



TOGETHER AGAINST
POVERTY SOCIETY

Equity, Justice & Dignity

ANNUAL REPORT



TAPS 2020-21 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE:

Patricia Cochran – President
Assistant Professor, Faculty of Law, UVic

Amy Baylis – Vice President
Policy Analyst

Nathan Cartwright – Treasurer
Accountant

Ryan Tonkin – Secretary
LLB, PhD Student - Philosophy

MEMBERS AT LARGE:

Felicity Smith
Retired Organizer and Fundraiser

Linda Doctoroff
Retired Social Worker

Cathie Boies Parker
Lawyer

Malcolm Sword
Inclusion Team Lead

Sandra Angus-Vincent
Manager – Daily Dose Society

Ruth Spooner
Intake Coordinator, Island Health

Caroline Hudson
Self-Employed

Herbie Dick
Mobile Outreach - Daily Dose Society

Bethany Aubrey
Manager and Social Services Professional

WHO WE ARE

Together Against Poverty Society (TAPS) was established in 1989 and is the largest anti-poverty organization on Vancouver Island. Located on the traditional territory of the Ləkʷəŋən People, known today as the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations, we acknowledge the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism in our communities and its inextricable link to anti-poverty work. 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. Through legal advocacy and public education, 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. We serve over 7,000 people each year, and we still cannot meet the needs of everyone who approaches us. TAPS is a non-profit society whose membership is open to individuals or groups concerned with the preservation of civil society, social justice, the eradication of poverty, as well as the continuing moral progress of those ideals.

WHAT WE DO

TAPS provides advocacy services in the areas of income assistance, federal and provincial disability benefits, employment standards, tenancy, and income tax preparation. Our work includes providing information and giving summary advice, negotiation and/or representation to persons of no, low or fixed income.

We also provide public legal education for low income persons and other interested community groups and organizations, which then enables them to advocate for themselves or for their members, and free, year-round tax filing services.

On a larger scale, TAPS engages in systemic advocacy focused on identifying, researching, and addressing issues relating to poverty with particular emphasis on those that affect our local community. TAPS is proud to be one part of a network of community groups and service providers all working in cooperation to advance these issues.

ON THE COVER: TAPS STAFF & PRACTICUM STUDENT
TOP ROW (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT): EMMA WHITE, IRENE MCGEE, ISABELLE DEHLER-HYDE,
LEILA GEGGIE HURST, MADYSON POWELL, GILLIAN GAFFNEY, EMILY SPROULE
BOTTOM ROW (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT): HANNAH MANG-WOOLEY, ANTONIA MAH,
CAITLIN WRIGHT, EMILY ROGERS, DOUGLAS KING



President's Report

The TAPS Board of Directors is made up of a diverse group of committed volunteers who work together to support the work of the organization. I am pleased to share this Report for 2021 on behalf of the Board.

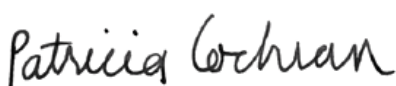
The beginning of this year saw us adopt our new Strategic Plan, which will guide our work for the next three years. The Strategic Plan will be a useful guide to keeping our aspirations and practical work tied appropriately together in the coming weeks and years, and our Board priorities this year have been organized accordingly.

In terms of strengthening board governance, this year we spent time working on policy development and thinking about what our committee structures should look like. We have organized board governance training, cultural competency training for board and staff, and have also participated in some community-building work that will lead to a revised “About Us” section of the TAPS website. These activities are small steps towards building our individual and collective capacity to meet those aspects of our strategic plan about community engagement and strengthening relationships to Indigenous communities and organizations.

The fundraising committee, in collaboration with the Executive Director, has been working on articulating a new model for our fundraising strategies, particularly taking into account ongoing uncertainties related to in-person events.

As a board, we are constantly inspired by the extraordinary work done by the staff and volunteers of TAPS, under the leadership of Douglas King. TAPS staff and volunteers bring to their advocacy work legal expertise, professional judgment, deeply informed compassion and dedication to social justice, and the result this work is effective, practical and sometimes transformative. As a board, we wish to recognize the care and work that staff contribute to social justice in our communities through their work at TAPS.

We know that many in our communities are experiencing new, more, or deeper needs as a result of the pandemic and government responses to it. We are incredibly proud of how TAPS has risen to the challenges of the pandemic with integrity, finding ways to provide services to clients in a way that is safe for clients, staff and the community as a whole. As we move forward into a still uncertain future, we are also thankful for our funders and individual donors for their remarkable ongoing commitment and generosity, which has allowed our organization the stability needed to work sustainably and with integrity.



