

# Helter Shelter!

## Some Relief for Parents with Children in Care

By Jonathan Blair, *Income Assistance Advocate*

For most people with children there is nothing more terrifying than losing custody of a child. If your family has a low income then this fear is increased by the fear of not having enough resources to maintain a home for

your child to return to. Well, until recently, many parents on income assistance or disability had the combination of these events imposed on them as a matter of government policy.

Almost exactly one year ago, West Coast Leaf and Pivot Legal Society launched a complaint to the Ombudsperson of BC regarding the Ministry of Social Development's (MSD) policy of reducing a parent's income if they had a child apprehended by the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD). They argued that such a policy was discriminatory and that it was inconsistent with MCFD's goal of always trying to reunite parents and children, as it made such reunification almost impossible. It was a classic "catch

22" situation, something not altogether uncommon when dealing with MSD. The problem was this: imagine you had a child and received income assistance. If your child was apprehended by MCFD, then your income

(See *Helter Shelter*, page 5)



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# My Weekend at the Cracks in the Concrete Learn-In

By Darren Dommett

Day 2, Sunday morning.

I'm here for the Together Against Poverty Society presentation. The meeting room smells of coffee.

Bleary-eyed but attentive people munch their morning snacks. We sit in chairs arranged in the round at first until the room fills up.

Then people sit on the floor and stand in the back too. So I'd say it's well attended. The seminar participants seem to fall into two categories: those in need and those who help them. The TAPS people tell us what they do, their specific function. They also speak about activism and how it differs

from advocacy. The presentation lasts about 45 minutes. A group discussion follows with focus on differing views and experiences with both advocacy and activism. A consistent theme is how best to bring about a marriage of the two as a means towards poverty reduction. The impression I had was that activism was shoulds and ought to's and that advocating was more in the here and now. The whole thing goes very well. Audience participation is mostly on topic and generally informative. Two groups as before, only this time it is those who are used to not being heard

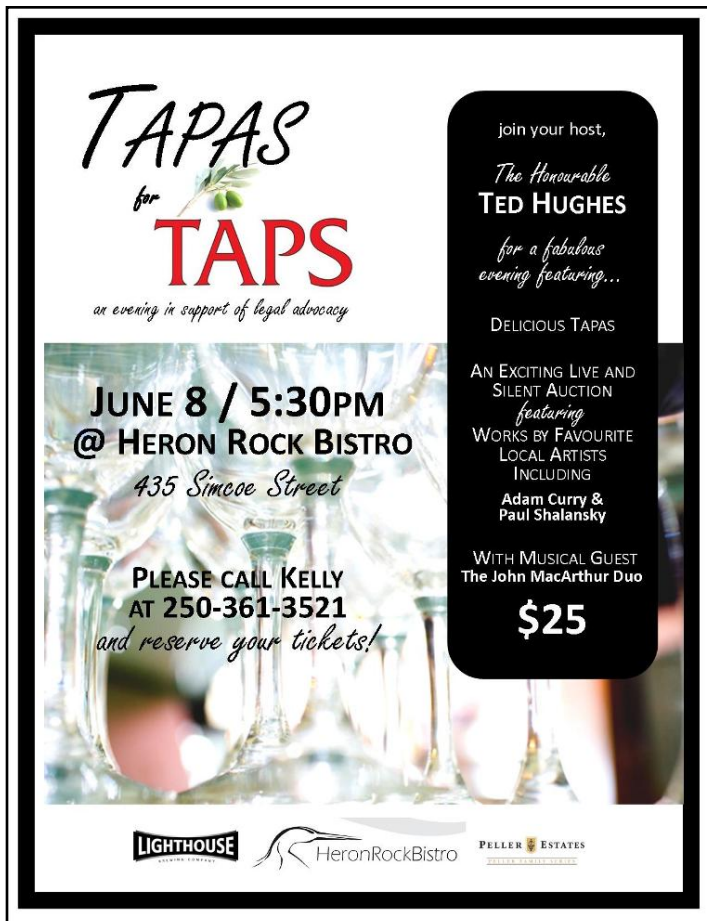
and those who are accustomed to being listened to. I get the impression that people are enjoying themselves. Strange, I never really considered fighting poverty to be all that much fun, but here we are all smiles as we discuss the most difficult moments in each others lives. There appears to be a growing sense of camaraderie.

