



2012 ANNUAL REPORT
Providing advocacy, education, community building

“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 5,000 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.

Executive Director's Annual Report 2012

It has been my pleasure to serve as Executive Director of Together Against Poverty Society again this year. It has been another exciting year at TAPS, marked by important achievements and ongoing challenges as we strive to ensure clients have access to justice and are able to obtain the benefits to which they are entitled.

We continue to advance the goals of TAPS strategic plan which are to: (1) Provide a consistent, high level of individual legal advocacy services; (2) Engage the board of directors in broader community advocacy; (3) Increase opportunities for volunteers and students; (4) Increase and broaden our public legal education and community outreach; and (5) Ensure the sustainability of TAPS.

Throughout the past year, TAPS legal advocates provided high quality legal advocacy services for clients with income assistance, provincial persons with disabilities benefits and tenancy issues. TAPS legal advocacy services were enriched through ongoing training, active peer support and high quality legal supervision provided by TAPS legal supervisor Lisa Cowan. TAPS Income Assistance Legal Advocacy Project went through some notable changes in terms of staffing over the past year. In February, we said good-bye to an exceptional legal advocate Amy Johnston, who moved to Nunavut to find new adventures. TAPS was fortunate that tenant advocate Tasha Page (nee Johnson) was available to move to full-time and step into the part-time income assistance legal advocate position, thereby combining the two roles. In August, Erin Pritchard left her position as the full-time Income Assistance Legal Advocate to complete her articles at the British Columbia Public Interest Advocacy Centre in Vancouver. This position has been filled by one of TAPS' former Volunteer Disability Advocates, Kim Roberts. The Tenant Advocacy Project saw one significant staffing change towards the end of the reporting period when Tasha Page stepped back from her role as a Tenant Advocate to pursue further studies and Yuka Kurokawa, TAPS former Social Work student stepped in. TAPS is very fortunate that long time Tenant Advocate John Cooke continues to provide excellent service to tenants in Victoria. We are also privileged to have the highly effective services of Stephen Portman, TAPS Volunteer Disability Coordinator.

With the help of funding from the Victoria Community Literacy Steering Committee, TAPS embarked on a new pilot project this spring, the Employment Standards Information and Assistance project. This project involves providing information and assistance to non-unionized workers regarding their rights under the Employment Standards Act. TAPS volunteer Patti Stockton assisted in getting the project off the ground and TAPS former Public Interest Law Student, Jonathan Blair has taken over as the Employment Right Worker.

One of the highlights of the past year for TAPS was the TAPAS for TAPS fundraiser held in June featuring Joe Arvay, QC. This was a very successful event drawing many members of the legal community in Victoria. TAPS board was integral in making this event a success. This year saw TAPS board create a number of smaller sub-committees, including a social policy committee,

communications committee and fundraising committee. All of these committees have been active; supporting the work of the organization as a whole. It is great to have the board address these issues as TAPS advocates are so busy providing service to clients in need.

TAPS extensive network of volunteers continue to make significant contributions to the organization that are vital in ensuring our programs are running efficiently and effectively. I am particularly proud of TAPS ability to recruit and retain volunteers from all walks of life. I want to thank all of the volunteers who give so readily of their time in the service of others. Much of the success of our volunteer program can be attributed to Heidi, TAPS talented Volunteer Coordinator, who ensures TAPS volunteers are fully appreciated for their skills and time. Over the course of the year we had three special events to celebrate our vital volunteers. We had a holiday turkey dinner in December, a Chinese lunch and a summer BBQ, which was held on a beautiful day in July; all of which were very well-attended.

TAPS flagship volunteer program, the Volunteer Disability Advocacy Project (VDAP) continues to improve each year; building on the work/improvements completed the year before. I am constantly impressed with the dedication and thoughtful advocacy undertaken by the Volunteer Disability Advocates. TAPS is also proud of its' role as a learning organization and throughout the year, TAPS took on 6 students from the University of Victoria, including from the Faculty of Law, and the Schools of Nursing, Child and Youth Care and Social Work and from the Social Justice Studies Department. We also hosted a student from the University of Ottawa's Law Faculty.

