Superior Court of California
County of Santa Clara

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Young Women's Power Lunch

Valuing the voice, experience and future of young women in the County of Santa Clara

SAN JOSÉ, Calif. (March 29, 2024): The Superior Court of California, County of Santa Clara, welcomed over 100 attendees to this year's Young Women's Power Lunch. The event gathered approximately 80 young women ranging from 8th grade through high school, offering them a unique opportunity to connect with mentors from various fields, including female judicial officers, attorneys, elected officials, and local leaders. As a fitting commemoration of Women's History Month, this event, hosted by the Court's Community Outreach Committee, aimed to foster meaningful connections between high school students and adult mentors, facilitating a two-way learning experience that empowered both mentors and students alike. Over lunch, attendees engaged in small group discussions and networking activities while being inspired by thoughtfully selected speakers who shared their insights and experiences to uplift the youthful audience. Through these exchanges, the event conveyed a powerful message to all participants: the future of women empowerment lies in the ability of women to support each other towards achieving their dreams.

The event commenced with a warm welcome from Hon. Beth McGowen, Presiding Judge. She set the tone early in the program, emphasizing that every possibility awaits the young women in attendance. She reiterated the aim of the event, which is to encourage the young ladies to pursue paths that bring happiness and make them feel strong. In agreement, Cassandra Staff, Program Manager II at the Office of Women's Policy, encouraged everyone to look for the "helpers" in society and to become a person of service, leading with compassion and understanding. The conference room bustled with the rich history and experiences shared as women with a diverse range of experiences came together to bestow encouragement upon young women in pursuit of their goals with courage and confidence as predesignated mentors.

Hon. Julia Alloggiamento, Chair of the Court Community Outreach Committee, eloquently described the atmosphere, emphasizing the undeniable positive energy generated by a room full of amazing, intelligent, and motivated women. She highlighted the event's mission to demonstrate the transformative power of connection, support, and mentorship in overcoming barriers and realizing aspirations, "We are all hear to support one another. Who you are and who you want to be is good enough. Don't listen to the noise. We want to give you a chance to be you. We want to give you a space to breathe. That's what this day is all about."

Addis Arciniega, Program Coordinator and Coach at the Silicon Valley Urban Debate League, delivered an inspiring address, underscoring the importance of resilience, determination, and embracing challenges as opportunities for personal growth. Throughout the event, engaging sessions facilitated meaningful interactions between mentors and participants. Icebreakers, breakout discussions, and a word cloud exercise encouraged attendees to share insights from their personal journeys, explore thought-provoking questions, and envision their aspirations and goals.

Sharan Dhanoa, Director of the South Bay Coalition to End Human Trafficking, delivered a compelling keynote address, shedding light on the critical concept of embracing your authenticity, "Not just one thing or experience in my life led me to where I am today," she affirmed. "Don't be limited by experiences in your life or things that happened to you. There's always time to re-center yourself to find the most authentic version of yourself. We live in a world that moves a mile a minute and when we are given messages that we are not enough, it is really difficult. Please find space just to be you. Find cheerleaders who encourage your authenticity. Be the cheerleader that someone else needs."

The Community Outreach Committee extends its gratitude to it partners who made this day possible, specifically the Office of Women's Policy for sponsoring the lunch, OWP and P-WOW for providing souvenir gift bags, the California Judges Foundation for minor supportive funding, and all of our justice and educational partners who assisted with recruitment and transportation. Finally, thank you to the inspirational women who carved out time in their busy schedules to mentor these young women.

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Figure 1- Attendees in deep conversation with Mentors.

Figure 2- A young woman sharing her response to an ice breaker question.

Figure 3- Cassandra Staff, Program Manager II, Office of Women's Policy

Figure 4- A bustling conference room filled with positivity and encouragement.

Figure 5- Young Women's Power Lunch attendees with their Mentor.

Figure 6- Addis Arciniega, Program Coordinator and Coach at the Silicon Valley Urban Debate League

Figure 7- Sharan Dhanoa, Director of the South Bay Coalition to End Human Trafficking and Hon. Julia Alloggiamento, Chair of the Court's Community Outreach Committee

Figure 8- Students pictured with Hon. Julia Alloggiamento.