



**2008 Annual Report**  
**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 nearly 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, and the eradication of poverty.

## 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 and educating 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.

## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT AUGUST 2008: JOAN MCHARDY**

There have been significant changes over the past year at TAPS.

After 18 years with TAPS, Susan Noakes has left TAPS. Susan started as an employee, back in 1990, as the sole advocate. After her first four years with TAPS, Susan was on the Board. For the last three years Susan was President of TAPS. On behalf all those who have benefited from her commitment to TAPS, I want to thank Susan for her outstanding dedication to the work of TAPS. We all appreciate her hard work. I took over as President in August of this year.

One of the many tasks completed by Susan was the move from TAPS old office on View Street to our new and improved location: Suite 302, 895 Fort Street. The move was a big upheaval for all of us. But now we have settled down and are enjoying our new space. TAPS is growing and we needed more space.

Our staff has grown to four advocates and a coordinator, thanks in large measure to increased funding from the Law Foundation. John Cooke, has been our tenant advocate for 11 years. Lorraine Bates and Sonia Bianca are advocates for persons with disabilities. A new employee is Sarah Brady who is the income assistance advocate. Tricia Roche is our coordinator. I want to thank the staff who work so hard on behalf of our clients. It is a difficult job advocating for those who need help with housing and often very complex income assistance questions. And then there are the 23 page disability forms that we help clients complete.

I want to give a special thank to Heidi Berry who is the volunteer coordinator at TAPS. Heidi and the TAPS volunteers donate countless hours to the work of TAPS. Each individual contribution is appreciated. And each individual contribution is important as it is through our joint efforts that we make a difference.

The Law Foundation of BC has provided financial support for TAPS since its inception. The Provincial Employee Community Services Fund as well as the Province of British Columbia (through Gaming) continue to be strong supporters of TAPS. We greatly appreciate the many years of support. And we have other institutional donors. And we have individual donors. Thank you.

Next year we are planning a celebration of twenty years of TAPS' work. TAPS was incorporated in 1989. After twenty years of trying to eradicate poverty we have not succeeded. But, we are trying. Over the years, we have made a significant difference in the lives of many thousands of women and men and children.

I am very proud to be associated with TAPS. We are not a charity model of helping. We work from the premise of addressing social justice for all. This is the philosophy that keeps our organization alive. As Mary Wollstonecraft said in 1792, "It is justice, not charity that is wanting in the world."

## TAPS COORDINATION 2008

Thanks to a contribution from the Law Foundation, this year for the first time TAPS had a paid coordinator. The focus of the coordinator, as TAPS closes nearly two decades of work on poverty issues, was financial development, community education, staffing, reporting and administration.

The move to a new, larger office was an important event last year. Individuals in need of the services of the volunteer disability advocates, in particular, enjoy the more numerous meeting spaces. It is difficult to sum up the importance of our financial supporters in making this move a reality.

The achievements of TAPS during the past year could not have been possible without the support of the Law Foundation for our Income Assistance and Disability Advocacy programs and a capital grant to facilitate the development of our new office space. We extend our sincere appreciation to the Law Foundation of BC for their on going support of TAPS and in particular to Wayne Robertson, Executive Director and Mike Seaborn, Regional Director.

Additional financial support was received this year from the Public Employees Community Services Fund, the Province of BC, Coast Capital Savings Credit Union Community Investment Fund and Vancity Community Fund.

### THIS YEAR TAPS:

- » **Provided** advocacy services to over 3,560 individuals and education services through Public legal education presentations, TAPROOT newsletter, community workshops to another 1300 people.
- » **Established** a larger, accessible office at #302, 895 Fort Street.
- » **Published** TAPROOT with articles ranging from Advocacy Advice to personal experiences of poverty to legal information.
- » **Undertook** new performance measures for Advocacy Services.
- » **Organized** a successful fund raising dinner in February.
- » **Developed** new policies and procedures for the organization.
- » **Supervised** students from the University of Victoria Faculty of Law, School of Child and Youth Care and Women's Studies.
- » **Fielded** media enquiries regarding homelessness, poverty, living wage, child poverty.
- » **Gathered** community partners to discuss the vulnerability of low income seniors.