Public Legal Education presentations and workshops are a key component of TAPS mandate. Over the past year TAPS legal advocates have given presentations at over a dozen different organizations across Greater Victoria. We have also participated in and helped organize numerous public events that help the public gain a greater understanding of TAPS services and the challenges faced by people living in poverty in Greater Victoria. TAPS is also involved in some broader coalition work such as Raise the Rates, the Victoria Community Literacy Steering Committee, the Community Action Plan on Poverty, Safer for all, the Coalition for Public Legal Services, and the Downtown Service Providers.

I am pleased to report that TAPS reached its budget goals again this year. Given the unpredictability of granting applications and the challenging economic times we face, meeting budget goals can be stressful, but with the help of our generous donors and successful grant applications we were able to reach our target. I want to thank the Law Foundation of British Columbia for all they do to support TAPS. It is so much more than the Continuing Programs core grant we receive; it is the support and training and network of advocates across the province providing access to justice for low-income British Columbians, that would simply not exist with the support of the Law Foundation of BC. I also want to thank the Province of British Columbia, the United Way of Greater Victoria, the Provincial Employees Community Services Fund, the Vancouver Foundation and Coast Capital Savings, without whose generous financial contributions TAPS would simply not survive.

It is an honour to work at Together Against Poverty Society, an organization with integrity and intelligence that provides such a unique and vital service to some of the most vulnerable members of our society.

KELLY NEWHOOK

November 2012

2012 President's Report

We are now in our 23rd year of making a difference as the largest anti-poverty organization on Vancouver Island. There have been so many changes over the years, so many successes. However, we are still struggling with the facts:

- BC has the highest poverty rates in Canada and the second highest poverty rates for children in the country;
- On average, low income Canadians die 10 years earlier than high income Canadians;
- BC Dietitians report that BC residents in all categories of income assistance cannot afford to both pay rent and eat a healthy diet, even if they don't spend anything on other necessities.

This is not the world we want. TAPS is a proud member of the "Raise the Rates" coalition in urging necessary change in income assistance rates. Everyone must receive a minimum monthly income that adequately covers food, shelter, transportation and other basic needs. I want to thank the Board for their strong commitment to effect positive changes such as raising the rates.

This year, the Board decided to set up sub-committees of the board to get results more effectively. These include a social policy committee, a communications committee, an organizational policy committee and a fundraising committee. All of these committees have been active; supporting the work of the organization as a whole. For example, the social policy committee has been working on a number of issues, including the continuation of the Community Volunteer Supplement, the new 5-week work search, delays with immediate needs assessments and the difficulties involved in the persons with disabilities application. We will further explore using committees as we prepare to renew our Strategic Plan early next year.

I want to say a special thank you to our Executive Director, Kelly Newhook. Kelly has done an excellent job of both administering the office and reaching out to the community. Kelly's work is vital to the success of TAPS. I also want to thank the staff and volunteers, including the volunteer Board members. All have contributed to the important work of TAPS.

Each of us contributes what we can and, together against poverty, we will make a difference.

JOAN MCHARDY

November 2012

2012 Tenant Advocacy Project

TASHA PAGE (NEE JOHNSON), JOHN COOKE,
AND YUKA KUROKAWA

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

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

- legal information for tenants regarding 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,
- 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 capable of advocating 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, as part of a caseload.

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 hearing as well as researching case law in addition to the collection, dissemination and disclosure of evidence.

CASE WORK

Case Files are opened when:

- a client has commenced an application for Dispute Resolution with the Residential Tenancy Branch against a former or current landlord and/or conversely,
- a current or former landlord has filed a Statement of Claim seeking damages against a tenant or,
- circumstances are such that 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 a week's preparation; whether it be toward a (pre-hearing) negotiated settlement of a particular dispute or before a final, legally binding decision that would be rendered by an adjudicator at a formal Dispute Resolution proceeding.

Matters going forward at hearing typically might involve:

- Claims in Damages,
- Notices (of eviction) for Non-Payment of Rent and/or Utilities, Repeated Late Payment of Rent, (1 Month) Notices to End for Cause, (2 Month) Notices for Landlord's Use of Property,

- Applications requesting Orders for Service and Repair,
- Applications disputing unlawful Rent Increases,
- Applications requesting Orders for the return of either a Security/Pet Deposit or, both.

CASE TRENDS

There continues to be a number of Claims in Damages and/or Cross-Applications for Damages that more often than not, due to their legally complex nature, consume considerable amounts of time and energy in the gathering and/or dissemination of evidence, hearing preparation and witness management.