PATRICIA COCHRAN
BOARD PRESIDENT

Executive Director's Report



IMAGE CREDIT: ADIRAN LAM (EGEN-ELLIOT, ROXANNE. 'TENANTS IN SUBSIDIZED HOUSING FACE RENT INCREASES, EVICTION FEARS.' *TIMES COLONIST*, 17 NOVEMBER 2020)

Thank you for taking the time to read our humble report on all the activities of our Society over the last year. In the pages that follow, you'll see a lot of stories about the work we were able to do with our clients and the myriad of challenges we faced due to the ever-changing nature of the pandemic. I hope that as you read it you'll see a reflection of the intense dedication to our work that our staff hold which I get to see each day and all the different ways we have tried to address poverty in the many forms it takes in our community.

This year saw uncertainty in many ways, but I'm happy to say that TAPS has made it through another year with much to be proud of. We said goodbye to some of our long-term staff and good friends, and welcomed new ones to our team. Most importantly, we rose to the challenges of a continued crisis in affordable housing, patchwork protections for workers, and the many barriers to vital income support, all of which only grew stronger during the pandemic. In each project report, you will see some of the successes we have had and also get a sense of the frustrations that our advocates and coordinators feel as we try to promote the rights of those who seek to navigate our legal systems.

It can be a grind trying to challenge these systems day in and day out, which is why it has been so important to see the incredible support of our members and donors this year. In another year where we were unable to hold a fundraising event, or gather to show our appreciation to donors and volunteers, our supporters stood with us and provided us with an unprecedented level of contributions. To all of you reading who supported TAPS in 2021, I give you my heartfelt thanks.

We are already excited for all the next year has to offer, and the cautious optimism that the next phase of the pandemic will bring some much needed respite from the social and financial pressure so many low-income people have been feeling.

DOUGLAS KING
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Supervising Lawyer's Report

This will be the last TAPS annual report I write after 12 year at TAPS, first as a volunteer, and then 10 years as the TAPS supervising lawyer. I will take this chance to look back and remind myself, and you, how far TAPS has come in that time. When I started, there were two full time advocates and one part time advocate. The wonderful Heidi managed the front desk volunteers who were essential to keeping the door open and organization running smoothly. My office was a tiny windowless room with mouse traps, Christmas decorations, piles of old wires, adaptors and other computer paraphernalia. The piles grew as computers improved.



IMAGE CREDIT: VERONICA BONDERUD PHOTOGRAPHY

But the heart of TAPS beat strongly and the advocates, volunteers, new executive director and the board saw the need to serve people who were marginalized by poverty, disabilities, and faced discrimination. Some benefits and rights were available to support these folks, but assistance and advice were needed to actually access them. Government offices gradually moved behind bars and staff people were replaced with computers and automated messaging information. The needs of the people we served caused little TAPS to grow and often provide services formerly done by government employees. Talented, committed and energetic advocates were recruited to provide free, face-to-face legal advocacy for people with income assistance, disability benefits, employment standards, and tenancy issues.

Advocates, working in teams in their program areas, built connections with other social justice organizations in our community. As TAPS' reputation grew, our known expertise on anti-poverty policy resulted in a broader form of advocacy for our clients. In addition to public legal education, advocates' participation in various committees related to their work grew, submissions to City council, provincial policy and legislation committees, organizations trying to deal with homelessness and community groups seeking to change the laws. And this was done while providing expert legal advice and representation in often complex cases involving hearings and appeals, done with passion, compassion and hard work.

I have been on a rollercoaster ride watching all this happen. My prejudices and assumptions about members of our community have been repeatedly challenged. I have had the opportunity to see effective access to justice delivered with professionalism and expertise. I have seen clients come into TAPS completely cowed and leave with a glimmer of hope. Witnessing tent city issues directly was a life-changing experience, taking affidavits in tents, attending morning circle where talking is regulated by passing the talking stick and not by who is "important", giving updates on injunction cases at night when the wind was so strong that my job was to hold onto the tent pole and yell to be heard over the heavy rain, and working with constitutional law experts who so generously donated their time. It was also one of many opportunities provided by TAPS for law students to see firsthand the impact of poverty and the importance of providing legal representation to people who cannot afford lawyers.

On a regular basis I ensured advocates correctly interpreted and applied the law. But also, I was able to support advocates as they painted a word picture on the impact of the law on their clients' lives and the need for decision makers to exercise their statutory discretion for this client in these circumstances. I have watched advocates expand their skills from stiffly reading their submissions at their first hearing to flexibly and skillfully responding to whatever came up. I have seen advocates skilled in the law come up with inventive arguments that bring new perspectives to legislative intent and the rights of applicants or tenants. There are frequent ethical discussions about how to represent a client. And then there were the losses. Clients at least felt their voices had been heard and obvious needs for changes in the law were identified and pursued.

