



2014 ANNUAL REPORT
Providing advocacy, education, community building

TAPS
25
YEARS!

“It is justice, not charity, that is wanting in the world.”

—MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

WHO WE ARE

Together Against Poverty Society (TAPS) is the largest anti-poverty organization on Vancouver Island. We have a positive impact on people's lives in ways that honour and promote human rights, justice, and a healthy, sustainable community. TAPS is a recognized leader and resource for citizens, community groups, and social agencies attempting to reduce poverty. Our education and advocacy services touch over 4,000 people per year – and we are not yet meeting the needs of all who approach us. We provide services to residents of the Greater Victoria area and adjacent municipalities including the Western Communities, Saanich Peninsula and the Southern Gulf Islands.

TAPS was established and registered as a Society in 1989, receiving charitable tax status in 1994. TAPS is a non-profit society whose membership is open to individuals or groups concerned with the preservation of civil society, the social justice movement, the eradication of poverty, as well as the continuing moral progress of those ideals.

THE PURPOSES OF TAPS

- To better the lifestyle and living conditions of persons on a low income;
- To enable social services and faith-based groups to network for the purpose of helping persons requiring assistance;
- To make the general public aware of the problems persons on low income have and ways in which they could assist in solving these problems;
- To focus a special interest on the welfare of children;
- To educate and inform persons on low income of their rights and to provide a support system assisting such persons;
- To form a network of people in poverty to enable them to solve their own problems;
- To maintain current records of what assistance is available for persons in need and where to obtain this assistance.

WHAT WE DO

- Advocacy services in the areas of income assistance and tenancy including information, summary advice, negotiation and or representation to persons of no, low or fixed income;
- Training for low income persons and other interested community groups and organizations, which then enables them to advocate for themselves or for their members;
- Identify, research and address issues relating to poverty with particular emphasis on those that affect our local community and;
- Work in cooperation with other community groups and social service providers in advancing poverty issues.

Interim Executive Director's Annual Report 2014

TAPS' 25th year in advocacy has been a compelling example of the strength and resilience of this small but mighty organization. TAPS' board, staff, and volunteers have continued the tradition of ensuring the rights of our most vulnerable citizens are protected in what are increasingly inequitable times. 2014 has been witness to a new strategic plan that will guide this organization forward into 2017. As an organization we are committed to meeting the goals of this plan as follows:

1. to provide a consistent, high level of individual legal advocacy services;
2. to engage the board of directors in broader community advocacy;
3. to provide diverse opportunities for volunteers with a wide array of strengths;
4. to heighten the awareness of the circumstances and systemic issues for people living in poverty and undertake to address them; and
5. to ensure the sustainability of TAPS.

This year we have faced organizational staffing challenges resulting from the unforeseen and deeply saddening medical leave of TAPS' Executive Director, Kelly Newhook, in May. As I write this report my thoughts turn to the incredible efforts of Kelly over the past 4 years and to the commitment of TAPS in continuing the path put forward by her leadership. Through this report I extend the sincere wishes and hopes of the entire TAPS' family to Kelly as she works through her recovery.

Following Kelly's leave TAPS benefitted from the interim support of a skilled organizational leader and present board member, Gail Snider. Gail stepped in as Interim ED until September and was assisted in her role by staff advocate, Thea McDonagh. In September, board and staff came together to formulate a strategy to steer the organization and fill Kelly's role. This collaboration led to the board appointment of myself, Stephen Portman, to the role of Interim ED, pending Kelly's return.

Apart from the above, TAPS has witnessed a great deal of frontline changes in staffing. TAPS benefitted from the return of John Cook, following a lengthy medical leave and the organization is happy to have our stalwart tenant advocate back in his office continuing his efforts in representing the tenant community. Zöe Macmillan has taken maternity leave this past year and continues to be connected to our organization as she takes some time out to be with her growing young family. Kim Roberts, past volunteer and Coordinator of the Volunteer Disability Advocacy Project, has left TAPS to continue her work as a legal advocate with the First United Church in Vancouver's downtown

eastside. Thea McDonagh has replaced Kim as the coordinator and continues the good work of this effective and essential community program. TAPS has welcomed another former volunteer into our staff, Raia Melnyk, who is now working as a full time Income Assistance Advocate after completing her law degree this past year at UVIC. Yuka Kurokawa continues in her efforts as a tenant advocate while taking on new responsibilities assisting in the Income Assistance Project.