This trend shows no signs of abating and depending on any number of factors, i.e., weighing a particular Client's ability or demonstrated inability to represent their own interests at hearing and as a second consideration, measuring the likelihood of success in any given dispute, the advocates have had to make some difficult choices in terms of who receives Summary Advice as opposed to Full Representation, in some instances.

Delays in scheduling at RTB further compound matters and some files remain open for upwards of a year before any final disposition before a DRO can be arrived at.

In recent months there seems to be an increase in evictions for non-payment of rent. Tenancy advocates are restricted in their ability to assist with these notices. As a result, these files often require the advocates to negotiate with the landlord and work in conjunction with income assistance advocates and/or other community agencies to access emergency funds or secure an Immediate Needs Assessment with the Ministry in an effort to maintain a client's tenancy. Due to the urgency of these files, the limited resources available, and the restrictive nature of the legislative authorities these files can be labour intensive to work on.

PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION

The advocates have provided Public Legal Education to tenants and service providers at various organizations in the Greater Victoria area, including but not limited to; a monthly Public Legal Education session at Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) Stabilization Unit, the University of Victoria, AIDS Vancouver Island's Love Your Liver Health Fair, Project Connect at Our Place, the YMCA Transitional Housing Project (for at-risk teens), the Prostitutes Education and Empowerment Resource Society (PEERS) and the Single Parents Resource Centre.

CASE PROFILE

By way of introduction, we will refer to this file as Landlord v: The Dog.

Client came to TAPS after receiving an eviction notice from his landlord and for what was alleged to be a "Breach of Material Term" of his tenancy agreement.

The eviction notice followed on from a warning letter the client had previously received from the landlord with regard to a dog being in his unit.

This client suffers from prostate cancer and diabetes. He had in fact gotten a dog shortly after moving into the unit; approximately eight years ago. The dog is trained, but not certified, to detect low blood sugar and alert his owner. The presence of the dog proved to be an effective

method of managing his diabetes and the client's incidence of hospitalization was drastically decreased, as result.

When he initially got the dog the client informed the landlord. When he eventually received the warning letter, he offered to provide the landlord with a doctor's letter stating that the dog is an Assistance Dog.

The landlord refused the letter and subsequent to that, issued the eviction notice. TAPS tenant advocate assisted the client in applying for Dispute Resolution and represented him at hearing. The tenant advocate sought to have the Notice set aside; on the basis that the landlord has known about the dog's presence for the last eight years and secondly, that the landlord has a duty to reasonably accommodate the client's disability.

The client was also referred to the local Human Rights Coalition, where a human rights complaint was initiated against the landlord, which was subsequently accepted for hearing by the Tribunal office.

Information regarding the human rights complaint and the landlord's prior knowledge of the dog was provided to the Residential Tenancy Branch for the purposes of the hearing. However, the eviction was upheld at hearing and the landlord was granted an Order of Possession.

TAPS tenant advocates, working in conjunction with a variety local public interest lawyers, were successful in getting a Stay of the landlord's Order of Possession in BC Supreme Court pending the outcome of a Judicial Review of the Dispute Resolution Officer's Decision and the human rights matter.

The landlord has agreed to accept the dog as an assistance animal and the client will be able to stay in his suite indefinitely.

The total number of clients served by The Tenant Advocacy Project for this reporting period is 1135.

Volunteer Disability Advocacy Project 2012

STEPHEN PORTMAN

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

TAPS' Volunteer Disability Advocacy Project (VDAP) provides legal advocacy and support to economically disadvantaged persons applying for Persons with Disability (PWD) status. The Volunteer 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 Social Development.
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.

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

The level of denial upon initial application for PWD designation continues to be high, in the experience of clients to the project in the period covered by this report. The high denial rate creates lengthy and time consuming appeal processes that place undue hardship upon applicants while

straining the resources of the ministry and our staff. The level of success upon reconsideration appeal to the ministry continues to be high attesting to the often erroneous legislative interpretation applied by ministry adjudicators in denying initial applications.

PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION

The VDAP coordinator has provided many public legal education seminars over the past year. 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.