TAPS work is done in an atmosphere of equality, respect for clients and for each other and a recognition that it is essential to support each other. Optimistic cynicism and laughter are prevalent and stress is reduced by karaoke, colouring, puzzles (my favourite) and craft events. My granddaughter wears a unicorn horn that I made at TAPS! And this Christmas season a wreath made at TAPS hangs on my front door. Who would have thought that being a supervising lawyer at TAPS would result in such a meaningful, challenging and exhilarating period of my life?

Thank you all past and present Tapsies.



LISA COWAN
BARRISTER & SOLICITOR

Poverty Law Project

DOUGLAS KING, DANIEL JACKSON, IRENE MCGEE, LEILA GEGGIE HURST

PROJECT DESCRIPTION & UPDATES

The purpose of the Poverty Law Project is to provide assistance to low-income clients with legal representation on poverty related legal matters, and to support legal advocates at TAPS and across Vancouver Island with legal issues and higher-level cases that arise through the provision of legal advocacy services. The Poverty Law staff lawyer is available to take their own cases, and to handle appeals and judicial reviews from cases started by legal advocates. This is incredibly valuable to TAPS as legal advocates are not sanctioned to make court appearances.

In June 2021, Staff Lawyer Daniel Jackson left the organization. Executive Director Doug King and Articled Student Irene McGee carried the project while we completed the hiring process. In September 2021, Leila Geggie Hurst joined the team as the new staff lawyer.



127
clients
served

CASE TREND

THE RISKS OF RENOVICTION

As the rental market has become even less accessible, we continue to see an increasing number of clients dealing with confirmed or suspected ‘renovictions’. These cases can take a variety of forms. In some cases, our role has been to ensure that landlords follow the required procedures, providing the necessary notice and compensation to tenants. In other cases, what appears to be an eviction for another cause may in fact be an attempt to circumnavigate statutory ‘renoviction’ protections.

As will be highlighted in our case study, we also identified a particularly challenging type of possible “renoviction”. When a rental building experiences a disaster, such as a fire or a flood, there is no simple mechanism for the tenants or an independent authority to assess the habitability of the building. Instead, the landlord has the power – through privately contracted experts – to make its own assessment. There is a real risk landlords could use this as an opportunity to declare the entire building uninhabitable, thus ending all tenancies without having to go through the onerous redevelopment application process. With the housing market in its current state, landlords have an extremely high incentive to move old tenants out and bring new tenants in. This is particularly the case in older buildings with tenants who have lived there for decades and are paying rents well below market value. Unfortunately, it is exactly these buildings – frequently neglected and significantly behind in safety standards and repairs – that are most at risk of a disaster occurring. Addressing this gap will be an area of focus for this project in the coming year.

CASE TREND**GAPS IN COVID-19
RELATED AMNESTIES**

The gaps in various government's responses to COVID-19 are numerous, but there are a few that stand out in the context of this project. First, the (brief) rent and eviction moratoriums did not apply to housing on reserve or co-op housing, and evictions proceeded in the context of the first major lockdown, when it was very difficult to find resources. This project assisted with both of these kinds of evictions through the lockdown.

Second, while the City of Victoria has moved to allow people experiencing homelessness to not take down tents during the day (a pause in the '7 to 9' enforcement), the suite of restrictions that these tents face (size, spacing, setbacks, etc.) have led to extensive and sometimes unpredictable bylaw enforcement. Many people have experienced frequent displacement and destruction of belongings. We continue to work to find an effective way to hold enforcement officials accountable.

CASE PROFILE**THE MENZIES STREET
APARTMENT FIRE**

In fall 2021, TAPS met with a group of tenants who had recently lost their housing after a fire in their apartment building. The landlord had told the tenants that the building was uninhabitable and had prevented the tenants from returning to their apartments, but had not followed any of the processes set out in the Residential Tenancy Act to obtain confirm a tenancy is frustrated or an order of possession. The landlord had not shared any information with the tenants about the state of the building or the reasons it was uninhabitable. Meanwhile, the City of Victoria provided TAPS with a report indicating that some of the tenants' suites had been undamaged by the fire.



PICTURED: STAFF LAWYER LEILA GEGGIE HURST IS JOINED BY MENZIES STREET TENANTS FOR A PRESS CONFERENCE HELD AT TAPS ON NOVEMBER 24 2021

TAPS represented a group of these tenants at the Residential Tenancy Branch, seeking orders of possessions to return to their homes. Settlement was reached with the landlord for those tenants. We also used this as an opportunity to speak with the media about the need for a government body with the authority to quickly enter a building, in the event of a catastrophe, to make a neutral, qualified determination about the habitability of the building.