Like many non-profits TAPS needs to diversify its funding sources. As we close the year, small individual contributions to the work of TAPS are more important than ever as granting bodies have reduced funds for community groups due to the current economic climate.

## COMMUNITY EDUCATION

The daily work of TAPS looks at the reality of poverty, its impact on individuals and families in Victoria. People in poverty who come to TAPS tell us they feel heard here and that they have no where else to turn. The advocacy work of TAPS this year, as always, demonstrates to us that the source of poverty is less the individual than the economic and social system. Our understanding of the issue guides our proposed solutions and our community education agenda.

Telling the TAPS story and the story of the people we serve– the reality of poverty and homelessness and the need to mobilize to end poverty – is part of our community education program. This year we reached out to young and old in the development of projects and workshops that

- » profile solutions to poverty,
- » challenge stereotypes of poverty and marginalization
- » reveal the widening gap between the rich and poor in Canada
- » educate seniors about tenant rights
- » answer the question “what can I do?”
- » detail a national poverty reduction strategy
- » encourage the electorate to ask candidates what they would do to end poverty and homelessness.

In the coming year we look forward to completing a strategic planning process for TAPS 2009-2012, developing our Speakers Bureau and continuing our vigorous Advocacy Services.

With this annual report we close two decades of work by TAPS. There is much to celebrate .... And there is much left to do. Join us.

# INCOME ASSISTANCE ADVOCACY PROJECT - 2008

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Income Assistance Advocacy Project of TAPS offers professional services by two advocates (one full time, one part time) in an attempt to meet a growing demand for assistance. Information is provided to clients on all aspects of Income Assistance, eligibility is clarified, documents are prepared for reconsiderations, and clients are represented at tribunal hearings.

## OBJECTIVES:

1. Enhance access to justice by providing reliable legal information to people living in poverty about their rights and entitlements to income assistance benefits and employment insurance
2. Provide vigorous advocacy services to people living in poverty by negotiating with ministry staff and representation at appeal hearings in the areas of income assistance and employment insurance law.
3. Offer engaging and informative legal presentations to community groups and their clients about the rights and entitlements of income assistance and unemployment insurance law.
4. Train individuals and community groups in advocacy skills.
5. Educate and empower individuals effectively to advocate successfully on their own behalf.

## CASE WORK

The majority of our work is in the area of social assistance administered by the Ministry of Housing and Social Development. The advocates have helped individuals and families apply for assistance, answer questions about benefits and entitlements, overpayments and debts owed to the Ministry. In addition to this we have completed numerous applications for health supplements ranging from chiropractic visits, medical equipment to diet supplements and applications for crisis supplements. Most commonly crisis supplements have been requested and issued to address concerns regarding shelter and shelter costs. Clients also received assistance with applications for Person With Disability and Person with Persistent Multiple Barrier benefits. Approximately 5% of the work is in the area of Employment Insurance benefits.

In doing this work, the advocates have noted a very high number of individuals and families applying for and on assistance who are struggling to meet basic needs of food and shelter. This includes many clients already receiving Person With Disability benefits or Person With Persistent Multiple Barrier benefits. The advocates have also noted that difficulty in getting appropriate service from the Ministry of Housing and Social Development persists and that recipients of assistance are very often overwhelmed by the complexity of the law and policies which apply to their situation. In addition, the current ministry system of no fixed workers has added another layer of complexity to accessing social assistance. Often clients and advocates call with a question and receive numerous and differing answers from MHSD staff. This complexity often renders the involvement of an advocate necessary for a resolution of the issue.

Comparing the statistics to last year, there is a decrease of approximately 100 in matters under 30 minutes and an increase of the same number in matters between 30 minutes to 2 hours. This reflects the trend that TAPS advocates have noticed in recent years of income assistance matters becoming more complex and requiring more advocacy work.