## Silent Witness Program

Many of our clients find that appointments with the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) can be stressful. Some find that having another person at their appointment lessens their stress and helps the appointment proceed smoothly. At TAPS, we have Silent Witness volunteers who can accompany individuals to Ministry appointments. These volunteers provide a supportive presence during the meetings, and afterward they write a short report to give to the income assistant advocate at TAPS. If you would like to have a Silent Witness accompany you to your appointment with the MSD, please call TAPS at 250-361-3521.

My gripes with the weekend are as follows: 1) Hallways are hallways. They are not buffets. Thank you for the food and hot drinks but it's really difficult for those in wheelchairs and with visual impairments to negotiate such obstacle courses. 2) Washroom signs. They are big for a reason. Scrawling "toilets" or "toilets with urinals" in ballpoint pen on a piece of paper doesn't constitute suitable signage. Historically speaking, these will prove to have been minor problems, but it is 2011 and we do expect better.

(See My Weekend, page 6)



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# All Is Not Lost

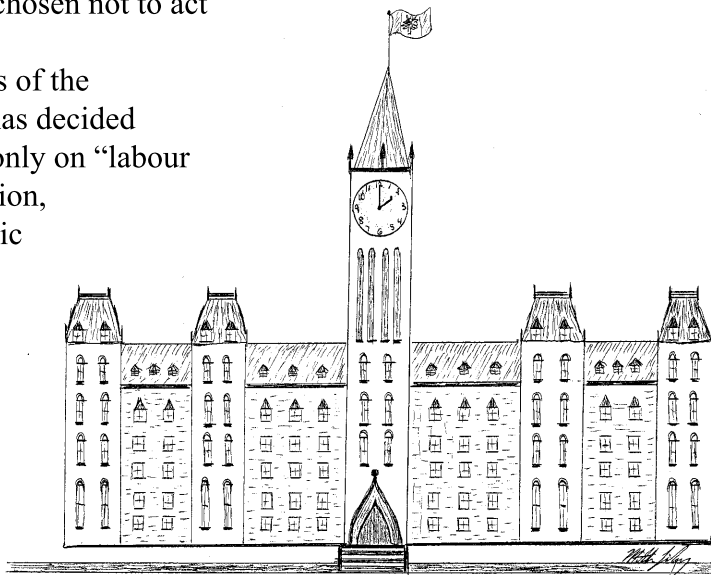
## What do the results of the 2011 federal election mean for poverty reduction in Canada?

By Kelly Newhook,  
Executive Director

On May 2, 2011, Canada elected a Harper majority government. Many of us in the anti-poverty world lamented this result because we know that eliminating poverty in Canada requires leadership from the federal government, and the Harper government has proven that a comprehensive and effective approach to poverty reduction is not on their priority list.

Between 2008 and 2010, an all-party parliamentary committee listened to over 260 different witnesses speak about poverty in Canada and how to address the challenges we face. They developed a report that included 58 recommendations on how to reduce poverty in Canada. Unfortunately, the federal government has chosen not to act on any of the 58 recommendations of the committee, and has decided instead to focus only on “labour market participation, ensuring economic security, and housing” (but voted against a National Housing Strategy) as the primary ways to reduce poverty in Canada.