Income Assistance Legal Advocacy Project

MADYSON POWELL, EMILY ROGERS, IRENE MCGEE,
THEA MCDONAGH, CAITLIN WRIGHT

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

TAPS' Income Assistance Project works to enhance access to justice by providing reliable legal services to people about their rights and entitlements to income security benefits. We advocate for people by negotiating with government representatives and providing representation at appeals in the areas of Income Assistance (IA) and Persons with Disabilities (PWD) benefits. The project also offers public legal education which aims to expand community knowledge of income supports, barriers to accessing these benefits, and potential remedies.



PICTURED: TAPS IA ADVOCATE, CAITLIN WRIGHT, SPEAKS TO THE MEDIA ABOUT BC TRANSIT'S ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES

CASE TREND **RATE INCREASE**

During 2021, a broad coalition of disabled and neurodivergent people, with lived experiences of disability and poverty, as well as legal advocates and other service providers, called on the provincial government to increase IA and PWD rates by making the \$300 temporary COVID supplement permanent, and challenged the Ministry to make an immediate and essential increase to the shelter allowance, which has been frozen at \$375 dollar per month since 2007.

In mid-March 2021, Minister Nicholas Simons announced a permanent increase to IA and PWD rates of \$175. While well short of a \$300 increase, this additional \$175 did mark the largest single permanent increase to welfare rates to-date. However, as with all previous rate increases, this additional income was attached to the support allowance, with no increase given to the shelter allowance. IA advocates felt this was a missed opportunity for the province to take bold action against a markedly unaffordable rental market, by helping to give low-income people greater autonomy to choose their housing, and demonstratively acknowledging that \$375 for shelter costs across the province is woefully inadequate.

CASE TREND **MSDPR'S RETURN TO "NORMAL"**

Though the provincial state of emergency had been extended until the end of 2021, earlier this year, we saw the Ministry begin its transition back to their pre-COVID policies and procedures. With the onset of COVID-19, the Ministry made various positive changes to accommodate virtual service and reduce burden on its clients. For instance, the Ministry made changes to its policies allowing advocates to more easily contact the Ministry on the behalf of clients to decrease the need for in-person services. Additionally, the

Ministry committed to significantly limiting cheque holds and compliance reviews, allowing clients to continue to receive their assistance while they took the necessary time to comply with the Ministry's requests for information. This year, we saw these changes be reversed back to normal bringing back the need for in-person document signing and creating a large influx of urgent cheque hold files. The urgency of these files paired with the return of advocacy barriers while remaining in a provincial state of emergency presented quite a challenge for our income assistance project this year. Despite these challenges, we are proud of our team for keeping up with demand and continuing to be a supportive presence alongside our clients who are undergoing these stressful situations.



661
clients
served

CASE PROFILE **ANGELA'S STORY**

After tax season this year, the Ministry became aware that many of their Income Assistance and Persons with Disability (PWD) clients had received the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). The CERB benefit was available for those who had earned at least \$5,000 in 2019. This year, Angela, a PWD recipient, came to TAPS after the Ministry became aware that she had accessed the CERB benefit, implying that she had to have earned at least \$5000 in 2019. Unfortunately, due to Angela's cognitive difficulties as well as insufficient information provided from the Ministry, Angela had not reported this 2019 income as she had misunderstood her monthly reporting requirements of the PWD program. The Ministry threatened to cut Angela off of her assistance if this situation was not promptly corrected.

TAPS supported Angela by advocating for her assistance to continue while we worked to gather the necessary documents to bring her income reporting up-to-date. Although an overpayment was established, we were successful with advocating for no further penalties or sanctions to be applied to Angela's file with our submissions that her inaccurate reporting was a direct result of insufficient information being provided to Angela about her reporting requirements upon her entry to the PWD program as well as a result of her cognitive impairments resulting from her disability. We were also successful in supporting Angela to negotiate a manageable repayment plan and helped provide education about her reporting obligations so this issue should not arise in the future.

Tenant Legal Advocacy Project

HANNAH MANG-WOOLEY, ANTONIA MAH, IRENE MCGEE, DOUGLAS KING,
NAVJOT JASSAR, ANDREA VOGEL, AND ISABELLE DEHLER-HYDE

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The TAPS Tenant Legal Advocacy Project (TLAP) works to improve access to justice by providing residential tenancy advocacy across Greater Victoria and the surrounding region. Our team assists tenants with the dispute resolution process of the Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB), and helps mitigate problems that fall under the British Columbia Residential Tenancy Act (RTA) and the Manufactured Home Park Tenancy Act (MHPTA).

588
clients
served

We also provide public legal education workshops regarding the rights and responsibilities of tenants, and engage in systemic advocacy by participating in policy initiatives, and lobbying government representatives and stakeholders to make residential tenancy legislation and local bylaws more supportive of tenants.

