



STRATEGIC PLAN 2014 - 2017

Introduction

The Together Against Poverty Society (TAPS) is the largest anti-poverty organization on Vancouver Island. It was incorporated in 1989.

TAPS provides free, individual legal advocacy services for people facing income assistance, BC Persons with Disabilities benefits and tenancy issues. TAPS provides public legal education to ensure that all individuals and service providers understand their rights and responsibilities so they are better able to advocate on their own behalf. TAPS also provides broader advocacy on issues relating to poverty.

TAPS hired its first Executive Director in 2010. In June, 2010, staff, Board members and volunteers participated in a day-long planning retreat to provide input into the first strategic plan. The goal for the retreat was to develop a meaningful and achievable Strategic Plan. This plan was to be responsive to current circumstances and provide the agency direction over the next three years. It was important that the Strategic Plan have the support of all staff and Board members. The original strategic plan has been updated through a planning retreat held in September 2013 as well as other planning events, including a day-long retreat to plan for TAPS' 25th anniversary to be celebrated in 2014.

The Plan strives to strike a balance of individual advocacy, public education and community advocacy.

Mission, Vision and Values

Mission:

Our Mission is to better the lives of persons living in poverty through legal advocacy and public legal education.

Vision:

All residents of Greater Victoria will have adequate income to allow them to meet their needs and to live with dignity.

Values:

At TAPS, we:

- Believe that the causes of poverty are in the social, economic and political institutions of our society – not the “failings” of the individual
- Listen to the voices and perspectives of people who live in poverty
- Know that change is possible
- Value the role of civil society
- Enable people of all backgrounds to work together to address the fundamental causes of poverty
- Treat everyone fairly and with respect
- Acknowledge the importance of social justice for all.

Strategic Context

Canada's income gap has been growing, unchecked, over the past generation. At the same time, there is a shrinking social safety net. Income assistance rates are not sufficient for survival. British Columbia continues to have the highest child poverty rate in the country. The living wage in Greater Victoria is just over \$18 per hour. Housing costs in the Victoria market are among the highest in the country. Rental vacancy rates in 2013 were 2.8% and average rent for a 2-bedroom unit was \$1068 per month. (CMHC, Fall, 2013).

The population in the region (like the rest of the country) is aging and more people will be moving into their retirement years without adequate savings.

Other agencies have reduced their services and more people are coming to TAPS. TAPS is rich in human resource potential and needs to be prepared to address these challenging times and poised to capitalize on emerging opportunities.

Strategic Goals

At TAPS, we will:

1. Provide a consistent, high level of individual legal advocacy services
2. Engage the Board of Directors in broader community advocacy and activism
3. Provide diverse opportunities for volunteers with a range of individual strengths
4. Heighten awareness of the circumstances and systemic issues for people living in poverty and undertake actions to address them
5. Ensure the sustainability of TAPS

Actions to Support Goals

1. Provide a consistent, high level of individual legal advocacy services
 - Support staff through training opportunities and mentoring
 - Consult with staff regarding any program changes
 - Facilitate opportunities for staff to discuss best practices and identify emerging case trends
 - Support staff to put boundaries around their individual advocacy work, including capping caseloads
 - Maintain positive communication among Board, staff and volunteers through a range of celebratory activities
 - Liaise with relevant government agencies and staff to address systemic, substantive and procedural issues that involve more than one client.
2. Engage the Board of Directors in broader community advocacy and activism
 - Refine the communications strategy to include an updated brochure, regular website updates and the continued use of print and social media
 - Raise the profile of TAPS through 25th anniversary activities
 - Staff will continue to identify and document trends and systemic issues to bring forward to the Executive Director and Board for broader advocacy work
 - The Board will continue, through social policy and communications sub-committee/s to work with staff on systemic issues for broader advocacy
 - The Board and staff continue to participate with other anti-poverty groups.

3. Provide diverse opportunities for volunteers with a range of individual strengths
 - TAPS will ensure that people living in poverty are engaged at all levels of the organization
 - Volunteer recruitment will continue to expand the numbers and skill sets of volunteers

4. Heighten awareness of the circumstances and systemic issues for people living in poverty and undertake actions to address them
 - Use the Charter Challenge – A Child’s Right to Food, as a key vehicle to raise awareness and to act on the systemic issues causing poverty.
 - Use events celebrating TAPS 25th anniversary to raise awareness about the charter challenge and the systemic issues causing poverty
 - Continue to share knowledge and expertise more broadly in the community
 - Continue to provide high quality public education
 - Making better referrals for clients.

5. Ensure the sustainability of TAPS
 - Ensure financial stability through:
 - Increasing membership in TAPS
 - Broadening fund raising efforts
 - Applying for grants that support strategic goals
 - Ensuring financial accountability by staff and Board members

 - Ensure organizational stability through:
 - Developing clear policies relating to all organizational aspects including financial controls, human resources and health and safety
 - Ensuring that the constitution and by-laws accurately reflect the purpose and operation of TAPS
 - Continuing to recruit new members, renewing and replacing the Board with individuals with the skills and values needed to fulfil the Mission of TAPS
 - Ensuring that activities undertaken by the Society are consistent with the Strategic Plan

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

-Mary Wollstonecraft, 1792

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