However, all is not lost. The report included a recommendation that “at their next meeting, First Ministers start negotiations regarding the creation of a new federal transfer (e.g., a federal poverty reduction fund) to support provincial and territorial poverty reduction initiatives.” This is a very timely and important recommendation because federal transfers to the provinces are up for renegotiation in 2014, which makes it an ideal time to implement such a progressive change. It is possible—we will have to make sure we work across provincial and party lines to push our provincial governments to demand that these specialized provincial transfer payments to support poverty reduction are implemented.



Together Against Poverty Society

# TAPROOT

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# Powers That Be

By G.R. Tomblin

*It was late on a dull and dismal afternoon, when the clouds suddenly began rolling darker, faster and lower. Mother Earth was angrily gathering Her forces. It would not be long before She unleashed Her fury upon these creatures who had hurt Her. She was angry. And no one would escape Her anger....*

Ah-hhh...!

Bob Nobuks peed in blessed relief upon a rhododendron in one of the planters at Monster Mart.

As he zipped himself back up, he felt some regret. He didn't like peeing on plants. They couldn't

dodge it, could they? But what the hell. Not a single one of the stores, the restaurants, or any of the other businesses at Monster Mart would let him—the guy who did the cleaning up—use their facilities. So what else could he do? When you gotta go, you gotta go, right?

And the only other legitimate place he could go was in the big concrete sink in the janitor's room. But to reach that haven of urinary relief, he had to take a long, slow elevator down to Sub-Level Three, then run down a 100-foot concrete tunnel, then use his key to open the janitor's closet—which usually took a minute or so because it always stuck and you had to jiggle it around—then run to make it to the big concrete sink before he ruined his pants. Rather impractical.

Now with his mind at ease, he could get back to work. And a lot of work was left to do.

And he had better do it fast. The way that sky looked, with those black clouds boiling around up there, he wouldn't have much time before the heavens burst and God knows what might come blasting down.

It made Bob half-wish he'd actually kept that stupid, boring government job he'd had all those years ago. At least he'd be indoors.

*She whose anger could not be*

## Advocates at TAPS

### Income Assistance Advocates

Candace Witkowskyj  
Jonathan Blair  
Julia Hincks

### Volunteer Disability Advocacy Coordinator

Stephen Portman

### Tenant Advocates

John Cooke  
Thea McDonagh

## Persons With Disabilities

TAPS has advocates who can help you apply for Person With Disability status (PWD) through the Ministry of Social Development. TAPS can also help you with an appeal if you have applied and been denied. Call TAPS at 250-361-3521 for more information. If you are at the appeal stage, be sure to get in touch with us as soon as possible after receiving your letter of denial and tell the receptionist you are calling about a disability appeal.

## Taxes

TAPS is offering tax prep services to people on low incomes on Thursday mornings from 9:00 to 11:00, and Thursday afternoons from 1:30 to 4:00. No appointments. First come, first served.

*placated drew Her great breath—and blew and blew again upon these creatures who knew no respect...!*

Holy crap! What the hell was going on? Bob Nobuks was amazed at the violence from the sky.

Golf ball-sized hail was pelting down, lightning was stabbing to ground, deafening thunder was shuddering apart the very molecules of the air.

Bob Nobuks turtled himself with his raincoat and splashed through the streets.

*(See Powers, page 5)*

(From Powers, page 4)

He reached his building, the 128-year old Grunge Hotel, ran in and made it up the stairs to his third-floor room, and locked himself inside. But that didn't stop the awful din from the heavens. Maybe there was something to all this climate change stuff after all. But, still gotta eat....and he got up and went to the cupboard.

A small knock came on his door. He interrupted the stirring of his green lentil soup to answer

## Good-bye, Jessica

We at TAPS are sorry to have to say good-bye to Jessica Wall, our intrepid fundraiser of the past 10 months. Jessica's hard work and determination has set TAPS on the right path for the future. We want to thank her for her contribution.

