

12-YEAR REVIEW & RENEWAL





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First Community Action Training graduating class, 2009



2016 Advocate team: (left to right) Sharon, Hannah, Leticia, Annie, Deborah, Scott, Carol, Mark, Joanne, Jackie, and Debbie

# Rooted in Struggle — a Testament to Resilience and Resourcefulness

# By Joanna Pawelkiewicz, Community Advocacy Team Lead

The magic of The Stop Community Food Centre's Community Advocacy Program (CAP) lies in its underpinning philosophy: "**Nothing about us without us.**"

From the very beginning, we recognized that the people most affected by an issue should have a leading role in deciding how to resolve it. People coming to The Stop had needs that couldn't be met by a traditional food bank. They were experiencing homelessness, punitive social assistance policies, inadequate health care, and social isolation. The system had let them down. The Stop created CAP as a response to these injustices, and to this day, the same people who depend on the program continue to be its most significant contributors.

Since 2008, thousands of low-income community members have participated in our program. They became Peer Advocates or Mentors, took our Community Action Training course, attended events like our annual Winter Fun Fair, or trusted us to help them in the Community Advocacy Office.

CAP persists and thrives because of the talents and passion of these community members. Still, the architects of CAP knew that living up to our vision of valuing people with lived experience of poverty required careful attention and critical self-assessment. "Turning this value from just a phrase into practice is the meat of our work, and sometimes this meat is tough and gnarly." — first CAP Manual

So, 12 years after the program's inception, we need to ask ourselves, have we accomplished what we set out to do? Has its vision of "Nothing about us without us" been put into practice?

# Action, reflection, action, reflection

In 2018, CAP celebrated its 10th anniversary. We marked the occasion by celebrating the program at The Stop's "Good Food for All Festival," and by commissioning a short video about the Advocates. However, we wanted to do more than celebrate. We wanted CAP to keep evolving and expanding.

Looking at the program's trajectory, it was clear that its most successful initiatives, policies, and projects didn't just evolve organically — they were products of careful thought and consideration, often involving many individuals. We wanted to replicate this process on a larger scale.

We needed to step back, take stock of everything the program has accomplished, and set the course for the next five years. For this process to be meaningful, we had to centre the voices of our community members. According to the Wellesley Institute, "The ideal for many community-based research projects is one where community members play an active and equitable role across all phases of research."

# **Project background**

We knew that we would need additional resources to execute our ambitious vision and were delighted when we secured the funding from the Maytree Foundation.

We began the project by assembling a team that could get the job done. The job requirements were immense: we needed staff that had organizational knowledge, superior analytical skills, ability to build rapport with interview subjects, connections with community members, and so much more.

Where could we find these magical workers? Luckily for us, we didn't have to look very far. As is often the case at The Stop, we turned to our most valuable resource — our community members.

We started the project with four Peer Researchers: a former Advocate, a current Advocate, and two former Mentors. I cannot overstate the contributions they made to this project. Because of their enthusiasm, diligence, and creativity, that which was initially dubbed a 'program audit' quickly grew into a 10-month research and evolution project. As you will see in our Methodology section, the scope of our work is considerable: we had about 15 hours of recorded interviews or focus groups, administered more than 150 surveys, and read hundreds of pages of reports.

### **About the Peer Researchers**

I want to acknowledge the immense contributions of our Peer Researchers. Brown Otter provided valuable input in the initial phase of the project. Daisy D'Souza was involved in the project from September to March and was particularly helpful in piecing together CAP's history. Special thanks to the three Peer Researchers who helped take the project to the finish line: Misty Parsons, Debbie Jenkins, and David Baptiste.

Misty was instrumental in helping us connect with so many former Advocates, Mentors, and current community members. She searched diligently and made relentless phone calls. Debbie began this project with very healthy skepticism. She cared about the integrity of our work and did not want our final report to be a mere "dog and pony show for funders." The pages of our report reflect her critical thinking skills and penchant for truth-telling. David added the much-needed historical perspective on our project. He was one of the first Mentors in CAP and had extensive organizational knowledge. David's careful analysis of our data also led to the discovery of some significant findings we may have otherwise overlooked. For example, he identified a pattern of disrespect experienced by numerous Advocate cohorts.

The last months of the project were very challenging. The onset of COVID-19 meant that our research team had to shift to working remotely overnight. For many weeks, the project stalled because much of my time was devoted to front line service delivery. The pandemic affected not only our project but the lives of everyone on the research team. The fact that all the Peer Researchers remained so dedicated to the work despite experiencing personal challenges, and in some cases tragedies, is remarkable. I will be forever grateful to the Peer Researchers for the tremendous support and understanding they lent me. Working with them has been one of the highlights of my time at The Stop.

# Methodology

The design of our project is inspired by the Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) framework. CBPAR democratizes how research is conducted because it includes community members as research partners throughout the process. The term "participatory action" signals that the project will result in actions or changes that will be beneficial to the whole community.

We wanted to capture as many voices as possible in our research and spent countless hours trying to track down CAP alumni and former staff. Here's an overview of the data we collected:

# **CAP** participants

- ▶ 2 focus groups with former & current Mentors, and 1 focus group with current Advocates
- ▶ 18 long form surveys with former Advocates
- ▶ 20 long form surveys with CAT graduates

### Staff

- ▶ 5 in-depth interviews with former CAP staff and 5 in-depth interviews with current Stop staff
- ▶ 30 surveys with staff

### **Community members**

- ▶ 37 short interviews with community members right after they left our Advocacy Office; 12 follow-up phone interviews three months later
- ▶ 38 surveys with community members attending our Annual General Meeting 5 phone interviews with staff from agencies we regularly collaborate with

In all cases, we compensated community members for their time and expertise by providing tokens, grocery cards, or vouchers to our Good Food Market.

In addition to the primary data, we read over 300 pages of documents, including past program reports, reports to funders, and CAP manuals. All our interviews and focus groups were recorded and then summarized. All data was then segregated into stakeholder categories and analyzed. Our research team then performed a rudimentary version of what is commonly called "coding," analyzing the data for key themes. Some themes, such as "best practices" were established in advance, while others, such as "respect" surfaced organically as we were reviewing our data.

### What's inside this report?

We organized this report into three sections: Looking Back, What We Learned, and Looking Forward.

- ► The Looking Back section includes a comprehensive timeline of our program and explanations of some of our key milestones
- ► In What We Learned, we describe how the program currently looks, reflect on various unresolved issues that surfaced during our research, and share some best practices
- ► Finally, in the Looking Forward section, we share significant recommendations and a new logic model

We hope that this report will serve as a point of reference for other practitioners, a way for us to archive our organizational knowledge, and a map that will guide the next three years of programming.

# **Research Team**





# Debbie Jenkins, Senior Peer Researcher

Debbie began volunteering at The Stop's Food Bank in 2010 and became passionate about preparing community members' income tax returns for free. Debbie later took the 2014/2015 Community **Action Training course** and became an Advocate. In 2017, she became a Mentor until her tenure ended in July 2019. Earlier that year, Debbie worked as the Interim Tax Clinic Coordinator. She returned to work on the 12-Year Review & Renewal project that October.



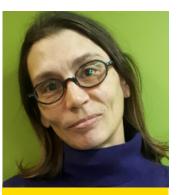
# David Baptise, Junior Peer Researcher

The Stop accepted David as a placement student from George Brown College in 2011. In June 2012, David joined the **Community Action** Training (CAT), Upon completion, David worked as a Peer Advocate and later as a Mentor in The Stop's Advocacy Office. David's pursuit of social justice and commitment to helping others is what makes him a true leader in the community.



# Daisy D'Souza, Junior Peer Researcher

Daisy came to The Stop as a Community Dining volunteer. She later became an Advocate for two years. Daisy's love of listening to and understanding people led to her role at The Stop and, by extension, the Community Advocacy Office, which Daisy diligently serves. Daisy was actively involved with the 12-Year Review & Renewal project through interviews she conducted and the extensive research surrounding the effectiveness of the programs offered.



# Misty Parsons, Junior Peer Researcher

Misty, a native of Toronto, started volunteering at The Stop in 2016, where she helped out in the Dropin during lunch. This volunteering position sparked her interest in becoming more involved at The Stop. Misty then took part in the Community Action Training and became an Advocate, and she has been serving in this role for the past two years. Misty's passion for social justice has positioned her to become an integral addition of the CAP team.



# Joanna Pawelkiewicz, Research Project Coordinator

Joanna has been the Community Advocacy Program Team Lead since autumn 2018. Joanna's involvement with the project began with its inception. She was responsible for the research methodology as well as onboarding and supporting the incredible Peer Researchers (who did most of the work). Joanna is a strong proponent of the meaningful inclusion of PWLE (people with lived experience). When not at The Stop, Joanna is out walking her dog, watching documentaries, working on a Master's Degree in Social Work or engaging in self-care.

