [AAUW began](#) in 1881. It was founded by college-educated women, which was rare at that time, who wanted to help more women obtain college degrees and find equity in their workplace after graduation. More than 130 years later, that is largely what AAUW continues to do. We address gender inequality in the workplace and in schools (K-12 and colleges).

SE: What programs and services does AAUW provide? Could you also talk to us about **Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School**.

HK: AAUW is unique because it has [so many departments](#) and does so much good work. Here are a few examples:

Through our Fellowships & Grants department, we award millions of dollars each year to help people receiving secondary degrees or groups doing community activism.

In our public policy department, we lobby on Capitol Hill and on the local level across the country to promote policies and laws that are good for girls and women, such as the Paycheck Fairness Act.

Our Leadership Programs has many programs aimed at college women to encourage them to run for student government, to learn how to negotiate salaries, and to be leaders on their campus. We also host an amazing conference for college women student leaders each year.

In our Legal Advocacy Fund department, we help offset the costs of people in sex discrimination lawsuits who are trying to right a wrong through the legal system.

We also have a robust research department that produces one report each year on various topics.

I co-authored our 2011 [study on sexual harassment in schools](#). Nearly 2,000 students in grades 7-12 reported on their experiences with sexual harassment during the previous school year. 48% had experienced sexual harassment, including 56% of girls and 40% of boys. About 1/3rd also witnessed it happening to someone else. We have a lot of recommendations for what schools can do about this, including having a well-publicized sexual harassment policy, making sure students know what it is and how not to be a harasser, talking to students about their rights and how they can report harassment, and then creating a way for students to report incidents safely, without fear of retaliation.

AAUW also has over 1,000 branches of people who address these issues on the local level. They do local lobbying, help with activities like science or tech camps for girls, and raise money for local scholarship for girls going to college.

SE: If there was one injustice AAUW could help combat or solve in the world what would it be and why?

HK: A core issue for AAUW for more than 100 years has been the gender pay gap. [AAUW research shows](#) that one year out of college, women and men who majored in the same field already experience a disparity in pay. On average, women make \$.77 to every \$1 a man makes. The pay gap impacts women's economic freedom, their ability to pay off student debt, and their ability to afford childcare. It can cause women who are in violent homes to stay if they feel they can't afford to leave because of their low salary.

SE: How can people get involved with AAUW?

HK: There are many ways to get involved. Bring [one of our college programs](#) to your campus. [Become](#) a member. [Donate](#) to help fund our work. Become a [two-minute activist](#) and receive an action alert once a week that allows you to be an activist by only takes up two minutes of your day! [Follow](#) our [social media accounts](#) and engage in dialogue on these issues there.

SE: Where does AAUW get inspiration from?

HK: We listen to the needs of our members. As a member-based organization, every [two years](#) our members vote on what issues AAUW will address. We also pay attention to issues in the news and try to be responsive and participate in dialogue around the timely issues of the day.

SE: If members of AAUW could work with any leaders or organizations who would it be and why?

HK: AAUW already has a pretty good relationship with the Obama administration, members of Congress, and like-minded nonprofits. Sometimes we have a hard time getting our message out though, so perhaps, partnering with a very visible thought leader or celebrity would help.