**TOTAL NUMBER OF CLIENTS ASSISTED DURING THE YEAR: 1316**

## **CASE PROFILE**

A woman with two small children came into TAPS one day. She was carrying an eviction notice that would become effective in two days. Until a month before she had been employed. Unfortunately, she had become ill and was laid-off from her position. At first, it appeared that she might get better and could return to work, which is why she didn't immediately apply for Employment Insurance. Once it became clear that she would be out of work longer than a couple weeks, she applied for Employment Insurance. However, this is when she ran out of money and received her five-day eviction notice for failure to pay rent. Her first Employment Insurance payment would be in two weeks and, without any friends or family in Victoria, she had no place to turn, so she came to TAPS. The Income Assistance advocate applied for Hardship Assistance from the Ministry of Housing and Social Development on the woman's behalf. The application was accepted and, as a result, she was able to pay her rent, saving her the ordeal of being homeless with two small children.

## **SILENT WITNESS PROJECT**

The full time Advocate coordinates the Silent Witness Project in which TAPS volunteers accompany recipients to meetings with Ministry staff. These meetings can be for an initial application for benefits, an annual review, an investigation for fraud, or for some other purpose. The Silent Witnesses do not do advocacy work, but are a supportive presence. In our experience their presence improves the outcome of the meetings for recipients. Prior to the meeting the Advocate advises the recipient in regard to their legal rights, the Advocate then arranges for the Silent Witness to attend the meeting. The Silent Witness reports back to the Advocate, submits documentation and any follow up advocacy is undertaken by the Advocate.

This year, the advocate re-developed and re-initiated this project after a period of hiatus. Several new volunteers were trained and clients were informed of and offered the services of this program. This resulted in a few clients receiving the services of this project. This project is still in the development phase and we plan more volunteer training and further advertising of the service to the public.

## **PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION**

Last year, 23 presentations were provided and involved over 218 participants. These presentations were provided to recipients seeking the services of community organizations, staff of those organizations and law students. The presentations were primarily regarding income assistance rights and entitlements. They are a valuable means to enable recipients to obtain legal information regarding their rights, as well as critical legislative changes. Several of these presentations were also made to advocates, present and future. Handouts of written advocacy material were prepared and presented to each participant attending the presentation.

Also late this year a new income assistance presentation was developed aimed at women in transition homes. This idea came out of a need for information and a relationship that formed with Victoria Women's Transition home. Handouts and information were developed in August and September with the first presentation occurring in October.

Three articles were prepared for the TAPS newsletter by the income assistance advocates. One was regarding guidelines for appealing income assistance decisions and another was regarding benefits available for people with the persons with disabilities designation. The final article outlined the benefits pregnant recipients could access and supplements available to parents of younger children.

## TENANT ADVOCACY PROJECT 2007-2008

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

- » Legal information for tenants about the BC Residential Tenancy Act and other applicable legislation, including the provincial Human Rights Code
- » Mediation for and negotiation on behalf of clients with their landlords toward the equitable resolution of disputes
- » Legal representation for clients at Residential Tenancy Branch Arbitration 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.

### ADVOCACY

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.

### PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION

The Tenant Advocacy Project delivers regular Public Legal Education workshops for local service providers and topical articles for the TAPROOT community newsletter. Two articles were: "Beginning a Tenancy: What Every Tenant Needs to Know" and "It's Your Money: Protecting Your Security Deposit".

## CASE PROFILE

A married couple in their late 70's contacted the TAPS Tenant Advocacy Project after receiving a Notice to End a Residential Tenancy for what was alleged by the landlord to be "a breach of Material Terms" of their rental agreement.

Mr & Mrs. Jones had been tenants in good standing of the rental property for 30+ years and their rent was considerably below what would be considered to be "market value."

Both were disabled and living on a fixed income.

As it turns out, Mrs. Jones had been, on an occasional basis, feeding a crow from the patio deck of their apartment and contrary to a "do not feed the birds" edict incorporated into their tenancy agreement.

The property management firm, rather than issue the tenants with a verbal or written warning, elected to issue the eviction notice.

In receipt of the Notice, Mrs. Jones stopped feeding the crow from the balcony and instead took daily walks to the small park adjacent the complex where she continued this activity.

The Property Management firm refused to enter into a negotiated settlement (It appeared that the real motivation for the Notice was to gain market value for the suite).

At hearing, the tenants were represented by the TAPS Tenant Advocate. The Notice to End was set aside by a Dispute Resolution Officer, with an Order that the tenancy continue with all rights and responsibilities of both parties intact.

