



2010 Annual Report

Providing advocacy, education, community building

"It is justice, not charity that is wanting in the world"
-Mary Wollstonecraf

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.

2010 President's Report: Joan McHardy

This has been an exciting year of change for TAPS. The two major changes are that TAPS now has a Strategic Plan for the next three years and the Board decided to hire an Executive Director.

In early June, staff, volunteers and Board members participated in a day-long planning retreat so that each person could provide input to creating a useful Strategic Plan. And we wanted our Plan to be responsive to current circumstances. When British Columbia has the highest child poverty rate in the country and the lowest minimum wages in Canada, TAPS advocacy work is needed more than ever.

If you would like to read the Plan, please go to www.tapsbc.ca/publications

The Strategic Plan helps us to focus our work. Everyone at TAPS agrees on our mission and vision statements:

Our Mission: To better the lives of persons living in poverty through individual and community advocacy and public education.

Our Vision: All citizens will have an adequate income to allow them to meet their needs and to live with dignity.

One of the important outcomes of the work leading up to the retreat was to review the organizational structure of TAPS. In February, the Board decided to hire Kelly Newhook as the first Executive Director of TAPS. We needed someone full-time to manage the office and to reach out to other community groups. We are so pleased to welcome Kelly and congratulate her on her good work!

I want to thank the staff for their continued good work on behalf of the clients: John Cooke and Thea McDonagh who work on tenant advocacy; Candace Witkowskyj and Susan Rasmussen, for their income assistance advocacy work and Stephen Portman, our Volunteer Disability Project Coordinator. Several staff members, including Tricia Roche, community outreach coordinator, have left TAPS and we wish them well.

Heidi Berry continues her good work with volunteers. We have over fifty volunteers who staff the desk, answer tax questions and help complete disability applications. The Board members are volunteers as well. I want to thank Heidi and all volunteers for their support as we could not survive without their help.

This year we did not get any funding from the Gaming Commission. This was a serious blow to our budget. However, we do want to thank those individuals, religious groups and organizations that did support us. The support of the Law Foundation, United Way and other major funders are so important to us.

We will continue to do the work of TAPS to the best of our ability. We are committed to fight for our mission and to work to see our vision is reflected throughout British Columbia.

2010 Executive Director's Report: Kelly Newhook

In late February 2010, I began my role as Together Against Poverty Society's first Executive Director. The creation of this position was a historic move for the organization and is a reflection of the growth that has taken place within the organization over the past decade. Within weeks of hiring its new Executive Director, TAPS learned that it would not be getting its 2010 Community Gaming Grant. This was certainly a budgetary challenge for the organization, but with the support of TAPS donors, friends and community partners, it is one we have managed to survive. TAPS was especially grateful to all those who participated in our Fundraiser in May 2010.

In June, TAPS board and staff participated in a day-long strategic planning retreat which resulted in an agreed upon strategic plan for the organization that will guide us through the next three years. TAPS would like to take this opportunity to thank Brenda McBain and Coast Capital Savings for their contributions to this important work.

With the help of the Victoria Foundation and many of TAPS dedicated volunteers, TAPS website underwent a complete makeover and was launched in July. Please check it out. You can find us at the same address www.tapsbc.ca. TAPS would like to thank baremetal.com for their hosting and support. TAPS was fortunate to have a number of talented and energetic students working with us this year.

We had students from the University of Victoria's Child and Youth Care program, School of Social Work and Nursing program. We were also privileged to have Erin Pritchard join us full-time for four months as TAPS' Public Interest Law Student from the University of Victoria's Faculty of Law.

In an effort to augment the supervision already being provided by our supervising lawyer, Roland Kuczma, a volunteer mentoring system has been implemented. Mentors include; a former TAPS advocate- Alix Hotsenpillar, former Dispute Resolution Officer (DRO) at the Residential Branch- April Katz, and Lisa Cowan, LLB. A series of bi-weekly training opportunities on casework related issues, including cross-examination training, 'dealing with challenging clients' and 'presentations from the perspective of the decision maker', have also been implemented. TAPS has been making efforts to address some of the systemic issues we see arising from individual casework. Numerous meetings between advocates and ministry staff have occurred over the past year and some small improvements have been achieved. However, there is much more work to be done on this front.