TAPS is also pleased to have the staffing addition of Jennifer King as our new Employment Standards Legal Advocate. Jen has extensive program development experience and has been with TAPS over the past year as both a practicum student and Canada Summer Jobs Student Advocate. We were fortunate this year to see the return of Ryan Tonkin, former pro bono law student on loan from Harvard, to the TAPS family once again as he completes an independent community effort formulating a pilot Federal Disability Advocacy Project. Lastly, TAPS was given the benefit of support from many students this past year who worked diligently in support of our organization. We thank them. Honorable mention goes out to Victor Ryan, a second year UBC law student who joined TAPS under the Law Foundation funded public interest work placement program. Victor was an enthusiastic advocate for the tenant community over the summer and was instrumental in our efforts to support the wrongfully evicted tenants of View Towers.

TAPS' legal advocates continue to receive stellar advice, training and support from our dedicated and truly amazing legal supervisor, Lisa Cowan. TAPS is profoundly grateful for the important contribution she makes to the quality of this organization's legal advocacy services. Lisa's generous commitment of knowledge, compassion and skill is fundamental to the work of our advocacy.

Over the past year the TAPS' board has been involved in advancing the organization's mandate while ensuring our sustainability. This included two successful fundraising events: the always popular Jazz for TAPS and our bedrock fundraiser Tapas for TAPS hosted by the Heron Rock Bistro. The board has been diligently involved in the guidance of staff reporting and continues to be a leader in building our organizational momentum.

The very heart and soul of TAPS remains our committed volunteers. Daily I am reminded of the incredible dedication, enthusiasm, and passion of the people who give their labour freely in order to enable TAPS to exist as we do in the struggle to promote the interest of people living in poverty. Our volunteers continue to be guided by Heidi, whose tireless effort deserves every acknowledgement that can be brought forth. Heidi continues to do an incredible job of recruiting, retaining and supporting our volunteers while also organizing all of our very successful and well-attended volunteer appreciation events, such as the summer BBQ, special Chinese lunch and "holiday turkey dinner".

TAPS continues to deliver Public Legal Education presentations to service providers and clients in Greater Victoria. These presentations play a vital role in disseminating information about clients' legal rights and responsibilities with respect to income assistance, tenancy and employment standards. TAPS also continued to actively participate in community events in an effort to educate the public about the challenges facing people living in poverty.

I am pleased to report that TAPS reached its budget goals again this year. I want to thank the Law Foundation for their continued support of TAPS' work. I also want to thank the Province of British Columbia who directly supports our Tenant Legal Advocacy Project through Community Gaming

Grants. In addition, I want to thank the United Way of Greater Victoria, whose ongoing funding is vital to the success of our legal advocacy programs. This year we are incredibly fortunate to benefit from the partnership of the United Way and various Labour affiliates who came together to fund the Employment Standards Advocacy Project, a first of its kind in British Columbia. Finally, I want to thank Vancity, who continue to fund our Volunteer Income Tax Program, ensuring that last year almost 1100 people received more than 1.8 million dollars in benefits and refunds they were entitled to under the law. TAPS has had some challenges and opportunities this past year with funding and we continue to be ever vigilante in ensuring the financial viability of our organization.

TAPS is growing. Growing also, is our commitment to the vision upon which this organization was founded 25 years ago. TAPS' fight to find dignity and respect for and alongside individuals living in poverty must be brought with intelligence and dynamism rooted in the cause of social justice. My privilege in being a part of this fight continues to fill me with energy as I look forward to the year ahead, confident and excited by our mission.

STEPHEN PORTMAN

Interim Executive Director

November 2014

President's Annual Report 2014

This year, TAPS is celebrating its 25th year anniversary. We advocate for some of Victoria and southern Vancouver Island's most vulnerable citizens.

TAPS was established and registered as a society in 1989, receiving charitable tax status in 1994. Over this period of time, TAPS has provided legal advocacy services in the areas of income assistance and persons with disabilities benefits. We advocate for people living in poverty who have tenancy disputes with their landlords. In recent years we have added assistance with income tax. And most recently we are advocating for men and women, who are not in unions, who are faced with employment issues. We assist in resolving disputes between workers and their employers that are captured under the BC Employment Standards Act.

We planned to celebrate our 25 years. But we are not feeling very celebratory. As most of you know, Kelly Newhook, our Executive Director, is on extended sick leave and it is hard to celebrate without Kelly! With Kelly's absence, we have had to reorganize and regroup. I am very pleased that the staff, under the leadership of Stephen Portman, our Interim Executive Director, has pulled together during this period of transition. The staff has taken the initiative to carry on our good work without Kelly. We will celebrate when Kelly returns to TAPS! I also want to thank the Board of TAPS. Each member of the Board has contributed to the work of TAPS. We are all working together to make sure that TAPS is going strong.