# **Contributors**











### **Karlene Ruddock**

Karlene volunteered as an activist for increasing the minimum wage when she came upon The Stop in 2015. Since then, she has been empowering the community to be selfsufficient and put food on the table by creating a side hustle. Karlene enjoys writing, designing, and teaching by experience. Karlene used her considerable artistic skills to design the entire 12-Year Review & Renewal report.

## **Elliott Gomez**

Elliott was a CAP placement student during his Bachelor of Social Work. He was instrumental in the analysis phase of the research project and provided vital support to the Peer Researchers. Along with a passion for social justice. Elliott also has an affinity for music, graphic novels, and film. As of fall 2020, Elliott will be pursuing his Master's in Social Work at York University.

# **Rannykay Johnson**

Rannykay came to The Stop in 2020 as a summer intern from York University through his passion for social justice initiatives. Rannykay is engaged in the Community Advocacy Office where he dedicates his time between the 12-Year Review & Renewal action plan and serving community members.

# **Nancy Eldridge**

Nancy joined The Stop in 2010 as a Peer Advocate and later, a Mentor. Nancy helped cofacilitate the first Planning Committee as well as a weekly arts & crafts workshop in the Drop-in. She is a former member of **Bread & Bricks Davenport West** Social Justice Group, and her passion for social justice has ties to her faith. Nancy is also an avid reader, animal lover, and artist.

# Acknowledgements

The 12-Year Review & Renewal would not be possible without the 200+ individuals who participated in our project through interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and informal conversations.

# We especially want to acknowledge:

All the former and current Advocates/Mentors whose dedication to our program was evidenced by the passion and care taken in expressing what they loved about CAP and what areas need work. We listened closely to your words, and improving your experience in CAP is our #1 priority (see 3-year action plan).

The contributions of the former CAP staff who generously shared their time and insights were instrumental in helping us better understand the history of our program. We are grateful that we can learn from your successes and challenges.

We thank all the community members who told us about their experiences in our Advocacy Office.

Over 40 of The Stop's staff spoke candidly about their experiences working with our program and gave great ideas on how we can deepen collaborations within our organization. You are not only our colleagues but our connection to all of The Stop's community members.

The Community Action Training (CAT) graduates for providing extensive comments on how the format and content of CAT can be enhanced.

Various partner organizations provided constructive feedback on strengthening our collaborations, including Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre (DPNCHC), West Toronto Legal Services, Neighbourhood Link, and Access Alliance.

We also want to thank those who shared resources and contributed labour or ideas to our project:

**Trace MacKay & Stephen Woeller** from Terrapin for their expertise in evaluation and guidance on our logic model.

**Kate Fane**, The Stop's Communication Manager, for her editing wizardry and enthusiasm for our project during the final stages. Thank you for helping us get this project through the finish line.

**Amy Gottung**, The Stop's grant writer, helped us craft the essays in our Major Issues section.

**Joyce Brown** from Grassroots Research and **Michael Classens**, Assistant Professor from Trent University provided invaluable advice at the beginning of our project.

**Dean Bere** for conducting follow-up interviews with community members who came to our Advocacy Office.

**Rekha Cherian** and **Anna Jacobs** from Community Food Centres Canada for meeting with our research team.

**Marial Addario,** our amazing 2020/2021 BSW placement student for helping with critical formatting and layout in the final hour.

**Norhan Haroun,** one of our Peer Advocates, for copy editing the report before we sent it to print.

Lastly, endless gratitude to the current Advocates and CAP staff who kept our program going while so many of our resources were diverted to the 12-Year Review & Renewal project. ■

A comprehensive timeline of our program and an explanation of some of our key milestones

CAP program milestones

CAP program timeline



# Roots of the Community Advocacy Program

**The Community Advocacy Program** (CAP) was a response to the systemic challenges faced by community members at The Stop.

Its roots were planted in 2007, when
The Stop's Civic and Community
Engagement Program formed the
Davenport West Income Security
Council. The Council brought together
community organizations and local leaders and
held multi-faceted programs, including Adult
Education and training workshops called the
Training Series with Guest Speakers, and
later, the Speakers Bureau.

The Council's programming evolved into a movement where community members united to improve their political, social, and economic circumstances. The movement gained traction, with over 100 people attending the weekly drop-ins and sharing their stories.

Their lived experiences ranged from neglect by politicians for many years, lack of housing, food insecurity, inadequate income, addiction, and immigration concerns.

A collective response to these community issues took root, but there was also acknowledgment of the need for advocacy support for individual community members. In 2008, The Community Engagement Coordinator hired a Community Advocacy Coordinator to create **CAP** and launch the **Advocacy Office** at 1884 Davenport.

"The Stop was looking for ways of addressing immediate needs that were coming up for community members, which contributed to their food insecurity, and looking for inclusive and empowering ways of addressing those needs." -former CAP staff

# Spotlight: The Speakers Bureau, 2008 – 2009

The Speakers Bureau was a series of Adult Education training workshops that prepared participants for public speaking opportunities and other ways of spreading their message to wider audiences. Every Tuesday, a small group of interested folks would meet for a meal and workshop on topics like race, culture, diversity training, politics, the economy, media analysis and public speaking. The guest trainers were diverse: for example, journalists were invited to prepare participants for interviews, and a labour leader talked about political theory, the workforce, and the impact it had on jobs.

For many participants, it was their first opportunity to deeply examine poverty and its effects on their lives. They then took this knowledge to The Stop, and chatted with staff while distributing flyers for events they were planning. The participants also engaged with the larger community by doing media appearances and speaking in universities. The Speakers Bureau became a weekly safe space where the community learned valuable lessons and were then able to speak with newspapers, church groups, and City Hall about needed policy changes.

# Advocacy Office at 1884 Davenport

The launch of the first Advocacy Office at The Stop's 1884 Davenport location was necessitated by the problems that community members were experiencing in their daily lives.

Community members met regularly at gatherings in The Stop's Drop-in and spoke openly of the hardships they were facing. The Stop's Civic Engagement Coordinator, who attended these meetings regularly, listened attentively, and convinced his manager to launch a new initiative to help meet their urgent needs.

With funding from the Metcalf Foundation, they hired an Advocacy Coordinator, and later recruited eight Peer Advocates who were paid an honorarium. The Advocates were trained by incorporating content from the **Training Series with Guest Speakers**, the **Speakers Bureau**, and other programs. This led to the formation of the **Community Action Training** in 2012.

The Advocacy Office was officially launched in summer 2008. According to one of the Advocates present, the place was bubbling with excitement. From then on, Advocates worked diligently, under the supervision of the Advocacy Coordinator and Civic Engagement Coordinator, 4 days a week from 10 am to 3 pm. The community members were very excited and relieved that they had Peer Advocates who "knew where they were coming from."

# Spotlight: Pelham Advocacy Office, 2012 - 2016

The Pelham satellite Advocacy Office opened in 2012 in a permanent space within the Toronto Community Housing building at 61 Pelham Park Gardens. It was open once per week and staffed by the Community Advocacy Worker and an Advocate. Because of Pelham's proximity to The Stop, we were often serving the same clientele in both offices. The Pelham office was also where the "Building Blocks" needs assessment was undertaken to understand the concerns of local residents. CAP staff and Advocates knocked on every door of the apartment building and the adjacent townhouse units as part of their survey. Suggestions from residents included adding gardens and a basketball court.

Many of Pelham's residents also had complex needs. In 2016, LOFT Community Services began offering supports in the Pelham building, and The Stop's satellite office closed. In recognition of our connection to this community, Pelham remains on the route of The Stops's Good Food for All march.

# **Bread & Bricks**

The Bread & Bricks Social Justice Club was a community group, financed and staffed by The Stop, that held monthly meetings to discuss systemic issues of poverty within Davenport West. These issues included food insecurity, insufficient housing, lack of economic opportunities, and inadequate social benefits—which were affecting not only the people of Davenport West community, but also Toronto and the Province of Ontario.

Bread & Bricks heightened people's political awareness through collaboration with outside organizations, such as OCAP and the Workers' Action Centre, in order to extend their reach and create a more significant impact to bring about social and political change.

Some of Bread & Bricks' successful projects included participating in "**Do the Math**" and "**Eat the Math**" campaigns in 2010, which both reached thousands of Torontonians through in-person events and a digital media strategy. These campaigns focused on the impossibility of people to survive on Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) as these programs were insufficient to cover their daily living costs.