Mr & Mrs. Jones, having never received an eviction notice before, were unaware of their legal right to dispute; as is so often the case with many other tenants.

If they had not filed for formal Dispute Resolution, within the 10 day requirement, they might very well have been evicted for the reasons as given on the Notice.

**OF THE OVER 1800 REFERRALS TO TAPS TENANT ADVOCACY PROJECT, NEARLY 400 WERE MADE FROM THE RESIDENTIAL TENANCY BRANCH. THE TOTAL NUMBER OF CLIENTS SERVED THIS YEAR WAS 1,974.**

## VOLUNTEER DISABILITY ADVOCACY PROGRAM (VDAP) 2008

A significant portion of TAPS work is to assist people with their persons with disability (PWD) applications. If they are found eligible for PWD status, clients are eligible for increased financial, medical, and dental support. PWD clients can also access a number of programs not available on other levels of assistance, such as the subsidized bus pass, subsidized camping rates, and lower car insurance fees. Although PWD is not a 'life long' benefit in that it may be revoked by the Minister after review, it can be considered an ongoing benefit in that it increases support for persons facing mental and physical health problems.

The VDAP program has been able to assist hundreds of persons to receive this ongoing benefit since its creation. Many individuals who receive advocacy services from this program have applied multiple times in the past and have been denied, and continue to be considered under the 'employable' category despite their significant health problems. Because PWD forms are not well written, and subsequently not well completed by health professionals, individuals with disabilities are often inappropriately denied. Without the help of the VAP program, many of our clients would continue to struggle on the reduced assistance available under other rates of income assistance and be required to participate in employment plans etc. by the Ministry. One of our volunteers also discusses the importance of this program:

*"I really think that TAPS does good work and crucial work for the people of Victoria. Every person deserves respect; every person deserves to be heard. This is a city with some of the highest homeless rates in Canada and still people who are having a rough go for whatever reason are so often ignored, treated as invisible, or treated negatively. TAPS provides a venue for peoples' voices to be heard, their concerns raised and addressed in a productive and positive manner."*

The PWD application is lengthy (23 pages) and requires health professionals to document detailed information about a client's age, diagnosis, duration of illness, restrictions, and need for assistance. It is TAPS' experience that most physicians and other medical practitioners do not have this detailed information regarding their patients at their fingertips. Therefore, the role of the VDAP program is firstly to understand a detailed picture of an individual's everyday life; from meal preparation to ability to interact with others.

VDAP volunteers then complete a section of the application that asks an applicant to discuss their disability and its affect on his/her life, and enables the volunteers to critically review information supplied in the application by health professionals. We then work with health professionals to present an accurate picture of their patient's health on the form. If a person is denied, the VDAP program will assist an individual with the two stages of appeal: request for reconsideration and tribunal hearings.

## VDAP VOLUNTEERS

The volunteers come from different sectors, but all are concerned with social justice issues. The majority of our volunteers are law students at the University of Victoria. TAPS has been fortunate in fostering a strong relationship with the Law School – we consistently draw volunteers who are currently working on a law degree, and some of our board members are professors at that school. We also have retired lawyers, a retired physician, those with backgrounds in other health professions (eg. Nursing), and those who have personal and life experience with disabilities and/or the income assistance system.

Volunteers have a variety of reasons to dedicate their time and energies to TAPS. Some volunteers have a strong commitment through their faith to participate in the community, others believe that those in poverty have a right to quality legal advice. Many of our student volunteers gain valuable experience working with persons with significant disabilities and advocacy skills while at TAPS. One volunteer describes her reason for volunteering at TAPS:

*“A number of years ago, I saw an article in the Times Colonist about Law students who were volunteering at TAPS and really making a difference in people’s lives. The article captured my interest and from time to time after that, I would visit the TAPS website and wonder what it might be like to be a volunteer. In December 2007, after reading a Jody Patterson editorial urging people to get involved to combat homelessness, I decided it was time to find out. I began my advocate training in January 2008 and have never looked back. It has been a pleasure and an immensely rewarding experience to work with the TAPS clients in the supportive atmosphere of the TAPS organization. I have found the TAPS staff to be a dedicated, supportive group of people who go out of their way to make volunteers feel welcome and I am grateful for the opportunity to be involved in such important work.”*

The number of active volunteers fluctuates throughout the year. As a number of our volunteers are university students, they often need time off during exam periods or leave for the summer. In order for the program to work at its optimum capacity, we generally strive to have between 12 and 15 active volunteers. The VDAP program generally is able to maintain this level of active volunteers by offering training sessions throughout the year. This year we offered a training session in the October/November of 2007, February 2008, and March/April 2008.