CASE PROFILE

Chris was in a car accident in 2011 and sustained a traumatic and life changing back and brain injury. Following the initial stages of his recovery he was forced to apply for income assistance as he could no longer work at in his previous occupation as a floor layer and had no savings to support himself. Chris immediately applied for disability designation on his own and his initial application was denied. He completed a 'Request for Reconsideration' and was again denied. Chris appealed the decision in front of the BC Employment and Assistance Appeal Tribunal, who upheld the Ministry of Social Development's decision to deny him provincial PWD benefits based on the fact that it could not be determined that Chris required help to perform activities of daily living. Chris was very distraught about the denial because although he had learned to perform some daily living activities on his own, they took him considerably longer than average and sometimes they did not get done at all. Furthermore, due to his impairments, Chris lives a very isolated life with few family supports and did not have any resources to get support with daily living activities as he no longer had the physical ability to earn an income. In fear that he would be evicted if he did not obtain additional support from the ministry he contacted TAPS at the recommendation of his physician so that he could gain some assistance in reapplying to the ministry for a second time. After meeting with a volunteer advocate, Chris was able to have his application completed by his physician who used the detailed information prepared by his advocate to give a more complete understanding of all the challenges that Chris faces. The new application was approved by the ministry without need for further appeal.

This year the Volunteer Disability Advocacy Project worked on 672 case files.

Income Assistance Advocacy Project 2012

TASHA PAGE, ERIN PRITCHARD, AND KIM ROBERTS

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

TAPS Income Assistance Advocacy Project offers high quality legal advocacy services. 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

- 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 WORK

CASE TRENDS

“Integrated Case Management” – Ministry Computer System Changeover

The Ministry of Social Development’s (MSD) new computer system, referred to as the Integrated Case Management (ICM), was introduced on April 1, 2012. Since its implementation the ICM has remained a significant challenge for TAPS legal advocates and clients alike.

Adjustment to the new system has led to significant delays in processing times for virtually every kind of application and appeal submitted to the MSD. For example, application, intake, and approval for basic income assistance can currently take up to 2 months, and a crisis supplement can take up to 2 weeks to adjudicate. Applications for Persons with Persistent Multiple Barriers can take up to 3 months. Due to the fact that ‘Immediate Needs Assessments’ do not currently exist in any meaningful way (see below) these delays are causing serious hardship for our clients. There also appears to be an increase in MSD errors such as lost paperwork or ‘requests for reconsideration’s’ not being mailed to clients, all of which have been attributed to ICM. These issues have shown no sign of abating and continue to be a concern for advocates to this date.

Immediate Needs Assessments

Income assistant applicants continue to face extremely long wait times for initial intake appointments. Even where someone is identified as requiring an ‘Immediate Needs Assessment (INA)’, many applicants have to wait up to a month for an appointment. “Immediate needs” include persons who have received eviction notices for non-payment of rent, impending hydro disconnection, persons with absolutely no resources for food (food banks do not negate an immediate need), etc. TAPS submitted a Freedom of Information request to confirm issues related to INA designation and appointment wait times, and also talked to a number of Ministry supervisors (including the Community Relations and Service Quality Manager) about this problem.

Despite this initiative, we still have not noticed an improvement to the INA intake process. Rather than providing an Immediate Needs Assessment, MSD workers simply offer to put clients on a waiting list for an earlier appointment in case an appointment is cancelled by another applicant. TAPS encourages and assists clients who experience unreasonable INA wait times to contact the Office of the BC Ombudsperson.

Crisis Supplements

One of the legislative criteria for accessing crisis supplements is that an applicant must have an “unexpected need”. The Ministry’s increasingly narrow interpretation of what constitutes an “unexpected need” has been a recurring problem for many of TAPS clients. For example, a client whose apartment caught on fire after she fell asleep with a cigarette in her mouth was denied funding for a new bed, as the Ministry determined it was not unexpected that a bed would catch on fire in this situation. Similarly, a client who had just been released from a treatment facility was denied a crisis supplement for clothing as it was “not unexpected that she would be released from a treatment facility,” despite the fact that it was the middle of winter, and the only clothing she owned was a pair of shorts and a long-sleeved t-shirt (i.e. no winter coat, boots, sweater, etc.).

There have also been a number of cases where the Ministry has made an unreasonable determination that other resources were available to meet the person’s need. Short term loans from friends and family members to pay for an acute need while a crisis supplement application is being adjudicated – which can take up to 2 weeks – are being wrongfully construed as “other available resources to meet the need,” and leading to denials of the application.