TAPS has sponsored innumerable public legal education workshops and seminars on the rights and liberties of all who live in our province. We are committed to raising awareness about the challenges, stigma and injustices faced by people living in poverty.

One area of social injustice that makes me very angry is that living in poverty kills people at an early age. Living in poverty is a death sentence. Without adequate and safe housing, without a living wage, without proper health care and all the other social determinants of health, the poor are dying much younger than the wealthy.

Statistics Canada gives us some numbers comparing the lifespan of those who are wealthy and those who are not. If you are a wealthy man, you will have 11.4 more years of healthy living than men who are not wealthy. If you are a wealthy woman, you will have 9.7 more years of healthy living. There is a get rich or die younger fact of life in British Columbia. When we look at the lifespan of those women and men who are homeless it is truly shocking. The homeless population is dead by the time they reach their forties. Compare that to the 83 years of life for British Columbians with a roof over their heads.

Social injustice is killing people on a grand scale. The conditions in which people live and die are shaped by political, social and economic forces. Poor women, for example, die ten years before a wealthy woman. This means ten less years of beautiful sunrises and sunsets, ten less years of living and loving others, smelling the roses. It means ten less years of fighting climate change which is itself a symptom of political, social and economic failures.

There could be as many as 700 million climate refugees by 2050. Where will TAPS be then? Where will TAPS be in 25 years? The year will be 2039. Over the past 25 years at TAPS, we have struggled to make this a better world. And we will continue to do so. Together we can accomplish great things. And we will. I want to wish happy 25 years anniversary to TAPS, to our staff and volunteers and supporters.

DR. JOAN MCHARDY

President

Income Assistance Advocacy Project Report 2014

TASHA PAGE, KIM ROBERTS, STEPHEN PORTMAN, ZOË MACMILLAN,
RAIA MELNYK AND THEA MCDONAGH

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

TAPS Income Assistance Advocacy Project offers high quality legal advocacy by one full-time and one part-time advocate. Information, summary advice, negotiation and representation at hearings in all classifications of provincial income assistance benefits (including hardship assistance, income assistance, persons with persistent multiple barriers assistance, and persons with disabilities assistance) are offered through this project. This project is designed to deliver on the following objectives:

OBJECTIVES

- Enhance access to justice by providing reliable legal information to people living in poverty about their rights, as well as the benefits and entitlements available to them through income assistance programs
- Provide vigorous advocacy services to people living in poverty by negotiation and written submissions with ministry staff and full representation in income assistance appeal hearings
- Offer engaging and informative legal presentations to community groups and their clients about the rights and entitlements of income assistance law
- Educate and empower individuals to effectively advocate on their own behalf

CASE TRENDS

The following case trends were observed by advocates during the reporting period:

- 1) Immediate Needs Assessments (INA):** Income Assistance applicants continue to face extremely long wait times for initial intake appointments with the Ministry. While those in urgent need of assistance can request an Immediate Needs Assessment (“INA”) of their application, TAPS advocates found that the Ministry was quite unreceptive to these request. Clients continued to wait several weeks for an INA.

During the reporting period, TAPS advocates tried a new tactic for INAs. They had clients fill out the online Income Assistance applications, call or attend the Ministry to request an INA, followed up by faxing in an urgent service request to the Ministry when the INA was not given and then called a supervisor the next business day to discuss the case. The tactic has been effective as clients generally got on to basic Income Assistance within the week.

TAPS continues to encourage those who experience unreasonable INA wait times to contact the office of the provincial Ombudsperson to register a complaint.

2) BC Hydro Crisis Supplements: TAPS advocates noticed a dramatic increase in clients coming in requesting assistance with BC Hydro Crisis Supplements. Clients on Equal Payment Plans (“EPPs”) with BC Hydro have faced substantial issues as their EPPs anniversaries have come up and they have been assessed as owing between \$300 and \$1100, amounts they have no way of paying. They have faced disconnection/been disconnected for failure to pay the large sums owed.

TAPS advocates have developed a strong Crisis Supplement template for service requests for these clients. TAPS has also drafted letters to the Ministry and BC Hydro and will be discussing the issues with heads of both entities to try to seek some resolution to the systemic issue.