## **PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION**

The major component for public legal education in this program is the training offered to volunteer advocates of TAPS and other service providers interested in increasing advocacy skills for their own organizations. TAPS is pleased to offer this training to other service agency staff and volunteers as it increases the capacity of the community as a whole to effectively assist people applying for persons with disability status. This year, the Victoria Native Friendship Centre invited TAPS to present a full day workshop on disability advocacy to better enable the staff to assist their clients. The advocate provided a full day (8 hours) of training, as well as provided the staff with the TAPS Advocacy Legal Materials Binder.

TAPS offers training sessions to all those potential advocacy volunteers interested in the program. This is a considerable time commitment on behalf of the volunteers, and also on the advocate, however there is considerable benefit to TAPS and its clients. TAPS' staff advocates would not be able to offer as many clients advocacy with regards to their disability application and appeals process without the support of our volunteers. These applications are lengthy, and the files often remain open for several months. Although it is TAPS' experience that having an advocate to assist with a disability application greatly increases the chance of success, and reduces the need to appeal, there are still many applications that are denied. TAPS then represents clients at both stages of appeal, the request for reconsideration, and the tribunal hearings, which also adds to the amount of time a file remains open. Each advocate spends approximately 6 hours of advocacy services before an application is submitted to the Ministry (this includes preparing the personal statement of the client and working with health professionals to ensure correct completion of the application).

TAPS provided a total of 14 advocacy training workshops to volunteers and community members this past year. A total of 36 people attended these training sessions; some were offered over full days and some were half days. A total of approximately 71 hours were spent to train volunteers and service providers. This time is an excellent investment for TAPS as each volunteer is then able to provide high quality advocacy service to a number of advocates. A law student who recently completed the training session stated:

*“As a law student and a new volunteer at TAPS I am excited about the chance to help our clients find the support they so richly deserve. I have an amazing opportunity to help people in my community receive what they are legally entitled to.”*

## **VDAP VOLUNTEER SUPPORT AND TRAINING**

Finally, the program offers ongoing support and training to its volunteers. This includes responding to individual questions about specific cases, but also meetings to deal with recurring issues or concerns and to receive educational updates. Important issues linking the advocacy work to community education are also covered.

This past year, three meetings were held to introduce the new advocate, discuss housekeeping items, case trends, updates to the legislation, and any other concerns the volunteers wished to address.

## VDAP CASE TRENDS

The pattern that is overwhelmingly documented by this program is the inappropriate denial of persons with significant disabilities. Often these individuals meet the legislative criteria, however their health professionals have not been able to express this clearly on the lengthy application form. This creates a huge amount of stress for our clients who struggle daily with mental and physical illnesses while trying to maintain on the lower supports available under other income assistance designations.

### CASE PROFILE

One client that we served this year had been suffering from a number of health problems. Her main diagnosis was kidney failure, however she was also struggling with other chronic illnesses such as arthritis. She often presented in what is commonly known in the medical community as the 'fog' associated with renal failure – a general sense of mental fuzziness (confusion, disorientation) and physical flu like symptoms (chronic fatigue, general sense of malaise). Further, she was facing barriers such as living alone in an outlying community while her health professionals were in town. Her housing was not adequate, and she was uncertain if she would be able to store all of the medical equipment required for her to perform dialysis at home (the Kidney Clinic indicates that you need at least one full room to store the chemicals and equipment required).

This woman had been denied twice by the Ministry for her PWD benefits despite her supportive doctor, specialist, social worker, and staff at the Kidney Clinic. The forms were simply not filled in adequately to determine the extent of her difficulties, notwithstanding the efforts of her health professionals. She was desperate by the time she contacted TAPS – she was less than a month away from surgery to insert the catheter necessary for home dialysis. Her family doctor was taking a three month leave. She was going to have to participate in several weeks of intense training at the Kidney Clinic at the Royal Jubilee – a lengthy drive into town. She could not afford the gas, and was unable to take the bus (the stop was too far from home). She felt that her 'chances' at success were low, but she had an urgent need for the increased assistance available under PWD.