TAPS has been involved in extensive community outreach over the past year. We have had a presence at many key community events, including but not limited to: Earth Day, World Hepatitis Day, Victoria Law Day, Project Connect, the Moss Street Market, Fernwood Neighborhood Days, and the 'Gathering on Pandora Green'. We have also contributed to some significant community development initiatives such as the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness, the City of Victoria's Official Community Plan, St. John the Divine's City-Street-Church Conference, and the development of the United Way of Greater Victoria's future impact areas. TAPS also made a remarkable submission to the Public Commission on Legal Aid

Finally, I would like to say what a privilege it is to be a part of this organization. Every day, I witness an intelligent and compassionate staff, dedicated to ensuring they do everything in their power to assist their clients. Their commitment to social justice is unflinching. I want to take this opportunity to thank the board, staff and many volunteers for all of the work they do to make TAPS such an incredible organization.

2010 Tenant Advocacy Project

John Cooke and Thea McDonagh

Project Description

The Residential Tenant Advocacy Project of TAPS provides unique and vital services to the Greater Victoria community including:

- Legal information for tenants about their rights and responsibilities under the British Columbia Residential 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
- Education for tenants, professionals and the community regarding tenancy issues, rights and responsibilities
- Assistance and support for individuals to develop the skills necessary to advocate for themselves.

Direct advocacy services are provided to the public by way of summary advice, providing information through phone consultation, drop-in or appointment and as part of a caseload. The ongoing services of the caseload may include contacting a client's landlord and/or providing ongoing support and representation at the Residential Tenancy Branch Arbitration proceedings. The Tenant Advocate also spends a significant amount of time interviewing clients, preparing witnesses for hearings as well as researching relevant case law, in addition to the collection, disclosure and dissemination of evidence.

Case Work

Case Files are opened when:

- a.) a Client has commenced an application for Dispute Resolution (formerly known as arbitration) with the Residential Tenancy Branch against a current or former landlord and/or conversely,
- b.) a current or former landlord has filed a statement of claim seeking damages against a tenant or,
- c.) where both parties to a tenancy relationship may have filed statements of claim against each other simultaneously.

Some Case Files are legally complex in their origins and may take upwards of 20 hours of preparation; whether it be toward a (pre-hearing) negotiated settlement or before a final, legally binding decision that would be rendered by an adjudicator at a Dispute Resolution Hearing. Matters going forward at formal Dispute Resolution typically involve Claims in Damages, Eviction Notices for Non-Payment of Rent and/or Utilities, Eviction Notices for Repeated Late Payment of Rent, (1 Month) Eviction Notices for Cause and (2 Month) Eviction Notices for Landlord's Use of Property.

For many people, notably the working poor and those others on low or fixed incomes, finding a decent place to live or just maintaining an existing tenancy is becoming next to near impossible. While for others, including those who find themselves paying sometimes well in excess of 75% of their monthly income towards rent alone, any notion stability of tenure is virtually non-existent.

A great many landlords it would seem now rely on Sec.49 RTA (2 month) Notice to End (...Landlord's Use of Property) merely as a vehicle to coerce or oust longer term tenant(s) from their homes or rent gouge existing tenants similarly in an attempt to gain higher market value for their rental premises. Other landlord's and/or property management firms, in order to skirt the *ARI*, have simply adopted a policy of only entering into non-renewable fixed term rental agreements; a policy which effectively allows them to inflate the value of a rental premises at expiration of the lease.

CASE TRENDS

Over the course of this reporting period, the TAPS Tenant Advocacy Project has seen a noticeable increase in the numbers of Notices for Non-Payment of Rent and Notices for Cause being issued to tenants not just in free market rental stock but also to tenants residing in rental premises managed by various of the not for profit public housing providers as well.