CASE TREND

INCREASE IN EVICTIONS FOR NON-PAYMENT OF RENT



Helping tenants with eviction notices for non-payment of rent is, unfortunately, routine for the tenancy project. What is not routine is the number of tenants who are seeking help because an unsustainable proportion of their income goes towards rent. Because of the drastic increase in the cost of rent this year, low-income tenants in market housing are forced to sign tenancy agreements for \$1500.00-\$1800.00 bachelor or single suites to avoid homelessness.

When a tenant receives an eviction notice for non-payment of rent, we work to ensure they will be able to make future rent payments. Of all the issues we assist tenants with, the unaffordability of rent has become a consistent, undeniable piece of the majority of our cases.

CASE TREND**INCREASE IN EVICTIONS FOR LANDLORD'S USE OF PROPERTY**

On July 1, 2021, the Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB) introduced new updates to the tenancy legislation, including more rigid restrictions over a landlord's ability to issue eviction notices for major construction or renovations. This means that it's harder than ever for landlords to evict tenants. As a result, we have seen a drop-off in these eviction notices for renovation, but an increase in notices for landlord's use of property.



IMAGE CREDIT: HERNANDEZ, CRISTIAN, VANCOUVER TENANTS UNION. "VICTORY AT THE BELVEDERE COURT"

Eviction notices for landlord use of property allow landlords to evict tenants if they intend to occupy the rental suite as their own living accommodation. However, some landlords use these notices in bad faith and intend to re-rent the suite at a higher rent. This is because, unlike a notice for major construction or renovations, landlords can give half the notice period and do not need to have permits arranged first. We have had numerous successes protecting tenancies against landlords who claim they will occupy the suite but actually intend to re-rent it.

CASE PROFILE**RANDY'S STORY**

Randy came to TAPS seeking legal representation after his landlord denied him access to his suite while he was in hospital for several months recovering from a stroke. The landlord had asked Randy to sign a document during the hospital stay that they claimed was his consent to give up possession of his suite, but the paperwork said no such thing and Randy's doctors insisted he did not have capacity to sign anything at that time. We helped Randy file for an order of possession seeking an expedited hearing to reclaim his suite, as by denying access the landlord had illegally locked him out and discarded a significant portion of his belongings. Days before the hearing the landlord informed us there were other vacant suites in the building and offered Randy his pick in order to settle the dispute. Randy is now moved into a new spacious suite that has plenty of natural light for his plants. This case is an example of how helping tenants initiate legal action against a landlord who is in the wrong can be the gateway to extremely positive resolutions.

Employment Standards Legal Advocacy Project

ISABELLE DEHLER-HYDE, EMMA WHITE

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

ESLAP fights for workers' rights by helping workers access workplace justice and stolen wages, increasing public awareness about workers' rights through public legal education seminars and infographics, collaborating with other social justice and labour organizations, and engaging in systemic advocacy to improve the rights and protections for workers across BC. The bulk of the project's capacity goes to providing non-unionized workers with legal advice and representation with any legal matters related to the BC Employment Standards Act (ESA) and BC Temporary Foreign Worker Protection Act.

This year, we engaged in numerous lobbying and campaign efforts to increase protections for workers in light of the continued COVID-19 pandemic including advocating for a temporary paid sick leave provision to help workers isolating with COVID symptoms, paid vaccine leave, increased protections for migrant workers, and extensions for COVID financial benefits.



PICTURED: EMMA WHITE (LEFT) AND ISABELLE DEHLER-HYDE, THIS YEAR'S ESLAP ADVOCATES



IMAGE CREDIT: GREEN, KIERNAN. 'BC FEDERATION OF LABOUR URGES 10 PAID SICK DAYS ON FINAL DAY OF PROVINCIAL CONSULTATION.' SAANICH NEWS, 25 OCTOBER 2021

We lobbied the province to permanently add 10 employer paid sick days to the ESA and were involved in the various labour campaigns across the province calling for the same. Last month, the province announced the introduction of 5 employer paid sick days. While this is not the amount we had hoped for, it is an important step in assuring workers no longer need to choose between going to work sick or being able to pay their bills.

CASE TREND**WAGE THEFT**

Wage theft continues to be a significant problem. Wage theft occurs when employers simply refuse to pay wages that they owe such as regular wages, overtime wages, statutory holiday pay, or vacation pay. This act of theft results in significant hardship to our clients and often requires the involvement of other advocacy staff to deal with emergency access to income assistance benefits and evictions.

**CASE TREND****LENGTHY WAIT TIMES AT THE ESB**

While wait times to access complaint resolution processes at the Employment Standards Branch have been a longstanding issue, this year has been the worst ever in our project's history. ESLAP clients are waiting over a year and a half to hear from the Branch after filing a complaint. The impact of these delays on low-waged workers who have had wages stolen is profound. As such, the project is spending far more time trying to negotiate settlements with employers so that clients are not having to wait multiple years to recover their stolen wages.