TAPS was able to work with this woman's medical practitioners to ensure that despite her GP being unavailable and missing several pages of the form, her impending surgery and recovery, and her barriers to coming into town to meet with her advocate, we were able to present a strong application to the Ministry. TAPS recently heard that her application had been approved by the Ministry. This woman feels she likely would have been unable to be successful without the support and expertise of a TAPS advocate.

Another common and unfortunate case trend is that PWD applications and paperwork are misplaced and lost by the Ministry, or paperwork is incomplete resulting in serious consequences for a client.

## CASE PROFILE

One client began her journey towards disability benefits with TAPS. She had been homeless for a number of years and had travelled the country. She had a child back east whom she hadn't seen a number of years. She had been self sufficient for a number of years, living off the kindness of others and even living in commune for a few years. While she preferred to stay 'outside' the system, her mental health (depression) had eventually required her to seek medical treatment. Her doctor was so concerned that she was immediately hospitalized, and during that hospital stay was encouraged to apply for PWD.

Her GP and therapist completed the application. It was the opinion of her TAPS advocate that the application was strong, and likely to succeed. Surprisingly, it was denied. TAPS prepared her request for reconsideration, and was able to submit two strong letters of support from her doctor and her therapist as evidence. Again, and much to the surprise of her advocate, the application was denied. TAPS agreed to represent this client at the tribunal hearing.

While preparing for the tribunal, the advocate received a call from the Ministry stating that their data system had only one half of the letters of evidence submitted to the Ministry at the time of the reconsideration, and the tribunal was trying to access these documents to prepare the appeal record. The advocate had to re submit these letters of evidence. At no time during the first stage of appeal did the Ministry contact the client or advocate and indicate that their data system had not recorded the two major pieces of evidence. There was no other conclusion to draw than the Ministry had not read the evidence, nor had they bothered to rectify the situation.

The advocate presented this argument, among others, at the tribunal hearing. The tribunal unanimously decided to rescind the Ministry's decision. However, the tribunal chair incorrectly 'checked off' the box that stated the tribunal upheld the Ministry's decision. This meant a delay in benefits for a month for the client.

**LAST YEAR THE VDAC PROJECT OF TAPS WORKED ON OVER 270 CASE FILES.**

## TAPS VOLUNTEER PROGRAM 2007-2008

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 firsthand experience of poverty, people with a commitment to social justice, students, retirees, and people with disabilities. Some have specific skills they want to use, such as drawing or computer graphics; they also come to gain skills - in legal advocacy or office reception, for example. Many simply want to be involved in an organization that does good work.

*"I volunteer at TAPS because I lived in poverty once and I don't think anyone should have to do that. I had been following TAPS in newspaper articles and the newsletter and thought that it would be a fit for me. I was right. They do a very good job—everybody works hard here and I'm happy to do what I can,"*

says one volunteer.

*"I volunteer for the connection I feel with the organization and the people in it,"*

says another.

We have had **61 volunteers** over the past year doing everything from front desk reception to research and writing to tax preparation.

There are ten shifts per week on the front desk—that means ten volunteers, each doing a half a day a week, plus a few on-call volunteers to step in when someone is sick. Our front desk volunteers manage a very busy front office and provide a friendly welcome to our clients.

Several volunteers provide support to clients at appointments with the Ministry of Housing and Social Development.

The volunteers on our community education table are getting the word out about poverty in Victoria and how people can get involved in the fight for social justice.

Volunteers work on our newsletter, researching issues, writing articles and drawing pictures.

Our volunteer office helper makes coffee and keeps the office looking nice and clean.

Our board volunteers guide the direction of the organization.

We have a busy income tax preparation program. Every year we provide help to the public with filing income taxes during tax season. This year, in response to the need of our clients, we are continuing to provide tax service once a week throughout the year.

*"I enjoy volunteering with TAPS. I get a sense of helping others while doing something I enjoy,"*

says our tax volunteer.