As it concerns Notices for Non-Payment of Rent in public housing, the current dilemma may in large part be attributable to BC Housing's new *Flat Rent Calculation Table* and that which came into being in 2010. The *Flat Rent Calculation Table* is applied to consumers of Income Assistance and is used by BC Housing to determine the tenants monthly rent portion and/or their eligibility for subsidy; a figure which would normally be arrived at during the tenant's *Annual Review* process. Whereas in previous years, BC Housing would calculate no more than one-third of the tenant's gross monthly income in determining their monthly rent contribution, the housing provider now sets the tenants maximum allowable Shelter Portion of their monthly Income Assistance entitlement as their monthly rent contribution.

To better illustrate, a case in point:

A Single Parent family with one dependent child who continues to reside in BC Housing and who is currently in receipt of income assistance will now be expected to pay \$570.00 per mo. under the *Flat Rent Calculation* formula whereas previously, they would have paid approximately \$230.00 or, roughly one third of their gross monthly income toward their rent. A further downside to this new policy will see Income Assistance recipients having to pay for their basic needs and utility costs from the support portion of their monthly benefit cheque. In law, a tenant's failure to meet with their obligations in terms of paying utility bills on time or similarly should they find themselves cut off from BC Hydro for non-payment, is considered a Material Breach of the tenancy agreement and were either circumstance to eventuate, the landlord could then elect to end a tenancy on that basis.

Public Legal Education

During the last year the Tenant Advocacy Project designed and delivered ongoing Public Legal Education presentations within the Greater Victoria area. These presentations were provided both to tenants and service providers who work in the community. The workshops are adapted for different audiences but the focus remains on educating tenants about their rights and responsibilities under the Residential Tenancy Act.

The style and length of the workshops vary depending on the audience and its level of experience. Different formats include lectures, interactive games and activities and question periods. Participants are always provided with additional written material for their reference.

The Tenant Advocacy Project is currently designing additional interactive tools to be used in their public legal education during the year to come.

The Tenant Advocacy Project is in the process of expanding this portion of the project and plans to deliver a greater number of workshops in the coming year. The tenant advocates are collaborating with long time community volunteer and advocate, Darcy Lindberg who will be volunteering with TAPS to broker and organize presentations in the future. It is the goal of the project to reach a larger segment of the tenant community by presenting in new venues.

Case Profile

An elderly woman came into TAPS because she was in dispute with her landlord. The woman had been living in affordable housing for a number of years due to her limited income. She had recently been informed by her landlord that she would be losing an essential service and would now have to pay additional money for it. The loss of this service would significantly impact the woman and due to her fixed income she could not afford the additional fees. The woman was very intimidated by her landlord who had come to her door on a number of occasions and demanded money from her. The Tenant Advocacy Project was able to represent the woman in a dispute resolution hearing at the Residential Tenancy Branch and the landlord was ordered to continue to provide the service as part of her tenancy agreement. The landlord further agreed to appoint a different agent that the woman felt more comfortable with.

**THE TOTAL NUMBER OF LEGAL ADVOCACY CLIENTS SEERVED BY THE TENANT ADVOCACY PROJECT
THIS YEAR: 1201**

Volunteer Disability Advocacy Project

STEPHEN PORTMAN

Project Description

TAPS' Disability Advocacy project provides legal advocacy and support to economically disadvantaged persons applying for Persons With Disability (PWD) status. The Disability Advocacy Project delivers a well-coordinated training and support initiative to volunteer advocates - in the interest of reducing the wait for individuals seeking advocacy services.

Objectives

1. Assist people with disabilities to apply and qualify for Persons With Disabilities (PWD) status with the Ministry of Housing and Social Development (MHSD).
2. Train, maintain and supervise an innovative and diverse volunteer network of advocates specializing in disability advocacy.
3. Update and refine the TAPS Disability Advocacy Training Manual
4. To design and deliver a regular training program for volunteer advocates
5. To engage in public legal education on disability issues.