Until it wound down in 2016, Bread & Bricks also served the organizing portion of CAP and was a precursor to the "Advocacy Committee," which later became the **Planning Committee.** 

# Spotlight: Interns and Community Gatherings, 2011 – 2014

Bread & Bricks interns were selected from community members who were part of the Davenport West Income Security Council. Each were awarded a 6-month contract by The Stop's Civic and Community Engagement Coordinator and were paid a cash honorarium. They attended Bread & Bricks meetings and represented The Stop at community meetings, rallies, and other events. The positions were excellent training opportunities where individuals could gain valuable knowledge and experience in community organizing, facilitating events, and public speaking. The interns were also an added support mechanism for Bread & Bricks-led activities.

Together with the Civic and Community Engagement Coordinator and placement students, interns were instrumental in organizing and overseeing monthly community gatherings and events in The Stop's Drop-in, which provided a platform for members to express themselves and have their voices heard. Community members played social justice-themed versions of games like *Jepardy, The Price is Right, Wheel of Fortune,* and enjoyed activities and entertainment like spoken word performances, talent and fashion shows, and karaoke. Interns also assisted in planning biweekly movie nights with facilitated discussions in the Sanctuary at Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood and Community Health Centre.



Community members and Advocates in a breakout group at one of our town halls



Evelyn, former Advocate during her shift in the Advocacy Office



Staff and members from the Bread & Bricks Social Justice Club

Bread & Bricks events 2012–2014

# **Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy community consultations**

In autumn 2014, the Civic and Community Engagement Coordinator accompanied a group of Bread & Bricks members and current CAT students to one of 11 citywide community consultations for those who were living in poverty, to have their voices heard. The group participated in breakout groups and completed questionnaires regarding the six key issues addressed in the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy, such as food access, employment, and transportation. The group continued giving input until Toronto City Council unanimously approved the strategy in November 2015.

# Anti-poor bashing awareness campaign

In 2012, Bread & Bricks began work on a project focusing on poor bashing—a set of beliefs and behaviours that humiliate, stereotype, discriminate against, shun, blame, or patronize people who are low-income. The group worked together to develop an educational booklet entitled "Building a Strong Davenport: Fighting Poor Bashing," which was distributed throughout the neighbourhood. They also developed a theatrical participatory workshop which trained people in how to recognize and intervene when they witness or are subjected to poor bashing. The workshop was delivered in various locations and was well received.



Poverty reduction town hall, June 25th, 2008

# **Stop the Cuts march**

On March 16, 2012, Bread & Bricks and Toronto Stop the Cuts Network joined the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) at an anti-poverty rally.

Bread & Bricks collected flags, noisemakers, placards, pots and pans, and marched to College and Bay Streets, outside the housing building where they met with other groups. They then marched to Queen's Park, where they took part in a huge rally that called on the McGuinty Government to reverse their proposed cutbacks to social programs and policies. Among the things the groups called for were a "living income, affordable and accessible housing, and public services for all."

# Wychwood Open Door Advocacy Office

With funding from the Metcalf Foundation's 2011 Communities in Action Project, Bread & Bricks was able to partner with the Wychwood Social Justice Group. This collaboration identified the resources and needs of both groups resulting in an active campaign that utilized the strengths of both its higher and lower-income members. The two groups developed awareness and outreach to combat the effects of poorbashing in the Davenport neighbourhood. Programming originally started with a movie night, followed by participation by peers from Wychwood in The Stop's Community Action Training.

The Stop opened its second satellite office in the late summer of 2011 at the Wychwood Open Door Drop-in at St. Matthew's United Church at St. Clair Avenue West and Rushton Road. The office was open from 9 am–2 pm on Wednesdays during Drop-in programming hours, and provided vital resources to community members who often had more complex needs than those in Davenport West.

In 2019, The Stop took over the operation of the Wychwood Open Door Drop-in, and Advocacy services continue there to this day.

# Spotlight: The Advocacy Planning Committee, 2014-Present

The Planning Committee was formed in 2014 because of an overburdening of the monthly Advocacy meetings. It was determined that planning events took time away from discussing pertinent issues.

The Committee was headed by two Mentors, and a staff advisor, with an average of eight Advocates taking part. Four events were organized every year, including workshops on housing, legal clinics, accessing OW and ODSP, and immigration, held in partnership with outside stakeholders. One of the Planning Committee's most significant successes was the execution of the Good Food for All (GFFA) rally and march in 2016.

Another highlight was the successful lobbying for compensation for Advocates who had been working long hours on making sure events were organized and productive.

"Community members would come out in huge numbers [to the GFFA], even those with mobility issues. It was social camaraderie, breaking isolation, mixing and mingling, getting together, and talking."

# Community Action Training (CAT)

CAT was developed in 2012 to train community members to support others who shared similar lived experiences. This formal training program built on the participants' existing knowledge of social justice issues and helped them to further develop practical skills so that they can challenge oppression on a personal and systemic level.

Much of the material from the **Davenport West Income Security Council, the Training Series with Guest Speakers**, and the **Speakers Bureau** was rolled into the CAT course. Other topics relating to anti-oppression, anti-racism, and intersectionality were also added.

"[The purpose of CAT was] to engage people, and empower them to locate their own experiences of living on a low income within a broader context that was economic and political.... to empower them to speak up against the hardships they are facing in their personal lives and to look beyond or away from the stigma and their own shame of living in poverty, to get at the systemic reasons."

The first CAT Group Project was organized by the 2014 / 2015 class. It was a voluntary 6-week addition to the training course, and most members took part. Doing so was considered excellent experience for event and initiative planning when participating in the Planning Committee.



Rosalie, former Advocate and Leticia, Community Advocacy Coordinator, speaking at The Stop's Good Food for All Festival in 2018

# Voter Education and Engagement

The political landscape has changed dramatically since CAP's inception: we've had two Prime Ministers, three Premiers, three Mayors, and two City Councillors, and at times we've become part of a different riding or ward altogether.

This shows the flexibility and versatility necessary to maintain the longevity of CAP, and the importance of embedding civic education into advocacy work.

Voter education and engagement has been part of CAP since its origins in 2006. In 2010, Bread & Bricks led voter activities and campaigns in preparation for the 2011 provincial election. In 2012, The Stop launched "Put Food in the Budget," which advocated for provincial funding to promote health and alleviate poverty in collaboration with Social Planning Toronto.

In 2012, the CAT curriculum covered the roles of each level of government to correctly address community members' concerns and refer them to appropriate services. A provincial and a municipal election in 2014 (four months apart) laid the groundwork for more structured voter education and engagement.

In 2015, The Stop organized a federal all-candidates' debate called "Dinner with the Candidates" in which several Advocates played supporting roles. The Planning Committee began "sign up for the voters' list" drives for community members, and by the 2018 provincial and municipal elections, they could sign up online in the Advocacy Office.

In 2019, CAP collaborated with DPNCHC, the neighbouring community centre, on a voter education and engagement project My **Davenport.** My **Voice.** The initiative included an all-candidates' debate and an arts-based initiative that allowed community members to express the issues that were most important to them leading up to the federal election. ■

Former Advocates Bob and Laura, with Mentor Tania at the monthly Advocacy meeting



# Community Partnerships

Community Partnerships began as early as 2011 and continued until COVID-19 protocol brought restrictions on visitors and the number of on-site staff in 2020.

The first two partnerships were with West
Toronto Housing Help Services and the Partners
for Access and Identification Project (PAID), which
has since become part of Neighbourhood
Link Support Services. Workers from both
organizations held regular office hours at
The Stop, offering community members
specialized services that would otherwise not be
available at the Advocacy Office.

West Toronto Community Legal Services also sent guest speakers to many Advocacy drop-in events and monthly meetings. Although they sometimes brought sign-up sheets for community members who needed one-on-one assistance, they did not send a worker regularly. A worker from Reconnect Community Health Services began visiting The Stop in 2017. Community members who require more intensive case management can be referred directly to Reconnect, bypassing long wait lists. Starting in 2020, a Health Coach from Access Alliance regularly comes to The Stop to help community members manage chronic illnesses and optimize their health.

# Spotlight: Placement Students, 2006 – 2020

In various eras of the Community Advocacy Program, students from Social Work and other faculties have been welcomed. The arrangement focuses on the students' learning and is tailored based on their interests, strengths, and the skills they are looking to develop. A significant part of the experience involves understanding the role that The Stop and CAP hold in the community, and the connection between social position and food security.

Placement students take part in several roles, including supporting Advocates and community members, and taking part in other programs and activities at The Stop. Students also bring their own knowledge, experiences, and skills to the position, and because of this they are respected and looked to for their input. One of the most recent placements students took part in the research for the 12-Year Review & Renewal project, worked alongside Advocates in the Advocacy Office, and facilitated and supported aspects of the Economic Justice Project, as well as the Tax Clinic.

# Growing a Tax Clinic into Financial Empowerment

A CAT applicant expressed an interest in bringing an income tax clinic to The Stop, which aligned with the Team Lead's desire to build a **Financial Empowerment Program** into CAP.