*All of Us at TAPS*

## Welcome, Julia

TAPS would like to welcome Julia Hincks as our Summer 2011 Public Interest Law Student. Julia, who has just completed her second year at the University of British Columbia Law School, is interested in helping clients exercise their rights within the legislative framework as well as advocating for change in the welfare system. Julia is at TAPS Monday to Friday helping people with income assistance issues.

it. He barely heard it through the crashing thunder of the storm. To his astonishment, a strange woman stood there. Not too far from his own age. Not at all bad looking. She said her name was Penelope Less—but her friends called her Penny. And could she please come in? Just for company until this terrible storm abates?

Bob heard himself say, "Penny, I would be honoured if you would."

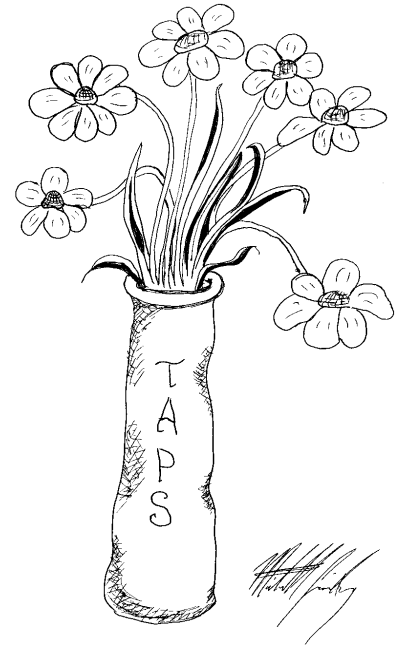
Penny said: "Thank you, Bob Nobuks, you are a good man."

That made Bob's lonely heart glow as it had never done before. As he showed her to the better of the two crappy chairs in his little room, he wondered: How does she know my name...?

*And She whose anger might have been far worse relented. Yet She swore to herself—if ever again these creatures anger me...*

(From Helter Shelter, page 1)

assistance support and shelter allowance would be reduced from that of a single parent to that of a single recipient, a pretty hefty drop of usually more than \$300 a month! This usually meant that you lost your home and could very likely end up on the street at the same time as you were trying to deal with your child's being taken away. If that wasn't bad enough, since you would no longer have adequate housing, you would likely not be able to get your child back, even if you dealt with the original reasons for your child's apprehension. Thus, we arrived at the incredibly unfair contradiction: the government



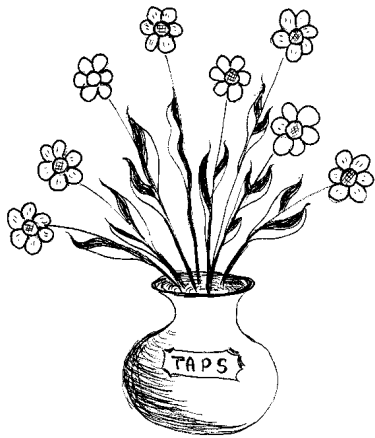
said they aimed to keep parents with their children, yet at the same time reduced the income of the parents so that it became impossible for them to get their children back!

As a result of the complaint and pressure by West Coast Leaf, Pivot and others, MSD has changed its policy around reducing the shelter allowance of parents whose children have been apprehended by MCFD. The new policy states that a parent will continue to receive the same shelter allowance so long as they are actively working on the return of their child. According to the MSD website, in order to continue getting the higher shelter allowance, confirmation must be given every six months by the parent's social worker that they are continuing to actively work on the return of their child. MSD refers to this as a "temporary shelter allowance" and will continue to give it to the parent

(See Helter Shelter, page 6)

## The Residential Tenancy Branch Has Moved

Here is the new address:  
Suite #101 - 3350 Douglas Street, Victoria, BC, V8Z 3L1 (Near the new Uptown Mall)  
Phone: 250-387-1602 to speak directly with an information officer. Office hours are 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday.