3) Ministry Toll-Free Number: Both clients and Advocates must communicate with the Ministry using their toll-free number. However, due to high volumes and insufficient staffing, callers typically wait over an hour to speak with a worker, or are disconnected due to call volume.

TAPS has learned of several new Ministry call center policies including disconnecting callers after several minutes of talking to a call center worker and gathering basic caller information and then passing messages along to other departments when there are high call volumes. TAPS has challenged the Ministry to explain these new policies at the September, 2014 regional moving forward meeting.

4) Ministry Staffing Changes: TAPS has learned that the Ministry will be conducting a large staffing shuffle in the near future: Employment and Assistance Workers (“EAWs”) were asked to rank their preferences for call center, crisis supplements and intake and will be moved into a new position soon. TAPS advocates are concerned this shuffle will create even longer waits for clients as Ministry workers will have to be trained in their new positions. This issue has been raised with the Ministry during the September, 2014 regional moving forward meeting.

PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION

TAPS Income Assistance Advocacy project has participated in a number of Public Legal Education (PLE) events over the past year, including but not limited to:

- The Law Centre
- UVic Social Work
- The BC Schizophrenia Society
- International Day to Eradicate Racism (ICA)
- Victoria Native Friendship Centre
- Prostitutes Education and Empowerment Resource Society (PEERS)
- Downtown Community Centre
- Blanshard Community Centre
- Fairfield Gonzales Youth Counselors
- Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society
- The United Way
- Resources

continued

The Umbrella Society
Victoria Brain Injury Society
The Mustard Seed
Research, Education, Empowerment and Support (REES) Network
Single Parents Resource Centre
“Project Connect” (Our Place)
VIHA Stabilization Unit (monthly)

STATISTICS

A total number of 2240 clients were helped by TAPS' Income Assistance Advocacy Project in the past year.

Tenant Advocacy Project Report 2014

YUKA KUROKAWA, JOHN COOKE, TASHA PAGE
AND THEA MCDONAGH

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The TAPS Tenant Advocacy Project provides a unique and vital service to the tenant community of Greater Victoria and surrounding region, including the following objectives:

OBJECTIVES

- Legal information for tenants regarding their rights and responsibilities under the British Columbia Residential Tenancy Act and Manufactured Home Park Tenancy Act,
- Mediation for and negotiation on behalf of clients with their landlords toward the equitable resolution of disputes,
- Legal advocacy on behalf of clients at Residential Tenancy Branch Dispute Resolution hearings,
- Community Public Legal Education for tenants, professionals and other stakeholders regarding tenancy issues, rights and responsibilities and,
- Assistance and support for individuals in order that they might be better able to advocate on their own behalf.

Direct advocacy services are provided to the public by way of information (either by phone consultation, drop-in or appointment), summary advice, or full representation.

The ongoing services of a caseload may include contacting a client's landlord and/or providing ongoing support and representation at formal Dispute Resolution proceedings.

Tenant advocates also spend a significant amount of time interviewing clients, preparing witnesses for hearings as well as researching relevant case law in addition to the collection, dissemination and disclosure of evidence.

CASE TRENDS

The following case trends were observed by advocates during the reporting period:

- 1) **Repairs and Maintenance:** With the onset of Fall and cooler weather, there has been a gradual increase in the numbers of tenants seeking repairs and maintenance and it is anticipated that that trend will certainly continue throughout the winter months and into Spring 2015.
- 2) **Dispute Resolution Delays:** Arguably, there are unreasonable delays for those tenants applying for formal Dispute Resolution against their landlords or, former landlords. Whereas previously a tenant filing an application might expect to have a hearing scheduled within 30 days, 90 at most, that is no longer the norm and, we are now seeing hearing dates being set by RTB for as far out as May 2015.
- 3) **Evictions:** defending against eviction notices for Non-Payment of Rent, Non-Payment of Utilities and Repeated Late Payment of rent are a constant; as are One Month Notices for Cause.

PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION

The advocates have provided 21 Public Legal Education workshops to tenants and service providers at various organizations in the Greater Victoria area, including:

- Island Health Authority Stabilization Unit (monthly)
- “Project Connect” at Our Place
- PEERS Victoria
- Victoria Justice Access Centre
- Seniors Entitlement Service
- The Mustard Seed
- Constituency Assistants Conference
- Single Parents Resource Centre
- University of Victoria Law Centre

CASE PROFILE

A fire erupted one morning and caused considerable damage to a large apartment complex. The fire affected over 70 tenants, many of whom are individuals and families living with low incomes. After the fire, many of these tenants experienced issues with their landlord who failed to fulfill all of their obligations under the Residential Tenancy Act. Examples of some of the Landlord’s actions include: their refusal to provide detailed information about the condition of tenants’ units and their belongings before asking them to agree in writing to end their tenancies, providing tenants with false information about the condition of their units, their refusal to allow tenants into their units to recover their belongings, and using verbal and physical intimidation tactics when communicating with tenants.