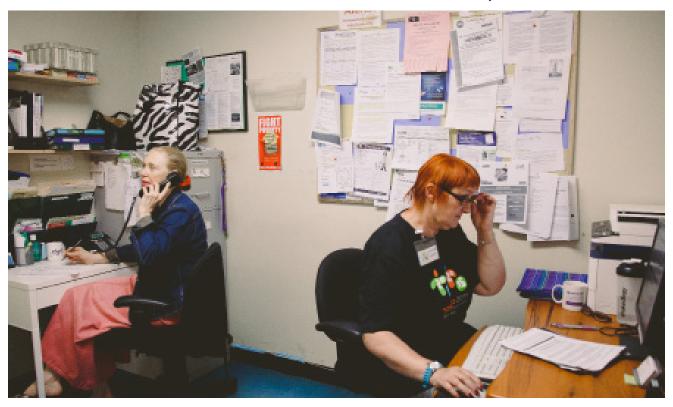
In 2015, the Planning Committee arranged for an accountant to prepare community members' returns off-site. However, these tax returns would have had to be mailed, and the process was time-consuming and drew only a few participants.

In 2016, the Planning Committee began hosting a CRA Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) free tax clinics for low-income people. They served upwards of 300 persons per year, and returned over \$400,000 in rebates and credits.

The service became so successful that in 2018 it became one of the year-round services offered by The Stop.

In 2019 a **Financial Empowerment Coordinator** was hired to coordinate the Tax Clinic, and the Advocacy Office was able to refer any inquiries involving financial matters, such as referrals to credit counselling organizations, to the Financial Empowerment Program. ■

Former Advocate Deborah and former Mentor Joanne in the Advocacy Office



# Economic Justice Project

The Economic Justice Project (EJP) was launched in the fall of 2019, and made possible by a one-time grant.

Located at the intersection of The Stop's

Financial Empowerment and Community

Advocacy Program, EJP works with people
who have lived experience of poverty to ease
their personal financial stresses, identify systemic
causes, and advocate for broader change.

The project was anchored by a 16-week Adult/ Popular Education course that explored the connections between micro (personal) and macro (social, political) economic issues, while also building participants' advocacy skills.

In the second phase, four EJP graduates were hired as paid, part-time Economic Justice Advocates on 6-month contracts to contribute their skills to like-minded advocacy campaigns across the city. They were organizing with existing groups that were fighting root causes of poverty and engaging people with lived experience in meaningful and authentic ways.

Unfortunately, the onset of COVID necessitated a shift to working from home and the EJ Advocates were given a new objective: to document the realities of low-income people during the pandemic. The Advocates wrote blogs about their experiences, interviewed other low-income community members, and created a report highlighting how poor and racialized people were impacted by COVID.

Good Food for All march, 2011



# Milestones

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
1884 Davenport						
Pelham Office						
Wychwood Office						
vvychwood Olinec						
Referrals						
Case Coordination						
Community Action Training						
Tax Clinic						
Financial Empowerment Program						
Economic Justice Project						
Housing Worker (West Toronto Housing Services)						
ID Clinic Worker (Neighbourhood Link)						
Case Manager (Reconnect Health Services)						
Health Coach (Access Alliance)						
Group Project						
E-Newsletter						
Do The Math / Eat The Math						
Drop-in Programs						
Davenport West Income Security Cabinet						
Bread & Bricks						
Speakers Bureau						
My Davenport. My Voice.						
Civic & Community Engagement Program						
Civic & Community Engagement Coordinator						
Placement Students						
Investing In Neighbourhoods Worker						
Community Member Interns						
Community Action Program						
Advocates						
Mentors						
Planning Committee						
Team Lead						
Community Development & Advocacy Worker						



# 03

How CAP currently looks, and the lingering issues that we'd like to tackle

Current program at a glance

Lingering issues



# **CURRENT PROGRAM AT A GLANCE:**

# **Advocates**

Advocates are community members with individual skill sets and lived experience of poverty, oppression, and marginalization. Often, they've demonstrated a desire to become more involved with The Stop after being a service user or a volunteer. Many have deep ties to the Davenport community.

To become an Advocate, individuals have to complete the Community Action Training and undergo a selection process similar to a job interview. Successful candidates then undergo a one-day Advocacy Office orientation and receive coaching from staff or Mentors for at least three months. The whole Advocacy team meets for a half-day every month for training, team building, and debriefing.

Advocates usually serve 1 to 2-year terms and contribute about 20 hours a month to the program. Advocates generally work in pairs in the office and are compensated with an honorarium. In addition to the shifts in the office, Advocates participate in the Planning Committee at least twice per year.

# **Impact**

- Advocates report a positive impact after participating in the program:
  - 88% learned about various community resources
  - 83% felt a sense of purpose
  - 78% felt it allowed them to build leadership skills

### **COVID-19 adaptation**

In the first three months of the pandemic, we were not able to have the Advocates on-site. Some Advocates went on leave, and others were deployed to our frontline services. Once our Advocacy Window was up and running, we began incorporating Advocates one by one, taking the necessary time to do the health & safety onboarding. To date, we have not been able to resume our monthly Advocacy team meetings or Planning Committee events.



Community Action Training graduate class (2012), several of whom went on to be Advocates & Mentors

# **Mentors**

Mentors are Advocates who have worked in the Advocacy Office for at least one year. We always have two Mentors on the team at all times, and they start their terms six months apart to ensure overlap.

Mentors help acclimatize newer Advocates into the Advocacy Office during their first several months by providing support and information about office routines. Mentors may also act as a liaison between CAP staff and Advocates. They facilitate the Planning Committee and may help implement new policies and procedures. Some attend other community organizations events as peer representatives. Mentors meet with CAP staff once a month to plan the monthly Advocacy meeting and discuss emerging issues in the Advocacy Office.

Mentors contribute about 35 volunteer hours to the program every month and receive additional honoraria in recognition of their extra time, skills, and responsibilities.

# **Impact**

- 90% of Advocates indicated that there were Mentors in the office when they served, and that they were instrumental in guiding them through the early days in the office, walking them through office procedures, helping them deal with community members, and organizing events with the Planning Committee
- 9 out of 10 current and former Mentors in two focus groups felt that lived experience of poverty and prior knowledge of government benefits systems were essential components of effectively carrying out their duties



Community Action Training graduates, 2015

# **Advocacy Office**

The Advocacy Office—located close to the reception desk and Food Bank waiting area at our Davenport location—is a small, private, welcoming space where Peer Advocates and CAP staff provide information, referrals, and general assistance to community members.

Advocates staff the office on Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 10am–2pm. These are usually peak times at The Stop because the Drop-in and Food Bank are open as well. On Tuesdays, the office provides specialized support staffed by our partner agencies such as housing help or an ID clinic. The Davenport location is closed to the public on Wednesdays, and our Advocates operate an Advocacy table at our Wychwood Open Door site.

The Advocates have a computer with Internet, a multi-line telephone with a paging system, a printer/photocopier/scanner, a bulletin board, and flyers and handouts for use while assisting community members. The office provides photocopying, faxing, and mailing services free of charge. There is also a locked filing cabinet for safe and confidential storage of personal documents and case files for community members who consent to open a file, when necessary, for case management/follow-up.

# **Impact**

- ▶ 90% of respondents felt treated with respect in the Advocacy Office and that the Advocates resolved the issue they needed support with
- Average rating of the service community members received in the Advocacy Office was 4.5 out of 5

# **COVID-19 adaptation**

In the first two months of the pandemic, our office was closed, and we shifted our operations to answering a hotline every day from 10 am–2 pm. We quickly realized that this method of service delivery had limitations. Some of our community members did not have phones or had more complex issues requiring more prolonged, in-person interactions.

In May, we moved our Advocacy Office to a small meeting room facing the street, which allowed us to provide contactless in-person service through a closed window. Our Mentor created a communication system by connecting two analog phones. Community members could come up to our window, sit down and talk to us using the phone. In the first two weeks of our soft-opening, we applied design thinking to make small changes to our operations to increase efficiency and strengthen health and safety protocols.

Between April 1st–June 30th, 2020, we provided services to 360 individuals. ■



Misty, one of our Advocates helping us test out our zero-contact Advocacy Window

# Community Action Training

Community Action Training is a 12-week course focusing on both individual and systemic action. Based on Adult and Popular Education principles, it includes guest speakers, multi-media components, and group exercises.

All Advocates are required to complete the training, which explores topics such as the root causes of poverty, intersectionality, human rights, and anti-oppression. CAT is also a gateway to other social justice programs and employability in a modern workplace.

The original curriculum was re-written in 2017 to emphasize personal development. In 2019, we further improved the curriculum through the addition of creative activities and practical applications such as a weekly case study. A voluntary group project consisting of planning an event or initiative follows the end of the training.