*(From Helter Shelter, page 5)*

until one of three things happens:

- 1) A continuing custody order is granted which indicates the child will not be returning to the parent;
- 2) MCFD social worker determines that the parent is no longer actively working on the return of their child;
- 3) The child returns home. Thus it is possible to receive the higher shelter allowance for as long as it takes to secure the return of the child, rather than the meagre three month period MSD used to allow. Though this is certainly a victory

for parents as well as advocacy groups, we must remember that a parent who is already dealing with the difficult situation of having their child apprehended has still had their support allowance reduced by almost \$150, some of which may have been helping with rent and bills.

Finally, along with changing the above policy, MSD has also made some other modifications around when a family's shelter allowance may be maintained even if they've lost a dependent. The shelter allowance may be temporarily maintained at the rate for the full family unit in any of the following instances: 1) when there is a death of a member of the recipient's family unit; 2) when a member of the recipient's family unit is temporarily hospitalized; 3) when a member of the recipient's family unit is in a residential alcohol or drug treatment facility; 4) when a member of the recipient's family unit is out of the province with the prior approval of the ministry; 5) when a member of the family unit is a warrant holder and leaves the province to resolve an outstanding warrant. The determination to maintain your shelter rate is made on a month-to-month basis for up to three months of shelter allowance. There is the possibility of an extension of up to three months for "extenuating circumstances" as well.

For further information go to: [www.gov.bc.ca/meia/online\\_resource/verification\\_and\\_eligibility/liverearrange/policy.html](http://www.gov.bc.ca/meia/online_resource/verification_and_eligibility/liverearrange/policy.html) or contact Jonathan, Candace or Julia at TAPS at 250-361-3521. ■

*(From My Weekend, page 2)*

Overall it seems to have been a successful meet and greet, the results of which will be a more open standard of communication as well as a greater understanding between the myriad organizations and individuals involved in poverty reduction. I had fun.

*The Cracks in the Concrete Learn-In took place on the weekend of May 13 to 15 at the BCGEU Building, and featured workshops, discussion and strategizing with the aim of strengthening the connections between groups and individuals working on poverty issues. Many groups participated, including among others Victoria Coalition Against Poverty, Action Committee of People with Disabilities, Society of Living Intravenous Drug Users (SOLID), Harm Reduction Victoria, and TAPS. ■*



## Free Camping for People with Disabilities

If you have Persons with Disabilities status (PWD) with the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), you and your camping party can camp for free in road accessible BC provincial parks. There is also no charge for a second recreational vehicle. Unfortunately, those with disabilities receiving assistance from other provincial or federal programs such as CPP Disability, WCB Disability, etc. are not eligible. Also, this discount does not apply to group camping, group picnicking, backcountry and marine fees.

### What you need to do

Go to your MSD office and ask for a current calendar year release of information form. Then, upon arrival at the campground, show the campground operator the

original approved form and a second piece of identification.

More information, including a sample release of information form, is available at [www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/fees/disability.html](http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/fees/disability.html)

## Reduced Rate Fishing Licence

If you are a person with a disability who enjoys fishing but can't afford the licence fee, you may be interested in the Angling Licence Fee Reduction Program for Disabled Residents of BC. In this program, any British Columbia resident who is severely and permanently disabled may apply for a Non-Tidal Angling Licence at the reduced fee of \$1.12.

If you have Person With Disabilities status (PWD), you must get written confirmation from the Ministry of Social