In response to the landlord’s actions, there were large-scale efforts and collaborations between TAPS advocates, tenants, and other community partners to support the affected tenants and to advocate for their rights. Over the course of several months, TAPS tenant advocates were involved in:

- Hosting meetings at TAPS for tenants to congregate and discuss their concerns.
- Representing tenants in multiple Residential Tenancy Branch hearings and in negotiations with the landlord to secure tenants’ access to their units and obtain their belongings.
- Organizing a solidarity rally in conjunction with tenants and community partners to show support for affected tenants and provide an opportunity for them to have their voices heard.
- Requesting service and repairs on behalf of tenants to have soot-covered rooms cleaned.
- Liaising with local media to discuss tenant concerns and implications of the fire.
- Working in cooperation with BCPIAC to file a request for an investigation and levying of administrative penalties.
- The aftermath of the fire has had ongoing implications; however, the advocacy provided by the TAPS Tenant Advocates has had many positive influences and has made a difference in the lives of many of the affected tenants.

STATISTICS

The total number of clients served by The Tenant Advocacy Project for this reporting period is 1108.

Employment Standards Legal Advocacy Annual Report 2014

STEPHEN PORTMAN, JENNIFER KING

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

June 2014 saw the launch of TAPS newest project, the Employment Standards Legal Advocacy Project, which is now lovingly known to the community as ESLAP. The project is the first of its kind in British Columbia as it provides directed, no cost, face-to-face advocacy to non-unionized workers in matters captured under the *BC Employment Standards Act*. This project is also a first in our region in terms of organizational funding partnerships. TAPS, together with the United Way of Greater Victoria and various labour affiliates, championed by the Victoria Labour Council, came together to secure two year funding. This means that marginalized and precarious workers in our region now have a real option for the near future in finding representation when the employer breaks the law.

ESLAP is a project that has been built on the previous work of past TAPS advocates and board members. Special thanks go to Patti Stockton and Jonathan Blair who put in the groundwork to ensure that this ambitious project came into being. Additional gratitude goes to the early pilot funders, Victoria Literacy and the Victoria Foundation. Without their support we would not have made it this far.

The first 6 months of ESLAP have been an exciting time around the TAPS office and out in the community as the roots of the project have taken form. We have formed an ESLAP Advisory Board that has been foundational in helping to guide the early development of the project to help us ensure that TAPS makes this project as strong as it can be to serve the low income workers of our region. The members of the advisory board are James Coccola, Tony Sprackett, Lisa Cowan, Kendra Strauss, David Huxtable and Alvaro Moreno. We thank these individuals for their sound guidance during these early stages of project development.

TAPS Employment Standards Legal Advocacy Project assists employees in the following ways:

- Communicate with an employer on behalf of the worker
- Assist workers in completing the Employment Standards "Self-Help Kit"
- Provide advocacy representation services in Employment Standards complaints, mediations, and determination hearings
- Provide advocacy representation services in hearings before the BC Employment Standards Tribunal
- Provide Public Legal Education Seminars on matters relating to Employment Standards

Here is a short list of some of the areas where we provide assistance to workers: overtime pay, termination pay or notice of termination, minimum wage, employee or sub-contractor, vacation pay, unlawful deductions, stat pay, split shifts, unsafe work, uniform charges.

OBJECTIVES

- To promote rights awareness for marginalized workers by providing accurate rights based information
- To increase access to justice for workers who are seeking assistance through information and referral
- To educate and empower individuals to effectively advocate on their own behalf
- To promote economic stability for marginalized workers through dispute resolution assistance

CASE TRENDS

1) Wait times: It has become glaringly clear at this early stage in the project that the leading case trend is delay in getting an Employment Standards Complaint to be either mediated, investigated or heard in a determination hearing. ESLAP Advocates report that the very earliest a case will be addressed is 3 months following the submission of a formal complaint. This results in significant challenges to our clients.

CASE STUDY

Tabitha came to British Columbia to work as a live-in caregiver in a wealthy household looking after an elderly woman. At 45 years of age she left behind her loving husband and two school aged children in Somalia, her country of birth, to make a living here in Canada with the hopes of securing a better future for her and her family.