The course takes place once a year and usually consists of 15 participants. The CAP Team Lead, and an assistant, generally from the Investing In Neighbourhoods program, facilitate the course. Since more than 60% of participants report not being food secure, the course provides Good Food Market vouchers, grocery cards, and a meal.



## **Impact**

- 85% of participants appreciated that CAT provides its participants with "a break from the daily struggle"
- ▶ 90% of participants felt more socially connected as a result of the training
- ▶ 80% of participants thought CAT strengthened their resume
- ▶ 95% of participants felt the course helped them to understand the connection between poverty and food insecurity
- ▶ 100% of participants said the course increased their understanding of how people who are experiencing multiple forms of oppression, such as racism & sexism are more likely to experience marginalization and poverty

All CAT graduates are eligible to apply for a limited number of open Advocate positions

- ▶ In 2018, 6 CAT graduates who applied became Peer Advocates and filled all six positions
- ▶ In 2019, 8 CAT graduates who applied became Peer Advocates and filled all eight positions

# COVID-19 adaptation

COVID forced the cancellation of the late spring/summer CAT course. The Stop plans to resume some of its group programming in the fall, and we will monitor this progress to garner best practices.

Community Action Training graduates and staff, 2013

# **Planning Committee**

The Planning Committee (PC) consists of Mentors, Advocates, and staff. It addresses chronic issues faced by community members accessing the Advocacy Office through collective action, such as events or other initiatives. For example, in 2015, the Committee wanted to focus on isolation and loneliness during the holiday season. They developed a workshop called 'How to Survive the Holidays.' Over the years, the workshop grew to a full-fledged fair with food, music, prizes, and recreational and educational activities.

Mentors coordinate all aspects of the Committee, including facilitating meetings, delegating tasks, overseeing the actual event as well as evaluation and debriefing. The Committee holds four events a year, and each Advocate has to participate in at least two.

One of our most successful Planning Committee events took place just before our tenth anniversary in 2018. It was comprised of four events over three days at three locations and focused on seniors' issues. The events drew community members and partner organizations alike, and where feasible was delivered in both English and Spanish. The final event was an evening fiesta at Davenport Perth Neighbourhood & Community Health Centre.

## **Impact**

- ▶ 82% of respondents felt the PC events were beneficial to community members
- ▶ 55% of Mentors and Advocates especially
- enjoyed working on the PC
- ▶ 50% said they developed new decisionmaking, leadership, and teamwork abilities

# **COVID-19 adaptation**

Our Planning Committee was in the final stages of coordinating a 'Meet the Advocates' event at our Wychwood Open Door location, and we had to postpone this initiative indefinitely.



Current Mentors Tania and Armando, former Advocate Brown Otter and former Mentor Sharon at the 2018 Good Food for All rally

# Financial Empowerment

The Stop's Financial Empowerment Program draws upon five pillars:

- Financial information, education, and counselling
- ▶ Help to access income benefits and tax credits
- Safe and affordable financial products and services
- Access to savings and asset-building opportunities
- Consumer awareness and protection.

The program operates a year-round free Tax Clinic under the Canada Revenue Agency's (CRA) Community Volunteer Income Tax Program and provides individual support. In most cases, this involves helping community members to apply for or rectify problems with collecting benefits under the Ontario Works, Ontario Disability, and seniors' retirement benefit programs. The program, funded by a private donor, employed a Financial Empowerment Coordinator. During the tax season, other CAP staff provide administrative support.

# **Impact**

Tax Clinic:

### 2016

- Number of tax returns filed: 138
- ► Total funds returned to the community: \$154420

### 2017

- Number of tax returns filed: 242
- Total funds returned to the community: \$485,006

### 2018

- Number of tax returns filed: 238
- Total funds returned to the community: \$439,780



- A senior asked us for help in resolving a large power bill. After several months' worth of advocacy, we were able to get the company to forgive an unpaid balance and lower the monthly payment, for a total saving of \$3000
- We helped a community member to file ten years of taxes resulting in a 12k return.We also helped him set up a budget and get re-instated on Ontario Works
- During the height of the pandemic (April to July), we helped over 20 eligible social assistance recipients to apply for the COVID benefit
- We were also able to remotely prepare urgent tax returns for a dozen community members some of them requiring multiple years. Further, we remotely empowered two people to take control of desperate situations, such as the final administrative duties after the death of a family member and a long overdue application for seniors' retirement income from the government.

### **COVID-19 adaptation**

Following CRA's recommendation, we shifted to a virtual Tax Clinic during the pandemic. Initially, we had office hours for when community members could drop-off their documents. Later during the pandemic, we established a no-contact drop box.

# Economic Justice Project (EJ) Pilot

We created the Economic Justice (EJ) project to create more educational opportunities for community members and to explore new ways of engaging in systemic advocacy.

EJ consisted of two phases: education and application. In the first phase, 15 community members with lived experience of poverty participated in a 16-week, Popular Education-based course. A Coordinator and a (paid) Peer Mentor facilitated the course. The curriculum was co-designed with course participants and covered issues such as workers' rights, social assistance, and housing.

In the second phase, we hired four graduates from the course as paid Economic Justice Advocates on a part-time basis. Over six months, the Economic Justice Advocates worked in pairs at placements in external organizations or coalitions that utilized community organizing to fight for economic justice.

This one-year pilot project, funded by a grant from the Catherine Donnelly Foundation (Adult Education stream), employed a Coordinator and a Peer Mentor.

# **Impact**

- ▶ We created four part-time, contract jobs for people with lived experience of poverty
- Nine participants completed a 16-week course

### **COVID-19 adaptation**

Our Economic Justice project was at the beginning of its second phase at the onset of the pandemic, and our four paid Economic Justice Advocates had just started their social justice placements.

We pulled our Advocates from their deployments. We then pivoted the objective of the project to that of documenting the impact of COVID-19 on our low-income community members. Our Advocates wrote blog posts, conducted interviews with our service users, and created reports on the effects of the pandemic on low-income and racialized communities.

"I learned about labour unions, government budgets, housing, Indigenous peoples, and many other things. All this gave me the tools to understand that official policies can shape an unjust economy, thereby creating a society that is unjust and full of inequities."

-Economic Justice Program participant

# **LINGERING ISSUES:**

Some of our most important findings cannot be easily summarized with a milestone, recommendation, or statistic. Here, we wanted to capture the rich conversations and unresolved tensions that have been percolating since CAP's inception.

# **Scope of Practice**

In earlier years of the program, Advocates assisted peers with almost every request they brought to the office — including matters of specialized practice such as immigration and eviction hearings. This breadth would sometimes raise problems, particularly around legal and medical issues. As one Advocate explained, "We eventually had to make a distinction between 'advice' and 'info."

In 2014, we decided to limit the extent of direct counsel that Advocates could provide to peers, and Advocate responsibilities shifted overwhelmingly to referrals over intervention or support. Instead, the trained staff at The Stop provided light case management and coordination while the Advocates focused on external redirection—connecting visitors to relevant off-site services or supports, where community members could find answers to their questions if the Advocacy Office didn't have them.

We are pausing to consider whether the current scope and focus of work are best serving our community and Advocates. What have we gained, and what have we lost by narrowing the scope of practice? Have we narrowed too far? Is it possible for us to meet community members' needs that are currently underserved?

### **Effectiveness of referrals**

A referrals-based service relieves both community members and Advocates of the burden of addressing complex, high-stakes issues that require specialized counsel. However, it is difficult to track data from referral agencies. We're aware that paperwork, eligibility criteria, and wait times at many of the more specialized sites can be prohibitive.

What number of our referrals are resulting in delayed or lack of effective action?

We're currently grappling with improvements to the referral process. How can we increase quality control on referrals? Is better data gathering / peer tracking possible? We know that multi-step intake processes may signal front-line agencies and services strapped for resources — and we ask if there is any possibility for our internal systems to better realize our work, by complementing theirs.

A suggestion is to create a working list of preferred organizations. A more robust database could include a broader range of data, with personal anecdotes and cautionary tales from community members with direct experience.



Advocates, Mentors, and staff, 2015

# **Expanding the role of skilled Advocates**

Some Advocates have particular skills or talents and are happy to apply extra hours to these areas. This also provides ways for Advocates to assume more significant leadership roles. By fully exploiting these opportunities, The Stop might grow its range of in-house expertise, and ease some of the reliance on referrals. There is hope that the engagement of alumni can be retained through this process as well.

## **Additional training**

While CAP may not be the best place for case management work, many emphasized the necessity of professional training, experience, and, compensation—including our resident caseworker.

We've considered adding specialized training in select areas (e.g. evictions, mental health, etc.) This option doesn't come without costs: it would require more resources and add more training into CAT. While it would likely increase our capacity to assist community members significantly, it would also raise barriers of access to participation and graduation for our Advocates.