CASE TREND**UNCHARTED TERRITORY: NEW WORKPLACE POLICIES**

COVID-19 has changed some fundamental aspects of workplaces. We are getting an unprecedented number of inquiries from clients who want to know their rights in the face of changing workplace policies such as mandatory vaccine policies and working from home. This has meant that we have had to diligently stay up to date on all the ever-evolving laws, case law, and health orders and their legal implications for workplaces. Further, it means our project is having to support clients in stressful disciplinary processes related to these new policies despite so many unknowns.

CASE PROFILE**DALISAY'S
STORY**

Dalisay sought out assistance from ESLAP advocates following her termination from a fast-food company franchise where she had worked for nearly two years. As a temporary foreign worker on a closed work permit, Dalisay was in a vulnerable position as her work permit only allowed her to work for that one company, so speaking out could jeopardize her ability to stay in the country. Her employer took full advantage of that, as well as all the rest of his employees – all of whom are temporary foreign workers.

Throughout her employment, Dalisay was required to work 6 to 7 days a week and up to 12-hour shifts, all while her employer refused to pay her for all of her hours worked. Despite her fear, Dalisay wanted to get justice and better working conditions for her and her coworkers. We filed an Employment Standards complaint on her behalf as well as a third-party complaint on behalf of all the other employees. Through an investigation, the Employment Standards Branch found that the employer failed to pay Dalisay regular wages, overtime wages, statutory holiday pay, vacation pay, as well as made illegal deductions from her wages. Thanks to our advocacy, Dalisay recovered over \$10,000 in stolen wages and the workplace is now going through a full payroll audit with the Employment Standards Branch to see what is owed to the rest of the employees of the company.



81
clients
served

Volunteer Disability Advocacy Project

GILLIAN GAFFNEY, CAITLIN WRIGHT

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Volunteer Disability Advocacy Project (VDAP) supports individuals living with disabilities by helping them access the medical and financial supports associated with obtaining the provincial Persons With Disabilities (PWD) designation. Trained volunteers provide support and guidance to clients while they navigate the notoriously inaccessible and lengthy application process for PWD. VDAP's volunteer advocates help by translating client's experiences into language that meets the government's legislative criteria, known as Section 1 of the PWD application. VDAP advocates also work with medical professionals to ensure that clients are accurately represented in the medical reporting aspect of the PWD application, with a focus on maintaining positive relationships between clients and their medical providers. VDAP strives to create a safe environment for clients while leading with empathy, respect, and promoting client autonomy.

CASE TREND

RETURNING TO IN-PERSON APPOINTMENTS

VDAP quickly adapted its method of service provision in order to meet public health guidelines early in the pandemic. VDAP's previous Coordinator, Caitlin, took this challenge in stride and got VDAP through some of the most challenging months of the pandemic. For many months, Caitlin was solely responsible for all client work as it was unsafe to have volunteers in the office. Caitlin was successful in welcoming some volunteers back to the office for phone appointments, and Gillian, the new coordinator, was able to transition



PICTURED: VDAP COORDINATOR, GILLIAN GAFFNEY (RIGHT) AND VDAP VOLUNTEER, SUMEET, PREPARE FOR A CLIENT MEETING

VDAP back to an in-person service last fall. VDAP welcomed its first in person client back to the office in August 2021 which was a monumental first step in revitalizing the project. Since then, we have had a steady flow of clients returning to the office and this will continue in 2022.

PROJECT TREND

CHALLENGES IN RECRUITING AND TRAINING

The pandemic also introduced new challenges in recruiting and training new volunteers after an extended hiatus. In October, a VDAP training session was held and the project successfully onboarded several new volunteers, who have now already taken on clients of their own. With such a limited volunteer base to draw from for mentoring of new advocates, it was extremely challenging to coordinate training shifts. Those dedicated volunteers who did return provided a lot of invaluable support to new volunteers, but the low overall number of returning volunteers created many obstacles. Existing staff with prior VDAP experience who stepped up to mentor new volunteers were instrumental and hugely appreciated.

PROJECT TREND

OVERWHELMING SHORTAGE OF DOCTORS

The critical shortage of doctors and other healthcare professionals in Victoria continued to create serious challenges for clients looking for support with their PWD applications in 2021. Many clients lost their doctors to retirement, and many walk-in clinics have extremely limited hours and appointments. For this reason, more and more VDAP clients are needing the assistance of volunteer Nurse Practitioner (NP) Uppal.

We are incredibly thankful for the working relationship we have with NP Uppal. And from the size of the waitlist to access his services, it is clear that we would need a whole team of NPs to successfully meet the demands of the community! VDAP Coordinator, Gillian Gaffney, has taken steps to establish an agreement with Telus Health which will ideally allow VDAP clients to access NP services virtually. We are hopeful that this relationship will be fruitful and that we can increase our capacity in this area in 2022.