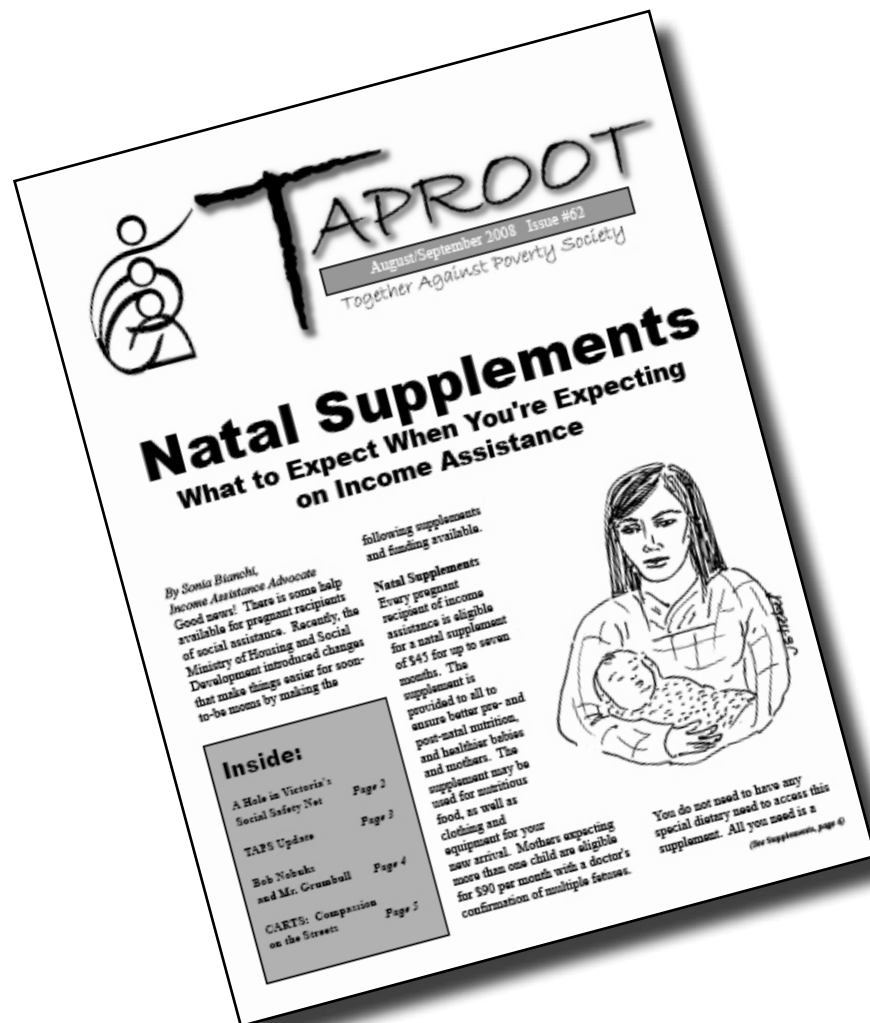
The people who volunteer at TAPS are an integral part of the organization. TAPS would not be able to provide the service to the community that it does without the skills, talents and dedication of our many volunteers.

## TAPROOT NEWSLETTER

The Taproot newsletter comes out once every two months. Staff members write articles on people's rights in relation to income assistance, disability or tenancy. Volunteer writers cover events in the community or research issues not usually covered by staff. One volunteer writes a regular fiction piece that explores the reality of life in poverty. We have a volunteer artist who draws pictures to accompany the articles.

We print 450 copies of each issue. We mail the newsletter to about 90 people, and deliver it, with the help of volunteers from the Garth Homer Society, to over 40 organizations and offices around town, including the John Howard Society, the Single Parents' Resource Centre, MLA's offices, the library, Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre, Victoria Disability Resource Centre, and the Cool Aid Medical Clinic.

Our newsletter is posted on our website at [www.tapsbc.ca](http://www.tapsbc.ca).