Other options include engaging the services of a social worker on a part-time or full-time basis, or having students take on some case management for course credit. This latter option would spare some additional costs.

We noted that more efficient office sessions might be possible with one skilled worker plus a social worker (as a coach), as opposed to the current, two-Advocate system.

#### **Unhindered successes**

One noted area of unequivocal success, through the scope transition, is the Advocacy Office's ability to "give people an ear."

Says an Advocate, "We do give people space to feel heard — community members keep coming back, and for a reason." ■

# Maximizing Input in Decision-Making

CAP built its foundation on direct, meaningful involvement of community members at all levels of programming: design, delivery, and evaluation.

We need to continually ask ourselves, are we maximizing opportunities for the general membership to be involved with CAP, and are we maximizing opportunities for Advocates to make decisions on how CAP runs?

Generally, we feel that we can always do better. On the surface level, CAT offers broad, diverse opportunities for volunteer engagement. The Advocacy Program is a welcoming place, even for those who may need a lot of support to volunteer. But are our volunteers just performing labour? Or are they meaningfully involved in decision-making around what opportunities might exist in the program and how they might best deliver these for the benefit of all involved?

How can we involve our community members in higher-level decision-making at the upper echelons of the organization? Should we be putting our community members on our Board of Directors or including them in hiring processes?

How could this work be adequately supported and compensated in the current environment? There are existing models for this type of work. But to facilitate an ideal setting for this engagement requires a commitment to changing The Stop's internal culture. How can we make CAP—and, through CAP's integration with the organization at large, The Stop—more democratic?

#### **Transparency and inclusion**

There is a sense among Advocates that staff can be prioritized in organization communications, manifesting a "double standard" or tiered treatment that can feel exclusionary. Advocates cited a perception that, on occasion, the news is "broken slowly to them" before being announced in full, or that they are "handled with kid gloves" around sensitive information.

As one example, Advocates have noticed they sometimes find out about "staff leaving parties" after they happen. According to one, the issue lies not so much in the lack of invitation (an opportunity for staff to "let loose" privately is understandable), but in the sense of hushing a whole event. They suggest other alternatives: a separate daytime office party, and inviting Advocates, volunteers, and others usually excluded.

Advocates also raised interest in being able to send a representative to general staff meetings, if only to help equalize the rate at which both staff and Advocates receive information. They would also like a chance to be able to voice opinions on issues before making decisions.

Increased transparency of decision-making processes would help to build a sense of agency and inclusion among Advocates. One Advocate suggested that a little context might go a long way. Management should note that "some things cannot be changed (e.g. our annual budget or the fiscal year); it would still be great for staff to explain what is happening and why within whatever fixed parameters."



Staff, community members, and volunteers at the 2018 Good Food for All Festival

#### Retention

There is interest in exploring productive, meaningful ways of keeping alumni Advocates engaged with ongoing activities around the program's development, particularly in light of increased demand expected over the next 6–12 months due to the pandemic. For example, we do not include alumni in monthly meetings, and this could be changed.

# 12-year research project

This project itself represents a new opportunity for increasing the decision-making capacity of our Advocates — a fact that did not go unnoticed or unmentioned.

"Now that we have this excellent research, a lot of things are coming to the surface, and we have an opportunity to correct things that were not working. That is sometimes hard to do. Now that we have, it will be all for the better."

"I hope something like this will be done in the future again."

# Compensation

The Stop imagined a reciprocal long-term relationship within the Advocacy Program: Advocates provided meaningful service to the organization, while the organization provided one to the Advocates.

After graduating CAT, participants with experience of marginalization received professional placements to develop their skills while continuing to receive support as needed. These roles situated Advocates at a well-meaning but challenging intersection: as a unique integration of both "client" and "staff."

Over time, the support provided to Advocates in professional roles became seen as incongruous with an employee position at The Stop. Some questioned the fairness and equality of the approach. Others felt that this manner of employment was inherently exploitative. The Stop was asking Advocates to draw on their lived experience to perform social work, but not providing the same level of remuneration as other staff members in the organization.

One of the more complicated and concrete challenges to reconcile has been in the area of compensation. Critically, moving payment towards that of entirely professional employment, recognized under the *Employment Standards Act*, results in clawbacks in other supports received by most Advocates, like OW and ODSP.

#### **After 10 years**

Our 10th anniversary invited reflection around this tension, and consideration of how better to structure the program to meet Advocates' needs.

There is widespread interest from Advocates to move into a more traditional employer-employee relationship, with the same level of expectations, and compensation, as other staff members at The Stop. This route would still be exclusionary, to some extent, with a limited number of available positions. It would require participants to forgo the level of ongoing support previously provided to Advocates by Stop staff. It would also result in clawbacks in other government supports, like OW and ODSP.

In shaping program structure, and accompanying roles, CAP staff and community members question whether they are merely raising the barriers to peer work — designed to be low — and whether to pay peer work at all. Or whether to build some level of support into employment justly and effectively.



# Respect

Issues of "respect" fall into two overarching categories: within the CAP program, and within The Stop as a whole.

#### Staff v. Advocates

Discrepancies between treatment and recognition for staff and Advocates were widely noted. Many Advocates felt that the work they do is also professional, but they do not receive the same compensation and designation as that of Stop staff. Advocates would feel more respected and included with more equitable treatment.

Examples, while not severe, were numerous. One of the most cited was the staff's suspicion — and occasional prevention — of socializing between Advocates. At times, when staff found Advocates chatting between office visits, there was a sense that staff compelled them to "find something for them to do," as if the Advocates were wasting time. This reaction was perceived as a double standard, as it is typical for Stop staff to take coffee breaks or talk among themselves.

At one point, staff asked Advocates to walk around the building and use another entrance when they needed to access the office to make photocopies or for any other reason. The detour took time and left community members waiting. It was particularly troublesome in the winter. Some Advocates found the practice disrespectful, and they felt their concerns were not considered with the same weight as those of staff (who requested the detour to limit internal disruptions).

Staff often take their lunch breaks in back rooms. Advocates already present and eating in these spaces reported sometimes feeling unwelcome, or "kicked out," once staff made an appearance.

## Within the pro gram

Some perceive current attendance policies as patronizing. They interpreted the changing from a 'star system' to a 'check mark system' as a means to increase timeliness and attendance as pedantic, and the overemphasis on punctuality distrustful. If Advocates called in an absence, mentioning an emergency health situation, they sometimes had been asked to produce evidence of just cause (e.g. a doctor's note, if reporting illness as a reason). They noticed it is a request not subjected to staff. While there is an appreciation for the necessity of

while there is an appreciation for the necessity of presence and timeliness, one Advocate asked for consideration of "a middle way between going on a complete bender and being late due to a blizzard." Other possible approaches include a 3-month probationary period for new members.

Similarly, Advocates sometimes feel their vulnerabilities are exploited. One reported occasional vexation at being "treated like delicate creatures." When not required, trauma-informed practices or supports can feel excessive to some. At Advocacy meetings, the presence of arts and crafts and "safety stones" for those who may benefit from additional therapeutic support, while well-intentioned, can also be read as infantilizing.

Cited disrespectful behaviour included staff protocol around Advocacy Office etiquette. It is common for some staff to enter without knocking, to take something they might need from the office, or to deliver a message. At the same time, an Advocate may be engaging in a confidential conversation with a community member.

# Record-keeping, Information Management, Administration

CAP members are evaluating how we keep track of our activity—both internally and in our front-line work with community members—and the implications of these processes.

Record-keeping has been an ongoing challenge. Familiarity and proficiency with written records is a skill that varies widely among staff, Advocates, and volunteers. These tasks can be time-intensive and compete with other short-term priorities for Advocates and the program. At the same time, they are critical to the practical, collective sharing and transfer of information that allows us to serve our members better and streamline processes within the program.

Now, we consider whether it might be worth revisiting and reworking standards and processes around record-keeping within CAP: how, when, for, and by whom is a record kept.

#### **Case management**

"We don't make a point of stressing how helpful case management can be."

There's a sense among Advocates that the value that good record-keeping has on case management could be communicated better to both Advocates and visitors to the Advocacy Office.

Tracking alumni and past participants of the program is also an opportunity that we could exploit better.

"Some Advocates work one shift a week. They may not see that same community member when they come back in the office, so information must be well-documented and in the right format, so the next Advocate dealing with their case doesn't have to start over."

"There are times we don't document enough, but if you don't take time to note that you spent time coaching, for example, you are cheating the benefit for both the Advocate and the community member."

If someone is housing-insecure and does not have a safe, reliable place to store their tax return, this is a direct service the Advocacy Office can provide. Similarly, submitting information like location information for emergency contacts can be a confidential source of support for community members. The file "is theirs: they can come and get it anytime they want; it's not our file — we are just taking care of the paperwork."