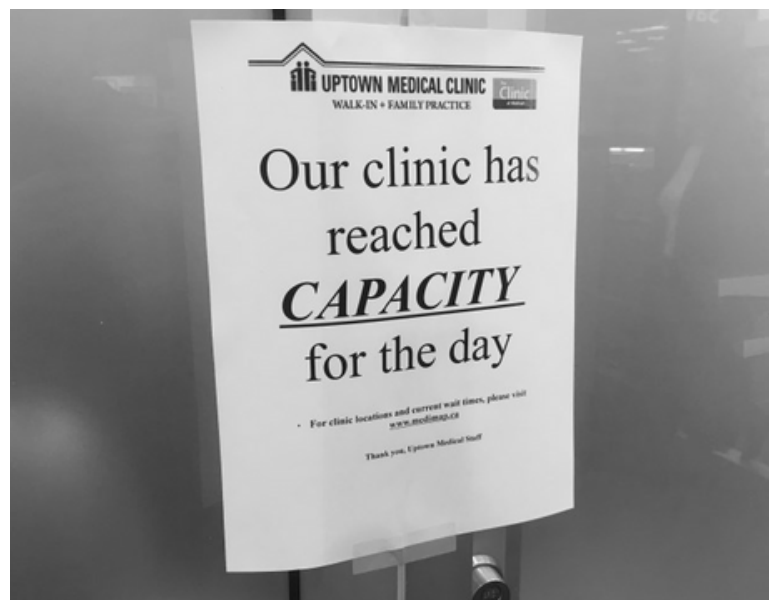


IMAGE CREDIT: HARNETT, CINDY. 'GREATER VICTORIA'S WALK-IN CLINIC WAITS...', *TIMES COLONIST*, 11 DECEMBER 2019

CASE PROFILE

ELI'S STORY

This fall, the Income Assistance Advocacy Project received a request for assistance from Eli, who had received a denial on their PWD application. Unfortunately, their doctor was not able to provide the information needed for a successful Request for Reconsideration. Eli was internally referred to VDAP for support with starting the PWD application process again. The VDAP Coordinator was able to match them with an existing advocate as well as a new advocate in training, and together they successfully created a strong Section 1 for the client's new application.

Eli had the opportunity to provide feedback to the advocates, and once they were happy with the result, their file was turned over to Nurse Practitioner Uppal for assistance with Sections 2 and 3. This was an invaluable learning experience for our new volunteer, and one that Eli felt was very positive for them – they reported feeling seen and heard and thanked TAPS for the support. While we do not know the results of the process yet, it is heartening to know that the process itself can be a supportive experience for clients.



Volunteer Tax Project

GILLIAN GAFFNEY, SHARIFA RIDDETT

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The TAPS Volunteer Tax Project provides free basic income tax preparation services to people with low income. Volunteers prepared up to 10 years of tax returns for clients, allowing clients to access the benefits and returns they are entitled to. Many social programs require clients to have their taxes filed, making TAPS' services imperative to individuals who need to access these income-tested supports. The project was forced to pivot to a drop-off model due to the pandemic and has operated successfully throughout 2021. Thanks to our partnership with the Disability Alliance of BC Tax Aid Program, we were better able to accommodate clients living with disabilities who otherwise struggle to access our services.

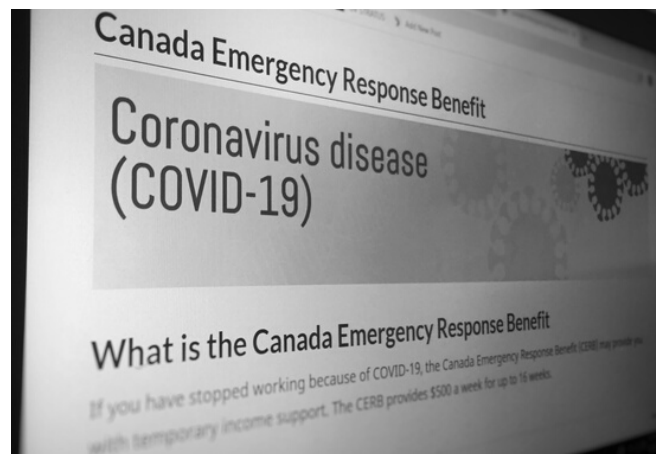
TAPS' tax program was run by the outgoing Tax Advocate with support from management until our new Volunteer Coordinator, Gillian, was hired in late July, 2021. By digitizing the tax intake tracking system, TAPS has been able to provide a more streamlined experience for clients. Ongoing outreach has rekindled connection between TAPS and other community agencies, with a large number of referrals coming from other service providers in the area.