It is important to note that income assistance legal advocates have seen a rise in the number of clients hoping to access crisis supplements not because of an acute need, but rather because the income assistance rates are simply too low to meet basic needs.

Throughout the past year, TAPS’ ability to assist people found ineligible for shelter crisis supplements has been improved through the establishment of the Homelessness Prevention Fund during summer 2011. This fund (administered collaboratively by a number of community service providers) provides clients with one-time funding of up to \$500 to secure their housing, and requires that a sustainable plan for subsequent months be established prior to disbursement. The increasing popularity of this fund has helped a number of people avoid becoming homeless; however, the need for the fund highlights the insufficiency of the Ministry’s shelter amounts, and contributes to ongoing and increasing concern about government downloading onto community agencies.

Support for Recipients with Children

TAPS advocates have met with a number of clients this year who have had difficulty accessing support for parents. For example, where a child has two parents that share custody equally, neither is able to access benefits available to the primary caregiver.

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, Work BC, Our Place, “Project Connect” at Our Place, Earth Walk, “Love your Liver” with AIDS Vancouver Island, and a monthly workshop at VIHA Stabilization Unit and more.

CASE PROFILE

A single mother of two came to TAPS seeking assistance with a Request for Reconsideration of the denial of her provincial Persons with Disabilities application. The client had numerous disabilities, including but not limited to HEP C, COPD, Type 2 Diabetes and PTSD, the latter resulting from extensive childhood trauma. This client depended heavily on friends and family to assist her with daily living activities. In her original application, she included an extremely supportive Doctor's letter that outlined the impacts of her disability on her daily living activities. As such, the denial of this application was quite surprising. With the help of TAPS Income Assistance advocates a detailed Request for Reconsideration was prepared and submitted highlighting; the comments made by the doctor in the original application, the support letter that accompanied the original application and the information provided by the third party assessor. Fortunately the clients' Request for Reconsideration on the decision regarding her original application for provincial persons with disabilities benefits was successful. However, this example shows how without support from TAPS legal advocates this clients life circumstances may have been completely different.

A total number of 1238 clients were helped by the Income Assistance Advocacy project in the past year.

Volunteer Coordination Project Report 2012

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.

CRIMINAL RECORD CHECKS

Over the past year we have had to request that all our volunteers who have contact with the public or access to money to get criminal record checks.

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 very stable group on the front desk, with only one permanent shift coming open in the past year.

SILENT WITNESS

In January 2012 we held a training session for silent witness volunteers, and we now have several people who are available to accompany TAPS clients to appointments at the Ministry of Social Development.

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.

TAPROOT NEWSLETTER REPORT 2012

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

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 Greater Victoria Public 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 or tenancy. In the past year, we have had articles on how people on income assistance or disability benefits can go to school, how returning to work will affect the benefits of people with disabilities, and, in tenancy, the rights and responsibilities of tenants in relation to repairs and maintenance. We are also able to keep our readers up to date on what's happening at TAPS.

For the past ten years, we have had a regular contributor who explored, through fictional stories, the reality of life in poverty. We are very sorry to announce that Gord Tomblin passed away on October 13, 2012. Gord's articles were a key component of Taproot. We will all miss Gord and his exceptionally well-written and poignant tales.

Several volunteers work on the newsletter team: we have two artists contributing artwork, one regular writer and another 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

TAPS COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX PROGRAM REPORT 2012

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, seniors, new immigrants, and students). 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 Coast Capital Savings for the financial assistance they provided to TAPS volunteer income tax project over the past year.

During the year ended August 31, 2012, TAPS volunteers saw over 650 clients and prepared and filed over 1300 income tax returns.

2012 Board of Directors

MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

Dr. Joan McHardy – President

Past Chair, BC Chapter of the Canadian Evaluation Society

Robin Bassett – Vice-President

Retired Lawyer

Barb Celu Amberstone – Secretary

Writer, Community Volunteer

Tony Pullman – Treasurer

Retired Chartered Accountant

MEMBERS-AT-LARGE

Marian Burka

Retired Public Servant

Rose Henry

Human Rights Activist

Melanie Hudson

Lawyer

Erik Kaye

Public Servant

Zoe Macmillan

Lawyer

Noreen Marshall

Retired Public Servant

Brenda McBain

Consultant

Hilary Marks

Community Advocate

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

TOGETHER AGAINST POVERTY SOCIETY
GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES OUR FINANCIAL PARTNERS:



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