Volunteer Advocates

The Volunteer Disability Advocacy Program currently relies on dedicated volunteers. Volunteer advocates engage in an initial interview with a client where they discuss the requirements for PWD status, explain the layout of the form, and listen to the client's explanation of their disability and how it affects their day to day life. These interviews generally last an hour and a half and can often be longer. After the interview, an advocate writes a 'section one' report for the application. The advocate also ensures that the information provided by the physician and the assessor are consistent. Throughout the process, the advocate ensures that the client understands the process as well as the outcomes. The volunteer advocates work tirelessly and diligently, committing approximately 6 hours a week to their TAPS advocacy position. Prior to engaging in advocacy work, volunteers attend a three part training program delivered by TAPS Volunteer Disability Advocacy Project Coordinator that reviews the PWD process, legislation, and professional standards of advocacy. The training program also includes observation sessions with current advocates in order to see advocacy skills and methods in action. Advocates are provided a training manual which includes all the materials relevant to advocacy for the PWD form.

Case Trends

This year has seen a marked improvement in the amount of PWD applications approved by MHSD at the reconsideration appeal level. This change in case trends is largely due to the legislatively binding BC Supreme Court decision, *Hudson Vs. The Ministry of Housing and Social Development*, which has redefined aspects of the eligibility criteria used to adjudicate PWD designation. The level of initial denials has remained relatively unchanged in 2010 and volunteer advocates have been working tirelessly to keep up with the high amount of reconsideration appeal work. These efforts have proved largely successful as the amount of PWD approvals for the third period of 2010 has seen a noticeable increase in the amount of approvals over the previous two periods.

Public Legal Education

VDAP also engages in Public Legal Education. This includes the training sessions for TAPS volunteer advocates as well as training sessions for community organizations. The program has provided training sessions for advocates from the Disability Resource Center and Public Legal Education to Street School run by AIDS Vancouver Island.