CASE TREND

THE AFTERMATH OF COVID-19 BENEFITS

One of the most significant trends we have seen this year is individuals who would typically receive a small return ended up owing taxes because they received Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) payments in 2020. Many clients were unaware that CERB payments were taxable or thought that the tax was withheld at the source. This caused significant distress for those who were relying on receiving a small return.

TAPS provided an information sheet to clients who were found to be owing, explaining why they owe, and detailing their options and resources. This practice seems to alleviate stress for clients and is a practice we look forward to carry with us into the 2021 tax year.



CASE TREND**SENIORS FACING GIS CLAWBACKS**

Another unfortunate trend we saw this tax year was clawbacks of the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) for Seniors, again as a result of receiving COVID-19 benefits such as the CERB. When the benefit year started in July, many seniors started receiving significantly lower payments than they were used to. Upon realizing this, the tax program reached out to the Seniors Entitlement Service (SES) and provided an educational presentation to their organization. This allowed us to share what the TAPS Tax Project could offer in terms of services, as well as to learn more about what the SES could provide in order to ensure that we were providing clients facing GIS issues with the most appropriate referral. Establishing a connection between these two programs has led to greater ease in terms of creating referral pathways for our community's seniors and we are excited to continue this relationship in the 2021 tax year.

CASE TREND**YEAR-ROUND NEED FOR TAX SERVICES**

Most other low-income or no cost tax services close for the fall, known as the 'off-peak' season for tax preparation. TAPS' tax program continues to prove that there is a need for ongoing, year-round tax supports for individuals in our community. As one of the only providers available, we were able to help dozens of clients to file their taxes who would have otherwise had to either wait until the new year or gone without assistance. Even though it was the 'slow' season, the TAPS tax program was able to process over 400 tax returns between August and November 2021, securing clients over \$425,000 in returns and benefits. This is a clear indicator that our services are necessary and are having a direct impact on clients.

**CASE PROFILE****ANDRE'S STORY**

This fall, the TAPS tax program was able to connect with a support worker from the John Howard Society. This support worker helped liaise between the Tax Coordinator and John Howard clients who are currently incarcerated. Many of these clients had not been able to file their taxes for years and had outstanding tax refunds and benefits owing to them. One of these clients was Andre, who was nearing his release date and had no housing or supports ready for him when he returned to the community. We were able to file 10 years of tax returns for Andre, gaining him access to a significant amount of money. This money was enough to secure him a place to stay when he was released and a damage deposit on a new rental. Thanks to the TAPS tax program, Andre was able to return to the community with a more stable framework in place.

TAPS Volunteers

EMMA WHITE & GILLIAN GAFFNEY, TAPS' VOLUNTEER COORDINATORS

TAPS relies on the hard work and dedication of over 30 volunteers who come to us for a variety of reasons and from a variety of backgrounds – they are students, retirees, people with disabilities, and people with lived experience of poverty who donate hundreds of hours each year towards supporting our community's most vulnerable individuals. They bring with them a vast and diverse set of skills, helping with everything from filing tax returns, to answering the phones, illustrating and distributing our newsletter, and helping folks navigate disability applications.

Front desk volunteers are often the first connection folks make upon reaching out to TAPS for help. They must have a solid understanding of everything within the scope of TAPS' work, an extensive knowledge of community resources, and the ability to remain calm and kind while interacting with clients who are often in an understandably great deal of distress. And because clients contact us about such a wide array of issues, our front desk volunteers quickly gain a holistic understanding of where our community is hurting the most. Across the board, one of the barriers we saw folks encountering time and time again in 2021 was a lack of capacity amongst local service providers, which can make accessing timely and appropriate help feel impossible. The role of the front desk volunteer certainly involves giving and receiving its fair share of bad news, but it's remarkably rewarding to hear how meaningful it is for folks to encounter a kind and compassionate person on the other end of the phone or plexiglass while navigating systems that are so often cold and cruel.

This fall, TAPS revitalized its front desk training program and onboarded 5 new volunteers. We ran a group training session that was well-received by volunteers not only for providing interactive learning opportunities like roleplaying and group activities, but also for providing the opportunity to meet and connect with other TAPS volunteers face-to-face, something that has been sorely missed throughout the pandemic. We're hopeful that 2022 will be the year we can safely resume showing our gratitude for all TAPS volunteers through in-person volunteer appreciation events.



PICTURED: EMMA WHITE (LEFT), COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COORDINATOR AND GILLIAN GAFFNEY (RIGHT) TAX & VDAP COORDINATOR

"To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness.

What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places – and there are so many – where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction."

– HOWARD ZINN

**TOGETHER AGAINST POVERTY SOCIETY
GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES OUR FUNDERS:**



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