## Write for the Taproot

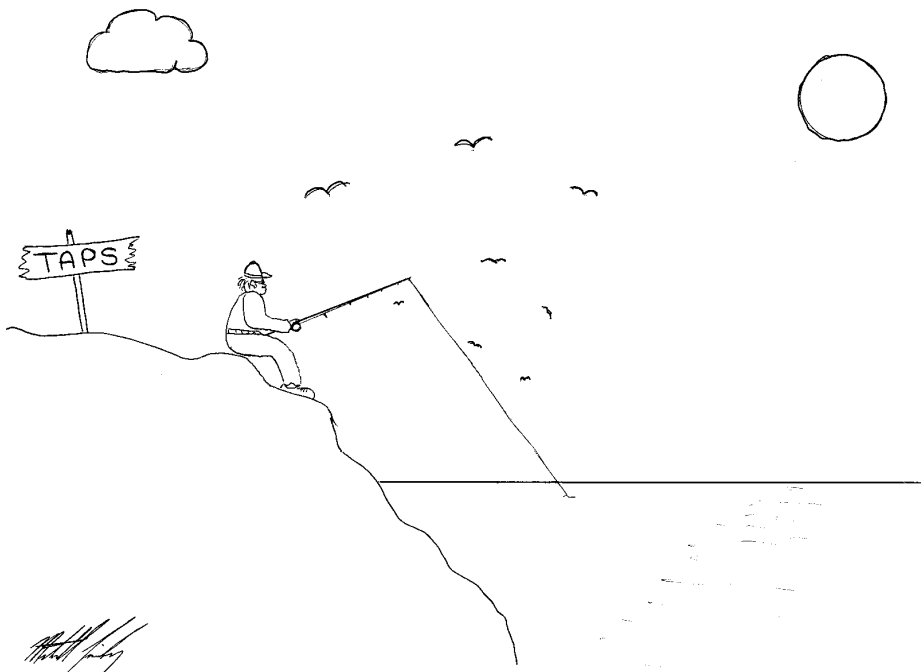
Taproot welcomes articles from readers. Share your ideas, experiences, opinions or outrage with Taproot's vast readership. Articles should be 600 words or less. Please include your name and a way we can reach you (phone, e-mail, or mailing address). The next submission deadline is July 15th, 2011. Send submissions to TAPS (Attn: Heidi) at #302 - 895 Fort Street, Victoria, BC, V8W 1H7, or by e-mail to [volunteers@tapsbc.ca](mailto:volunteers@tapsbc.ca).

Development indicating that you have been approved for and are currently receiving this benefit. The program, however, is not restricted to those on PWD.

An application form is available for download at [www.env.gov.bc.ca/fw/fish/licences/](http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/fw/fish/licences/) or may also be obtained from Service BC Centres throughout the province, or from the Fish, Wildlife and Habitat Management Branch in Victoria. Application forms are also available at the Disability Resource Centre at 817A Fort Street.

Further information is available from any of the Service BC Centres or by calling the Fish and Wildlife Branch, Ministry of Environment, in Victoria at 250-387-9589 or 250-356-7048.

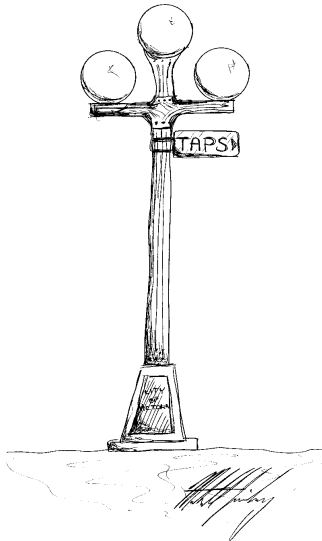
*The information on this page is from the Ministry of Environment website.*



## **Together Against Poverty Society**

TAPS was established and registered as a society in 1989 and serves the Greater Victoria area. We provide legal information and representation on issues relating to income assistance, provincial disability benefits, and residential tenancy. We also provide public education in these areas and on broader poverty issues.

You can reach us between 9:30 am and 4:30 pm, Monday to Friday, by phone at 250-361-3521 or in person at #302 - 895 Fort Street. The office is closed daily for lunch between 12:00 and 1:00 and is closed to walk-in clients on Monday and Friday mornings.



TAPS is funded by:

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TAPS mugs for sale

White coffee mugs with the TAPS crest on one side and a quote from Mary Wollstonecraft on the other: "It is justice, not charity, that is wanting in the world. (1792)" \$9, or two for \$15.



**Together Against Poverty Society**

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