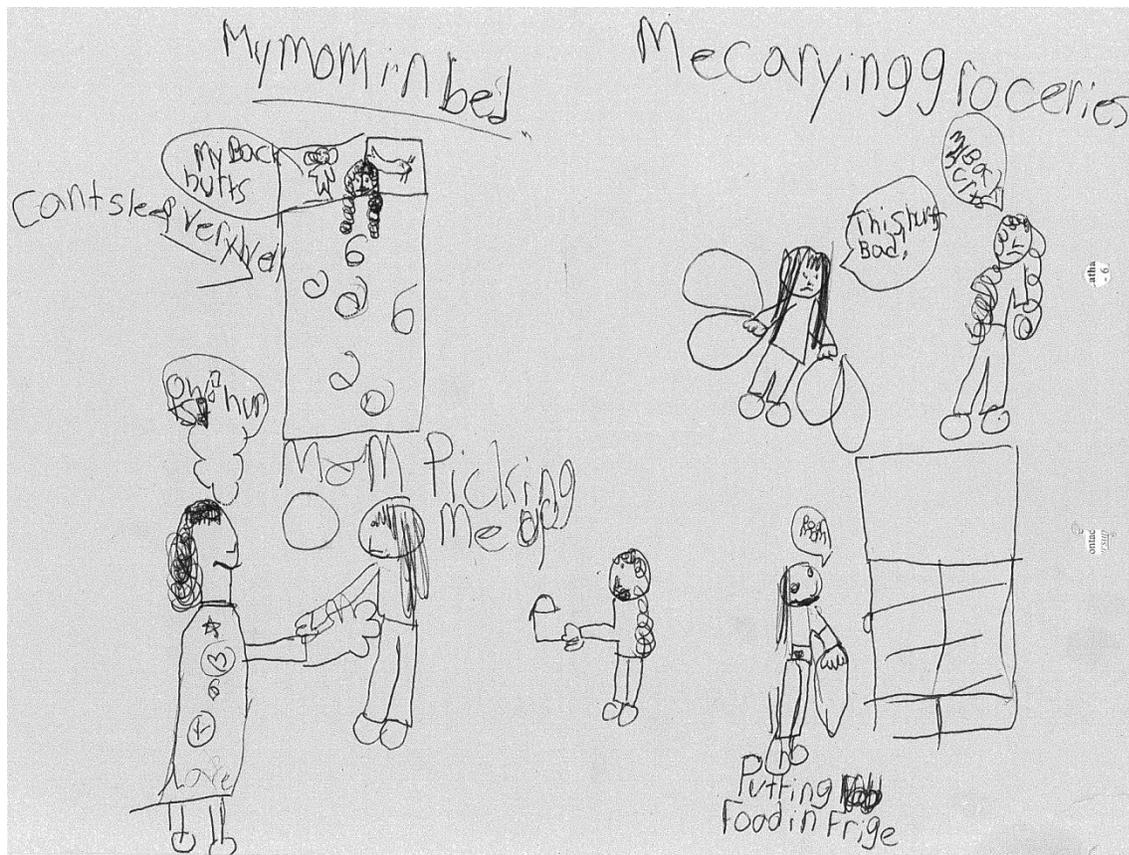
Case Profile

A single mother, with a young daughter, has been living in excruciating pain due to a musculoskeletal disorder. This pain manifests itself in her lower back and causes significant impairments in her daily living activities. The constant pain decreases her energy levels as well as causes disruptive sleeping patterns which negatively impacts her well-being. Her physical pain is further exacerbated by the emotional pain of living with depression and severe anxiety. In addition, she is withdrawing from others and experiences feelings of loneliness and isolation. Not only does her disability greatly affect her own life, it is having negative ramifications in her daughters life. Her daughter has captured the reality of this pain in a drawing, this picture reveals the realities that this family faces on a day to day basis.

Her personal testimonial was well articulated and her entire application was closely scrutinized by one of our volunteer advocates who had every hope that the application would be expeditiously approved so that this family could access basic supports to ease the pressure of their impounding poverty. Despite the glaring impact of her disability, she was denied a PWD designation saying that she did not meet the eligibility requirements. Her application was denied because it was thought that she does not have a severe mental or physical impairment, as well as that her impairment does not significantly restrict her daily living activities and finally that she does not require significant help to perform daily living actives.

She came to TAPS seeking help in applying for a reconsideration of her PWD denial. The VDAP advocates worked with her explaining the process and outlining the information that was necessary to move her case forward. The VDAP advocates collected information from her doctor drawing on his expertise to convey the extent and serious nature of her disability. Her friends and family wrote letters of support that further strengthen her case.

Through the passion and expertise of the VDAP program, her application was accepted and her PWD status was granted. This designation will help this women in addressing many of her physical and emotional needs and well as enabling her to better care for her daughter.



This year the Volunteer disability project worked on 370 individual case files

Income Assistance Advocacy Project - 2010

Candace Witkowskyj and Susan Rasmussen

Project Description

The Income Assistance Advocacy Project of TAPS offers quality advocacy by two advocates (one full time, one part time). 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.

Objectives

1. 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
2. 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
3. Offer engaging and informative legal presentations to community groups and their clients about the rights and entitlements of income assistance law
4. Educate and empower individuals to effectively advocate on their own behalf

Case Work

Over the last year, income assistance advocates saw a total of 1684 individuals, in regard to income assistance related issues. The advocates worked with clients who had issues initially applying for Income Assistance and supporting benefits, ongoing challenges with MHSD in accessing or receiving benefits, and through the appeals process. TAPS Advocates assisted clients in accessing extended health benefits (such as chiropractic or psychological support), medical devices (such as wheelchairs, braces, walkers, etc.) and supports for life threatening health issues (such as breathing devices). Advocates also navigated complex issues surrounding dental care, fraud charges, the Community Volunteer Supplement, and denials relating to MHSD suspicions of clients living in marriage like relationships.

Clients are frequently approaching TAPS Income Assistance Advocates with issues of increasing complexity and are often dealing with a multitude of issues with MHSD. Advocates are frequently working with clients on several issues at once, and as a result clients are requiring more time and advocates are interacting with MHSD workers more often. Negotiations are frequently required, and often pose a challenge because of the highly overloaded MHSD call centre. As a result, TAPS advocates are spending an increased amount of time in their efforts to simply contact an MHSD worker, so they can communicate clients concerns to MHSD. This has been further facilitated by TAPS Executive Director who has arranged meetings with MHSD staff to increase communication and information accessibility.