Tabitha had to pay over \$5000.00 to a third party employment agency just for the privilege of being hired by the family here in Victoria. When she arrived at work for her first shift she was given a strict rule guide by her employer that dictated to her the times she could leave her home, restricting her from having any visitor in the house where she lived, preventing her from doing any of her own cooking resulting in her diet being dictated by the employer, and forcing her to go to bed at certain times of the night. Tabitha did not like the rules but she agreed to them anyways as she had to make things work as her family was depending on her. After only two months on the job Tabitha was fired from her job without just cause. On her last day of work her employer refused to pay her outstanding wages and gave her a bill for accommodation and the cost of her travel to Canada, a practice that is strictly forbidden by law. Tabitha had no money to pay the charges and no way to pay for food or a place to live. As she was tied to her employer by her work permit she could not simply go out and get another job and with English as a second language found herself in a truly desperate situation.

Tabitha was referred to TAPS by a local agency specializing in services to new immigrants. Tabitha came to TAPS very emotional while showing incredible courage as she talked about her circumstances with an advocate. Through TAPS advocacy her employer was forced to give up chasing her for the bogus charges and paid to her immediately the outstanding wages after an Employment Standards Complaint was filed. We then helped connect her to a good employer who is going well out of the way to ensure that a work visa can be approved as soon as possible so that Tabitha can stay in the country and continue to send support home to her family in Somalia. In addition we took action to ensure that the third party agency that charged Tabitha

for her position of employment is being investigated. Without this support what kind of position would Tabitha and her family find themselves in?

PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION

TAPS Employment Standards Advocacy project has participated in a number of Public Legal Education (PLE) events over the past year, including but not limited to:

- Beacon Springboard to Success Program
- Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society
- Inter-Cultural Association
- GT Hiring Solutions and Partner Organizations
- Victoria Sobering Centre

STATISTICS

A total number of 109 workers were assisted by the Employment Standards Legal Advocacy Project in the first 6 months of operations.

Volunteer Disability Advocacy Project Annual Report 2014

THEA MCDONAGH, KIM ROBERTS

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Volunteer Disability Advocacy Project (VDAP) at TAPS provides legal advocacy and support to economically disadvantaged people who are applying for Persons with Disability (PWD) status with the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation. The project delivers a well-coordinated training and support initiative to volunteer advocates in the interest of assisting individuals with what is a lengthy and complex application process.

OBJECTIVES

- To assist people with disabilities to apply and qualify for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) status with the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation.
- To recruit, train and supervise a diverse volunteer network of advocates to support clients in the PWD application process.
- To update and refine training materials and resources used by the VDAP volunteers.
- To design and deliver a regular training program for new volunteer advocates.
- To engage in public legal education on disability issues.

UPDATES AND ACTIVITIES

In September, Thea McDonagh became the new coordinator of VDAP, replacing Kim Roberts. Thea began her position by organizing a meeting with volunteer advocates in order to introduce herself and get feedback about the project. From this meeting Thea was able to address several key issues for volunteers:

- Client's not attending appointments
- Communication between reception and volunteers
- Client difficulty finding a physician

As a result Thea has implemented a reminder call system in order to try and avoid missed appointments and continues to work with front desk staff to streamline communication with volunteers.

VOLUNTEER ADVOCATES

Prior to engaging in advocacy work, volunteers attend a three part training program delivered by TAPS Volunteer Disability Advocacy Project Coordinator that reviews the application process, legislation, and professional standards of advocacy. New advocates also attend 2–3 observation sessions with experienced advocates in order to gain further advocacy skills. Advocates are provided

a training manual which includes all the materials relevant to the volunteer position and meet with the Volunteer Disability Advocacy Project Coordinator regularly to ensure the quality of their work. Some advocates have personal experience living with disabilities and have been through the disability application process themselves. This additional level of understanding and awareness can be very beneficial to the client.

VDAP currently has 30 dedicated volunteers that meet with clients on a regular basis. During the initial interview, volunteer advocates discuss the client's eligibility for PWD, explain the application process, and listen to the client's description of their disability and how it affects their life. After the interview, the advocate will draft the client's self-report based on information they have received. During the second interview, the client reviews the report and ensures its accuracy. Once the remainder of the report is completed by the physician and/or assessor, the advocates review it for consistency and merit. Throughout the process, the advocate ensures that the client understands the process as well as the outcomes.