## Digital v. physical

Currently, we employ a mix of physical and digital systems. Digitization can be more streamlined and sustainable, but it can also feel closer to a medical model or case management, an ethos we try to avoid. Further, it requires a more extensive training component, however elementary the software system.

## Storage

A matter raised that could use improvement was a centralized system for information filing and management (including research) — this was brought to our attention, in part, through the research we engaged in towards this report process.

Storage, physical and otherwise, can be as critical as the contents of notes themselves — Advocates cited cases of not being able to find folders or files to which they needed access. One suggestion was to encourage Advocates, in slower periods between visitors, to take time to sort through files and folders and continually update the existing system.

Former Advocate Maureen organizing files in the Advocacy Office



#### **Minute-taking**

"We could do a much better job of documenting and improving our admin skills."

Minute-taking is more difficult for some community members than others. Whether an essential or substantial task, the results are highly practical. Minutes that are not clear or comprehensive can result in a loss of individual voices or perspectives, information, learnings, and time.

Not all Advocates or staff come to the program with previous experience with administrative tasks like minute-taking. Those who might have less comfort in this area might, additionally, be embarrassed to flag the issue. We question how we can better teach the skill, or distribute tasks according to skill sets, while also ensuring work is shared equitably. Not everyone likes taking minutes, but it is an essential task. An underlying software or template might help better guide those contributing.

#### **Evaluation**

Presently, evaluation is narrow and based on a limited selection of questions on The Stop's organization-wide evaluation surveys. We intend to carve out the time to develop a more rigorous, focused evaluation. We want to devote time to develop an evaluation framework and accompanying tools that evaluate all components of our program with a particular emphasis on capturing impact.

Recommendations and our logic model for change

3-year action plan

Logic mode



# Looking Forward

# **Advocates**

"We will support Advocates/Mentors in realizing their full potential within CAP and in their lives."

#### **GOALS**

- ▶ a. Galvanize alumni
- ▶ b. Integrate Advocates fully into The Stop
- c. Create a culture of respect and inclusivity
- d. Train Advocates to develop their hard and soft skills
- e. Increase opportunities for empowerment & decision-making
- f. Create supportive employment opportunity for peers

#### Year 1

#### A. GALVANIZING ALUMNI

1. Create a digital newsletter

# B. INTEGRATING ADVOCATES FULLY INTO THE STOP

- 1. Create a page on The Stop's website with Advocates' names, photos, and bios. Also, create a picture wall in a place visible to staff and community members
- 2. Transition Advocates and Mentors into paid employment positions (refer to Employment Proposal planning documents)
- 3. Reintroduce/introduce recreational activities and initiatives for Advocates, Mentors, and staff to build team morale

# C. CREATING A CULTURE OF RESPECT & INCLUSIVENESS

- 1. Organize a bi-monthly or twice yearly meetings between individual staff and Advocates for two-way feedback
- Hold two social gatherings or outings to focus on team building

# D. TRAINING ADVOCATES TO DEVELOP THEIR HARD AND SOFT SKILLS

- 1. Restructure the new Advocates' orientation to five half-days with a focus on practical implementation and increased info retention
- 2. Bring forward options and opportunities for free training at every Advocacy meeting
- 3. Support Advocates in developing annual learning goals and skill-building plans
- 4. Provide Advocates with training in ONE of the following areas: Suicide Assist, CPR, or non-violent conflict intervention and resolution
- 5. Work with Mentors to create an annual guide of best practices, strategies, and tips they want to pass on to the next cohort of Advocates

# E. INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMPOWERMENT & DECISION-MAKING

1. Create a mechanism for Advocates to be involved in determining and reviewing Advocacy policies, perhaps by forming a committee

#### A. GALVANIZING ALUMNI

- Organize an annual alumni dinner with an educational component
- 2. Hire two alumni as relief staff to fill in for CAP staff when absent
- A. INTEGRATING ADVOCATES FULLY INTO THE STOP
- B. CREATING A CULTURE OF RESPECT AND INCLUSIVITY
- D. TRAINING ADVOCATES TO DEVELOP THEIR HARD AND SOFT SKILLS
- Consolidate all policies about Advocates and the Advocacy Office into one manual
- 2. Create a Mentor onboarding training similar to Advocate orientation
- E. INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMPOWERMENT & DECISION-MAKING

## Year 3

#### A. GALVANIZING ALUMNI

- 1. Evolve alumni dinner into a one-day conference
- A. INTEGRATING ADVOCATES FULLY INTO THE STOP
- B. CREATING A CULTURE OF RESPECT & INCLUSIVITY
- C. TRAINING ADVOCATES TO DEVELOP THEIR HARD AND SOFT SKILLS
- 1. Provide Advocates with training in ALL of the following areas: Suicide Assist, CPR, and non-violent conflict intervention and resolution.
- E. INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMPOWERMENT & DECISION-MAKING

# Community Members (who already engage with us)

"We will increase the impact of support & advocacy for community members."

#### **GOALS**

- ► a. Increase capacity for case management
- ► b. Extend the profile of the Financial Empowerment Program within CAP
- ► c. Improve the efficiency of our referrals by providing peer support follow-up & auditing the organizations we refer people to

# Year 1

# A. INCREASING CAPACITY FOR CASE MANAGEMENT

- 1. Have the Team Lead devote 20% of their time to case support
- 2. Explore the role that Mentors could play as paid employees in case support
- B. EXTENDING THE PROFILE OF THE FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM WITHIN CAP
- 1. Compose a document on how to sign up for ODSP with detailed procedures and requirements.
- Create and facilitate a Financial Empowerment support group

- C. IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY OF OUR REFERRALS BY PROVIDING PEER SUPPORT FOLLOW-UP & AUDITING THE ORGANIZATIONS WE REFER PEOPLE TO
- 1. Make a referral action plan and/or use a checklist whenever we give a referral
- 2. Create an opt-in referral follow-up procedure
- 3. Organize an inventory system of organizations that can provide specific support to community members such as home visits, appointments, and accommodation viewing
- 4. Devise a system for keeping up to date on the ever-changing resources available and ensure we disseminate the information to CAP staff and Advocates
- 5. Create a goal of imparting one skill, tip, or piece of information/knowledge to every community member who visits the Advocacy Office

# A. INCREASING CAPACITY FOR CASE MANAGEMENT

- 1. Find funds to increase the Advocacy Coordinator's position from 4 days to 5 days a week
- B. EXTENDING THE PROFILE OF THE FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM WITHIN CAP
- Develop and implement an ODSP sign-up campaign
- C. IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY OF OUR REFERRALS BY PROVIDING PEER SUPPORT FOLLOW-UP & AUDITING THE ORGANIZATIONS WE REFER PEOPLE TO
- 1. As a component of peer support, pilot a self-advocacy mutual support group based on the success of the Financial Empowerment support group

# Year 3

# A. INCREASING CAPACITY FOR CASE MANAGEMENT

- 1. Do a needs assessment and feasibility study for an extension of Advocacy Office hours
- B. EXTENDING THE PROFILE OF THE FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM WITHIN CAP
- C. IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY OF OUR REFERRALS BY PROVIDING PEER SUPPORT FOLLOW-UP & AUDITING THE ORGANIZATIONS WE REFER PEOPLE TO

# Community Members (who currently do not engage with us)

"We will create more opportunities for community members in CAP programming, especially education."

#### **GOALS**

- ► a. Improve outreach methods and deliverables for CAT
- ► b. Increase the profile of CAP and Advocates within The Stop
- ► c. Deepen our connections with Community members in the Drop-in and at WOD Connections with Connections w
- ► d. Conduct ongoing outreach to community members who are new to The Stop
- ► e. Create lower-barrier educational opportunities focusing on self-advocacy and system navigation

#### Year 1

# A. IMPROVING OUTREACH METHODS AND DELIVERABLES FOR **CAT**

- 1. To address the drop-out rate, create a standardized CAT orientation session that thoroughly explains the course content and time demands, and invite a former CAT member to share their experiences
- 2. Create a CAT readiness selfassessment
- 3. Create a CAT-targeted outreach plan that ensures a diversity of representation.
- 4. Make the post-CAT group project a knowledge transfer event that shares the most practical and relevant aspects of CAT with the community in an accessible way

# B. INCREASING THE PROFILE OF CAP & ADVOCATES WITHIN THE STOP

- 1. Make a daily announcement in the Drop-in (names of those on duty, office hours, etc.)
- 2. Install a substantial permanent sign on the wall next to the Advocacy Office

# C. DEEPENING OUR CONNECTIONS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN THE DROP-IN & AT WOD

1. Have the staff and Team Lead make regular visits to the Dropin and WOD once a week during meals

# D. CONDUCTING ONGOING OUTREACH TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS THAT ARE NEW TO THE STOP

- 1. Create a monthly handout of what is going on at The Stop and use it in all interactions with community members to make them more aware of other Stop services and programs
- 2. Experiment with different strategies to interact and engage with new community members, such as compiling a welcome package