## TAPS STAFF 2008

**Lorraine Bates** was hired at TAPS in September 2007 as an Income Assistance Advocate. She has recently been hired as the Disability Advocacy Project Coordinator as a maternity leave replacement. Lorraine has completed a BA in Psychology with distinction at the University of Victoria. During the course of the degree she had the opportunity to engage in an extensive research project at all stages including data collection, data entry, development of further research questions, and statistical analysis. Lorraine is currently working towards an M.Ed. in Adult Education and Community Leadership. Lorraine's areas of academic interest and research include the interconnections between poverty issues, literacy, mental health and addictions. Lorraine has spent several years volunteering and working for the non profit sector. She has experience working with agencies specializing in brain injury, mental health, disability and addictions. As well as her position at TAPS, she works as a withdrawal management counselor and youth counselor in Victoria.



**Sonia Bianchi** started at TAPS as a Volunteer Disabilities Advocate before being hired as an Income assistance advocate. She has completed a BA in Political Science and History from the University of Victoria. During her degree Sonia found particular interest in the history of social justice movements and the role human rights in both a local and international setting. In addition to her advocacy work at TAPS Sonia is also a Human Rights Advocate for Vancouver Island Human Rights Coalition. Until recently she also worked for The Land Conservancy of BC a non profit land trust that protects special places throughout BC. Sonia is also on the board of directors for two non profit societies that provide support for HIV positive persons in 6 African countries, positively AFRICA and Partnerships for Opportunities.

**John Cooke** has been Coordinator of TAPS Tenant Advocacy Project for the past 12 years. He has a BA in Interdisciplinary Studies and a Masters in Anthropology from SFU. Prior to TAPS, John was employed by the Legislative Assembly of BC and he was a member of the Executive of both the Human Rights Coalition and the Fernwood Community Association. He is a founding member of the Tenants Action Group of Greater Victoria. John's other interests include teaching photography to youth. John is an award winning photographer, social documentary and is a graduate of the Western Academy of Photography.

**Maria Montgomery's** first involvement with TAPS began in November 2000 as a volunteer advocate. She began working at TAPS as the Income Assistance Advocate (Full Time) in August 2007, shortly after completing her Bachelor of Laws. While at law school Maria participated in the UVic Law Co-op program, completing placements as an analyst with the Ministry of Children and Family Development and with a law firm practicing aboriginal law. Prior to law school, Maria Montgomery received a Bachelor of Social Work, also from the University of Victoria, and worked as a youth worker with high-risk youth and as assistant manager of a group home.

**Tricia Roche**, TAPS' Organizational Coordinator, has a Masters in Human Rights from McGill University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in International Relations from UBC. She has over twenty years experience working in the non-profit sector including eight as Associate Manager of Outreach Services of the YM-YWCA of Greater Victoria. She was the primary researcher for the Out of the Rain Night Shelter evaluation and designed a fetal alcohol prevention program with street involved high risk women. She comes to TAPS most recently from the Sierra Club of BC.

**Heidi Brown** has been involved with TAPS for over 11 years and has been volunteer coordinator since 2006. Her primary responsibilities include recruiting and managing our volunteers, conveying volunteer ideas and concerns regularly to staff, organizing volunteer appreciation and providing evaluation and references for volunteers. In addition to her volunteer coordination duties, Heidi is the editor of TAPS Community Newsletter, TAPROOT. Heidi provides an important source of support for TAPS long standing volunteers.

(**Alix Hotsenpiller** is on maternity leave)

### **TAPS Legal Supervisor**

**Roland Kuczma** was called to the British Columbia Bar in 1979 and for more than 20 years worked for the Legal Services Society (Legal Aid). He was Director of Legal Service's Victoria office for the last 16 years of his employment with LSS. Since 2003 he has been in private practice in Victoria, specializing in criminal and human rights law. TAPS is fortunate to have had Roland Kuczma as Legal Supervisor for the past two years.

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS - 2008**

The Together Against Poverty Society has an effective and experienced Board of Directors with representation from a broad spectrum of knowledge, experience and interests. Membership in the Board includes people living in poverty, law instructors, social workers, a professional evaluation consultant, First Nations representation, representation from the disability community and students - all united in their commitment to ensuring appropriate and effective organizational practices and policies.

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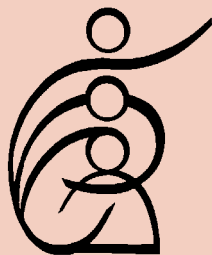
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