CASE TRENDS

- 1) **Access to Medical Supports:** TAPS advocates continue to observe difficulties clients face in finding a physician to assist them in completing their PWD applications. Often our clients do not have a family doctor when they meet with an advocate and are then in the difficult position of having to find a medical professional who can speak to their disabilities. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that the Ministry will sometimes use this as a reason to deny applications especially if the doctor or assessor has only met with the client once. Our advocates try to mitigate this problem by writing a thorough self-report describing the individuals impairments in order to give the physician, as well as the Ministry, a comprehensive understanding of the clients disabilities.

PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- 1) During this reporting period the VDAP project contributed to numerous round table discussions in the Disability White Paper Consultation Process. In addition, The Coordinator made a submission to the Provincial Government regarding improving accessibility and streamlining the application process for individuals seeking persons with Disability status.
- 2) The Coordinator, along with TAPS Executive Director and another advocate, Stephen Portman, met with the Minister of Social Development and Social Innovation to discuss key concerns regarding income and disability assistance.
- 3) The Coordinator recognized the desire for additional training opportunities for volunteer advocates and worked to organize these opportunities. In February an evening session was organized for a presentation from the Men's Trauma Center to provide information about working with male survivors of trauma. In August Kim organized a presentation from a Senior PWD adjudicator from the ministry to come and speak with advocates about the adjudication process of PWD applications. The Coordinator also attended several relevant training and community events herself including, Canada Without Poverty's workshop "Poverty, Housing and Food: What Have Rights Got To DO With It?" in April and the BC Disability Summit in June.

- 4) Kim provided two training sessions during the reporting period, one in February and one in July. These training sessions took place over three evenings and included at least two shadow shifts for each volunteer advocate. Interest in this training has been very high and the coordinator had to start a waiting list for another training session in early 2015.

PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION

The Volunteer Disability Advocacy Project Coordinator has participated in many public legal education seminars over the reporting period. The principle public education component of the project is completed through volunteer training seminars that are provided on a biannual basis. Apart from the training seminars, multiple public legal education presentations were given to community stakeholders in the non-profit and governmental sectors. These stakeholders include:

- University of Victoria
- Mustard Seed Food Bank
- Vancouver Island Health Authority Withdrawal Management Services
- Single Parent Resource Center
- PEERS Victoria Resource Society
- Victoria Native Friendship Center
- Urgent Short Term Assessment and Treatment (USTAT)
- Island Health and Community Care
- UVIC Law Center

CASE PROFILE

Frank is a 47 year old man with severe mental health impairments. When he came to TAPS he had already attempted suicide on several occasions and was at high risk of another attempt. Frank had been denied PWD already once in the past and was feeling very hopeless. After working with a TAPS advocate and getting his second application completed, TAPS was able to contact a senior PWD adjudicator at the Ministry and flag Frank's application for priority due to his risk of suicide. TAPS received the decision within 48 hours that Frank had been approved for PWD and was able to collect his additional benefits immediately. The stability and increased quality that this designation has brought to Frank's life has relieved significant pressure on his mental health.

STATISTICS

This year the Volunteer Disability Advocacy Project worked on 610 case files.

Community Volunteer Income Tax Annual Report 2014

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

TAPS is an approved community partner with the Canada Revenue Agency hosting trained volunteers to provide free income tax preparation. This service is part of the network across Canada that assists tax filers, regardless of ability to pay, or level of literacy, to have access to Canada's tax system.

Each week, TAPS team of volunteers provide free face-to-face income tax preparation from September through mid-July for eligible individuals (primarily those with low-incomes, the disabled, and seniors). Over the past year we had up to six volunteers working together to serve TAPS clients in the Greater Victoria area in response to a demand that continues to grow unabated. TAPS volunteers may complete up to 10 years of income tax returns for a client.

This is a much needed service in our community as Canada Revenue Agency no longer provides counter service to clients, and other agencies that provide this service either do not provide face-to-face service or do not provide service after April 30 when the tax season ends. As a result, there is a significant demand for TAPS services, especially from those individuals facing low literacy levels or other barriers.

Why do TAPS clients need their income tax done? It enables some of them to receive the income tax refunds to which they are entitled. It enables the majority to participate in many provincial and federal income-tested programs, such as the monthly Child Tax Benefit the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors, the Federal and provincial Goods and Services/Harmonized Sales Tax Credit, BC's low-income climate tax action credit, as well as a large number of non-tax related programs such as access to public housing, assisted living for seniors, Medical Services Plan Premium Assistance, Fair Pharmacare, ESL programs at community colleges, Canada Student Loans, and Registered Disability Savings Plans. In cases where clients may have a debt to the Crown, due to an ambulance ride, family maintenance order, unpaid fine, Canada Student loan or other government overpayment, the filing of an income tax return helps to satisfy this debt as the Crown exercises its claim on their income tax refund, and HST credits.

