



STRATEGIC PLAN 2010 - 2013



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Introduction

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

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

TAPS has undertaken an organizational review. As a result, TAPS hired its first Executive Director on February 22, 2010. Further, on June 2, 2010, staff, Board members and volunteers participated in a day-long planning retreat. The goals for the retreat were to provide input that would result in a meaningful and achievable Strategic Plan. This plan is to be responsive to current circumstances and provide the agency direction over the next three years. It was also an important goal that the Strategic Plan has the support of all staff and Board members. All those involved in the strategic planning retreat have had an opportunity to review a draft of this Plan and to contribute to the final Strategic Plan.

The Plan strives to strike a balance between service (individual advocacy), public education and community advocacy.

Mission, Vision and Values

Mission:

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

Vision:

All citizens will have an adequate income to allow them to meet their needs and to live with dignity.

Values:

At TAPS, we:

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

Strategic Context

Canada's income gap between the rich and the rest of us has been growing, unchecked, over the past generation. (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives) At the same time, there is a shrinking social safety net. Income assistance rates are insufficient for survival. There is no national housing strategy. Vacancy rates in the Victoria market have risen slightly over the past year to 2.5%, but average rents for a 2-bedroom unit are \$1000 per month. (CMHC, April, 2010) Canada is climbing out of a global recession and financial resources are constrained.

These realities are evidenced by an increase in requests for individual legal advocacy services. Other agencies have reduced their services and more people are coming to TAPS. When British Columbia has the highest child poverty rate in the country and one of the lowest minimum wages in Canada, TAPS is needed more than ever.

On the positive side, a federal poverty reduction strategy is gaining momentum. The City of New Westminster is the first local government to institute a “living wage” by-law. Five provinces have implemented poverty reduction legislation and strategies that are working. There are renewed and continuing calls for a National Housing Strategy. There is a new type of volunteer and donor – people coming through the recession who have never experienced poverty before.

TAPS is rich in human resource potential and needs to be prepared to address these challenging times and poised to capitalize on emerging opportunities.

Strategic Goals

At TAPS, we will:

1. Provide a consistent, high level of individual legal advocacy services
2. Engage the Board of Directors in broader community advocacy and activism
3. Increase opportunities for volunteers
4. Increase and broaden our public legal education and community outreach
5. Ensure the sustainability of TAPS.

Actions to Support Goals

1. Provide a consistent, high level of individual legal advocacy services
 - Support staff through increased training opportunities and mentoring
 - Consult with staff regarding any program changes
 - Facilitate opportunities for staff to discuss best practices and identify emerging case trends
 - Support staff to put boundaries around their individual advocacy work, including capping caseloads, if necessary
 - Improve communication between Board members, staff and volunteers
 - Liaise with relevant government agencies and staff to address systemic, substantive and procedural issues that involve more than one client.
2. Engage the Board of Directors in broader community advocacy and activism
 - Develop a communications strategy that includes an updated brochure, website and use of social media
 - Through the communications strategy, TAPS will develop an effective message that will reach a broad cross-section of the community
 - Staff will identify and document trends and systemic issues to bring forward to the Executive Director and Board for broader advocacy work
 - The Board will create a sub-committee to work with staff on systemic issues for broader advocacy
 - The Board and staff will increase participation with other anti-poverty groups.
3. Increase opportunities for volunteers
 - TAPS will ensure that people living in poverty are engaged at all levels of the organization
 - Targeted volunteer recruitment will be undertaken to expand the numbers and skill sets of volunteers

4. Increase and broaden our public legal education and community outreach
 - Sharing knowledge and expertise more broadly in the community
 - Broadening and improving public education
 - Making better referrals for clients.

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

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

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Facilitator

TAPS also appreciates the excellent work of Brenda McBain who facilitated the individual interviews, workshops and reporting.

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Provincial Employees Community Services Fund

*.....and the generous donations
of members and friends of TAPS.*

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

-Mary Wollstonecraft, 1792

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