Clients are coming to TAPS facing challenges meeting their most basic needs. As a result, advocates are frequently communicating with other supports in the community because MHSD

requires that clients exhaust community resources prior to accessing Ministry assistance. In order to assist clients in this regard and make accurate referrals, TAPS advocates must constantly try to keep up-to-date on services provided by community resources, which are frequently changing. TAPS Income Assistance Advocates also work frequently in tandem with Tenancy Advocates as many clients have both Income Assistance issues and tenancy issues. Through this, advocates have become more educated about the Legislation outside of their project and have developed excellent team skills.

Public Legal Education

Public Legal Education was also offered through TAPS bi-monthly newsletter, TAPROOT, by the income assistance advocates. The articles published, through this project, included, "It's Your Information: Exercise Your Right to Access It", "MHSD Goes High Tech: How to Apply for Income Assistance", and "Warranting Your Attention: MHSD Implements New Eligibility Rules for Individuals with Outstanding Warrants".

TAPS Advocates also worked with numerous agencies in the community to provide education about MHSD benefits to both employees and clients at community agencies. TAPS Advocates worked to increase PLE opportunities and to strengthen awareness of TAPS in the community through providing information and PLE Workshops to the Law Centre, Tim Richard's UVIC Law Class, The Sobering Centre, The Single Parent Resource Centre, PEERS, VIHA, and numerous other locations. TAPS Advocates provided information to 597 individuals in the community through PLE Workshops.

Through observing data trends on PLE Feedback Forms, both staff and clients in the community felt that TAPS PLE Workshops are extremely informational and very helpful in understanding client rights and the MHSD process. TAPS Advocates find PLE efforts also extremely helpful in making information available to employees within the community so that appropriate referrals and information can be provided to clients from the initial stages of concern.

Case Profile #1

A single father with one dependent came into TAPS requesting assistance from an advocate after being denied income assistance, due to non-compliance with his employment plan. At this time, the client was in the reconsideration phase of his appeal to the Ministry of Housing and Social Development; furthermore, it was nearing the end of the month and he required his monthly support cheque to pay for rent and groceries for himself and his teenaged son. After speaking with the client, the income assistance advocate learned that this man suffered from a multitude of health conditions and had communicated this to Ministry workers on several occasions. The advocate assisted the client in obtaining a letter of support from his physician, submitted a request for reconsideration on his behalf, and advised him of his right to receive benefits under appeal, so he could pay his required living costs. The reconsideration was successful, in that he was exempt from employment-related obligations, and the advocate referred him to the Volunteer Disability Advocacy Program at TAPS, where he received assistance with PWD application process.

Case Profile #2

An elderly gentleman with numerous disabilities was on PWD Hardship Assistance as a result of conviction of 'welfare fraud' several decades prior. Clients on Hardship Assistance are ineligible for most health benefits and are unable to access supplements except in the most severe circumstances. In recent years, this client had experienced a significant increase in negative health symptoms and medical professionals were growing concerned for his health as he experienced a number of heart attacks and subsequent breathing problems. The client approached TAPS as his physician had recommended a breathing device after observing his patient's breathing stopped for up to one minute on an average of 17-22 times per night, to which the Ministry had denied coverage of. TAPS Advocate appealed the Ministry's decision to deny the breathing apparatus as the need for this device was quite severe and the client would be in severe danger without it. MHSD approved the breathing device but limited the approval for 90 days arguing that this was the best option available due to the client being on Hardship. TAPS Advocate communicated with MHSD and appealed this decision again, addressed the severity of this case to MHSD Regional Supervisors, Policy Supervisors, and the Legal Analysts. Advocate was able to receive confirmation through negotiations that client would be provided the breathing device based on need as directed by the physician with no other stipulations or time limits as device was required out of life-threatening health issues. Client was provided with the breathing device without limitations.