TAPS would like to thank Vancity for the financial assistance they provided to TAPS volunteer income tax project over the past year. With the help of our partners at Vancity TAPS hosted a tax blitz day at the Downtown Community Activity Centre. This one day event brought together various community organization with knowledge in the financial sector to assist clients in a one stop shop to address financial need and tax filings.

STATISTICS

During the year ended August 2014 TAPS Community Volunteer Income Tax Program assisted 1,192 low income members of our community file 1,814 tax returns, as a result of which they became eligible to receive \$1,833,092.00 in federal and provincial tax benefits. The average refund received per client for the year covered by this report was \$1,011.00.

TONY PULLMAN

TAX VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

Taproot Newsletter Annual Report 2014

Taproot is published six times per year, in December, February, April, June, August, and October.

In the past year, as part of our Taproot expansion project, we have changed the look of the Taproot and made a better and more accessible e-mail newsletter. We have also made the newsletter and individual articles more accessible on our website.

We print between 500 and 600 copies of each issue. The newsletter is distributed to our membership by mail or by e-mail. We also deliver newsletters to over 40 organizations around Victoria, including the Disability Resource Centre, John Howard Society, Young Parents' Support Network, the Victoria Native Friendship Centre and the central library.

The *Taproot* includes articles by staff, board and volunteers. Staff members write articles that inform readers on their rights in relation to income assistance, disability, tenancy or employment standards. In the past year, we have had articles exploring the differences between provincial Persons With Disability status (PWD) and the federal CPP – Disability; an article on the involvement of the police in a person's tenancy, when the police have a role and when they likely do not; and an article by one of our board members on her trip to the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness conference in Ottawa. We are also able to keep our readers up to date on what's happening at TAPS.

Several volunteers work on the newsletter team: we have two artists contributing artwork, and a writer who contributes occasional articles. We have a volunteer who proofreads the final copy. And we have one volunteer who takes on the task of distribution, doing the mailout and keeping our delivery list up to date. We also benefit from the help of volunteers from the Garth Homer Society who deliver the newsletters to organizations around Victoria.

HEIDI

TAPROOT EDITOR

Volunteer Coordination Project I

Annual Report 2014

TAPS relies on the hard work and dedication of its many volunteers. We currently have about 50 active volunteers doing everything from helping people prepare their tax returns to disability advocacy to front desk reception to data entry.

People volunteer at TAPS for many reasons – to join the fight against poverty, to be involved in the community, to help others. Our volunteers are people who have experienced poverty firsthand, people with a commitment to social justice, students, retirees, and people with disabilities. Some have specific skills they want to use, such as writing or drawing or database development; they also come to gain skills and experience – in legal advocacy or office reception, for example. Many simply want to be involved in an organization that helps people.

FRONT DESK

There are ten shifts per week on the front desk, so we need to keep a team of ten active front desk volunteers, plus a few volunteers “on call” to cover shifts if the regular volunteer is away. We have had a lot of new volunteers come onto the front desk over the past year, while keeping a core group of long-time front deskers.

SILENT WITNESS

We have several people who are available to accompany TAPS clients to appointments at the Ministry of Social Development.

MEMBERSHIP DATABASE

We continue to fine tune the functioning of our database with the help of our database design volunteer, and continue to keep our database up to date with the help of our data entry volunteer.

HEIDI

VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

2014 Board of Directors

MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

Dr. Joan McHardy – President

Past Chair, BC Chapter of the Canadian Evaluation Society

Brenda McBain – Vice-President

Consultant

Barb Celu Amberstone – Secretary

Writer, Community Volunteer

Tony Pullman – Treasurer

Retired Chartered Accountant

MEMBERS-AT-LARGE

Cara Barter

Receptionist – BC Association
of Aboriginal Friendship Centres

Michel Pierre Janisse

Fund Development Professional

Erik Kaye

Public Servant

Hilary Mark

Community Advocate/Student

Richard Stern

IT Software Engineer – BC Association
of Aboriginal Friendship Centres

TAPS Board meets on the last Thursday of every month at 4:45 pm

TOGETHER AGAINST POVERTY SOCIETY
GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES OUR FINANCIAL PARTNERS:



Provincial Employees Community Services Fund



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... and our many generous individual donors. *Thank you!*