TOTAL NUMBER OF CLIENTS ASSISTED DURING THE YEAR BY THE INCOME ASSISTANCE ADVOCACY
PROJECT: 1684

Volunteer Coordination Report 2010 - Heidi B.

If you walk into the TAPS office you will encounter a volunteer on the front desk; you may see a volunteer making coffee, and another volunteer ushering a client into an office for a disability appointment. The volunteers you may not see are busy behind the scenes, writing articles or providing artwork for the newsletter, organizing our database, or working on the board.

Volunteers help clients fill out their tax returns, guide people through the process of applying for disability benefits, answer the phone and greet clients, deliver TAPS' newsletter, help with mail outs, and talk to the public at our information table.

Over the course of the past year, 68 people have volunteered at TAPS. Some of our volunteers have been with us for many years, while others come for a few months while they look for work or go to school.

Our volunteers are retirees, working people, students, and people living in poverty. Some volunteer because they believe in the work TAPS does: "I'm passionate about poverty" says one volunteer. Others are trying to get practical experience before they return to the workforce. Others have struggled with the welfare system themselves.

In the words of one TAPS volunteer: "I volunteer at TAPS because I've been there, eating one potato a day, and now I want to help others."

Volunteer Profile

I never worked in an office setting before in my life and at one point felt an office setting to not even be a job. Due to a devastating injury in the year 2002, I came across TAPS as a possible place to volunteer due to my injuries. I always had a keen interest to work with people for their better interests. Since coming to TAPS to volunteer, I find it very rewarding to be a part of a group that helps people understand their rights and responsibilities they would not have known otherwise. Being at TAPS has given me a lot broader view of the community and of what is available to people. Because of my personality and character, I'm very grateful to be working with people that accept the humour that filters through the office at some time.

2010 Taproot Newsletter Report

TAPS' newsletter, Taproot, has articles on tenants' rights, income assistance and disability benefits, and issues relating to poverty. TAPS' staff advocates write articles in the area of their expertise, several volunteer writers contribute articles and two volunteers provide artwork.

In the past year, articles on cuts to legal aid, outstanding warrants and income assistance eligibility, the income assistance application process, access to information, and security deposits have appeared in the Taproot.

The Taproot comes out six times a year. We print 600 copies per issue. The newsletter is mailed to members and is available at organizations around Victoria, including the Single Parents' Resource Centre, the John Howard Society, Our Place, and the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre.

TAPS Community Volunteer Income Tax Program

TAPS provides free year round face-to-face income tax preparation for eligible individuals (low-income, disabled, seniors, new immigrants, students). Over the past year we have had three volunteers, Fran Rothman, Paul Dwyer and Bakh Dhillon working together to provide this service. The demand has been great and continues unabated, whether it is tax season or not. 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 year round. As a result there is a significant demand for TAPS services, especially from those individuals facing low literacy levels or other barriers.

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 taxfilers, regardless of ability to pay, or level of literacy, to have access to the tax system.

Why do TAPS clients need their income tax done? To receive their income tax refund! Or to participate in many provincial and federal income-tested programs, such as the monthly Child Tax Benefit, Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors, the Goods and Services/Harmonized Sales Tax Credit, access to public housing, assisted living for seniors, Medical Services Plan Premium Assistance, Fair Pharmacare, ESL programs at community colleges, Canada Student Loans. 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, and having their income tax prepared helps to satisfy this debt as the Crown may have a claim on their income tax refund. TAPS volunteers may complete up to 10 years of income tax returns for a client.

TAPS COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX PROGRAM PREPARED OVER 620 INCOME TAX RETURNS.

2010 Board of Directors

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Past Chair: BC Chapter of the Canadian Evaluation Society

Robin Bassett – Vice-President

Retired Lawyer

Barb Amberstone – Secretary

Writer, Community Volunteer

Paul Dwyer – Treasurer

Retired Accountant

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Kris Constable

Information and Privacy Consultant

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Provincial Employees Community Services Fund

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generous



individual donors. Thank you!