# E. CREATING LOWER-BARRIER EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOCUSSING ON SELF-ADVOCACY & SYSTEM NAVIGATION

1. Have a monthly system navigation self-advocacy and self-learning program in the Drop-in

# A. IMPROVING OUTREACH METHODS AND DELIVERABLES FOR **CAT**

- 1. Meet with every program head at The Stop on an annual basis to discuss possible collaborations
- 2. Complete an assessment of which communities and groups CAP is not currently serving

# B. INCREASING THE PROFILE OF CAP AND ADVOCATES WITHIN THE STOP

1. Organize an annual 'know-your-rights' fair

# c. Deepening our connections with community members in the Drop- in and at $\overline{WOD}$

- 1. Hold an annual social justice event in the Drop-in and WOD to promote community member interactions
- 2. Open the WOD Advocacy Office twice a week
- 3. Infuse practical training on how to best work with a street-involved population in CAT and all other Advocate training

# D. CONDUCTING ONGOING OUTREACH TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS THAT ARE NEW TO THE STOP

1. Look into the feasibility of hiring a youth summer student who lives in the neighbourhood or is connected to The Stop

# E. CREATING LOWER-BARRIER EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOCUSSING ON SELF-ADVOCACY AND SYSTEM NAVIGATION

1. Pilot a short pre-CAT course focussing on life skills to reach marginalized people and hold it at WOD

#### Year 3

# A. IMPROVING OUTREACH METHODS AND DELIVERABLES FOR **CAT**

# B. INCREASING THE PROFILE OF CAP & ADVOCATES WITHIN THE STOP

1. Assess the Advocacy Office's requirements for further promotion; devise and implement outreach plans

# C. DEEPENING OUR CONNECTIONS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN THE DROP-IN & AT WOD

1. Open the WOD Advocacy Office three times a week

D. CONDUCTING ONGOING OUTREACH TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS THAT ARE NEW TO THE STOP

E. CREATING LOWER-BARRIER
EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES
FOCUSSING ON SELF-ADVOCACY
AND SYSTEM NAVIGATION

 Create programming to target marginalized people and hold it at WOD

# **Partners**

"We will strengthen existing partnerships and develop new ones."

#### **GOALS**

- ► a. Develop new partnerships for case management referrals
- ► b. Explore new partnerships for specialized services (i.e. like the ID clinic)
- ► c. Strengthen current partnerships—both internal and external—by creating clear terms of reference & feedback mechanisms

## Year 1

- A. DEVELOPING NEW PARTNERSHIPS FOR CASE MANAGEMENT REFERRALS
- B. EXPLORING NEW PARTNERSHIPS FOR SPECIALIZED SERVICES (I.E. LIKE THE ID CLINIC)
- C. STRENGTHENING CURRENT PARTNERSHIPS—BOTH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL—BY CREATING CLEAR TERMS OF REFERENCE AND FEEDBACK MECHANISMS
- 1. Invite Advocates to all-staff meetings at least once a year
- 2. Meet with DPNCHC frontline staff who work in areas such as community development, settlement, and counselling, to discuss a specific structure for collaboration, cross-referrals, and information exchange
- 3. Publish a monthly newsletter that can be sent to our partners, highlighting new programs and initiatives that The Stop/CAP is undertaking

## Year 2

- A. DEVELOPING NEW PARTNERSHIPS FOR CASE MANAGEMENT REFERRALS
- B. EXPLORING NEW PARTNERSHIPS FOR SPECIALIZED OFFICE HOURS (I.E. LIKE THE ID CLINIC)
- 1. Develop a partnership with an employment agency to do regular office hours at The Stop
- C. STRENGTHENING CURRENT
  PARTNERSHIPS—BOTH INTERNAL AND
  EXTERNAL—BY CREATING CLEAR TERMS OF
  REFERENCE & FEEDBACK MECHANISMS
- 1. Hold annual partnership review meetings to discuss strengths, challenges, information exchange, and improve collaboration

A DEVELOPING NEW PARTNERSHIPS FOR CASE MANAGEMENT REFERRALS

B. EXPLORING NEW PARTNERSHIPS FOR SPECIALIZED SERVICES (I.E. LIKE THE ID CLINIC)

C. STRENGTHENING CURRENT
PARTNERSHIPS—BOTH INTERNAL
AND EXTERNAL—BY CREATING
CLEAR TERMS OF REFERENCE & FEEDBACK
MECHANISMS

# System (government policies and programs)

"We will work collectively to fight for systemic change."

#### **GOALS**

- ► a. Challenge poor-bashing and stigma surrounding poverty
- ► b. Centre the experiences and expertise of community members in any systemic advocacy that we engage in

## Year 1

- A. CHALLENGING POOR BASHING AND STIGMAS SURROUNDING POVERTY
- 1. Attend four coalition meetings as a scouting mission to gauge effectiveness
- B. CENTRING THE EXPERIENCES AND EXPERTISE OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN ANY SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY THAT WE ENGAGE IN
- 1. Evaluate the results of the Economic Justice Pilot Project
- 2. Explore the feasibility of integrating a Speakers' Bureau into the next ideation of the Economic Justice Program

## Year 2

# A. CHALLENGING POOR-BASHING AND STIGMAS SURROUNDING POVERTY

- 1. Pick a significant coalition that is addressing poverty and choose a staff person to oversee the initiative
- 2. Create CAT 2.0 / Economic Justice course
- B. CENTRING THE EXPERIENCES AND EXPERTISE OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN ANY SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY THAT WE ENGAGE IN
- 1. Request the voluntary participation of the Financial Empowerment support group and the self-advocacy mutual support group in any systemic action activities

A. CHALLENGING POOR-BASHING AND STIGMAS SURROUNDING POVERTY

B. CENTRING THE EXPERIENCES AND EXPERTISE OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN ANY SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY THAT WE ENGAGE IN

# **Infrastructure**

"We will strengthen the administrative, HR & financial foundation of our program."

#### **GOALS**

- ► a. Engage in a meaningful, ongoing evaluation
- ► b. Improve & streamline our record-keeping (digital case notes)
- ► c. Pursue more funding

## Year 1

# A. ENGAGING IN A MEANINGFUL, ONGOING EVALUATION

- 1. Diversify core CAP staff positions with a focus on racialized people and those with lived experience of poverty
- 2. Ensure that CAP staff undergo annual training about peer worker supervision and support with a focus on respect and dignity
- 3. Establish a program that provides peer workers with additional training on employment rights and their collective agreement during their onboarding
- 4. Create an evaluation framework and schedule to carry out a comprehensive evaluation of the core components of CAP every year
- B. IMPROVING & STREAMLINING OUR RECORD-KEEPING (DIGITAL CASE NOTES)
- C. PURSUING MORE FUNDING

#### Year 2

# A. ENGAGING IN A MEANINGFUL, ONGOING EVALUATION

- 1. Continue to explore ways that peers can be employed in CAP; for example, hiring them to help with CAT
- B. IMPROVING & STREAMLINING OUR RECORD-KEEPING (DIGITAL CASE NOTES)

#### C. PURSUING MORE FUNDING

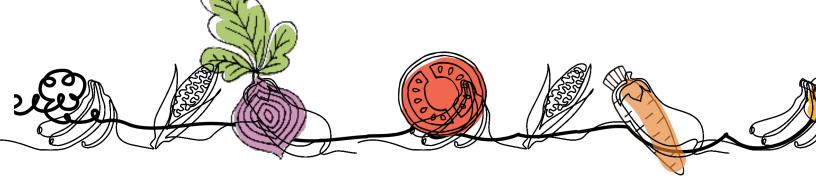
1.Meet with the fundraising department and design a specific fundraising plan for CAP

A. ENGAGING IN A MEANINGFUL, ONGOING EVALUATION

B. IMPROVING & STREAMLINING OUR RECORD-KEEPING (DIGITAL CASE NOTES)

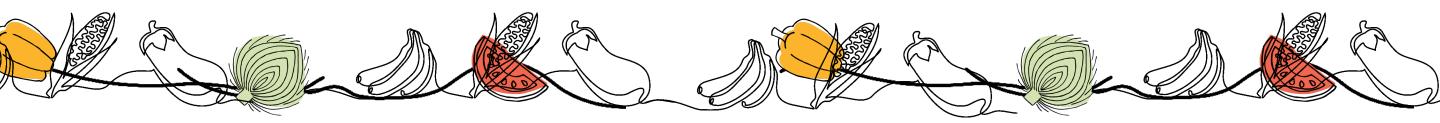
C. PURSUING MORE FUNDING

1. Work with senior management to ensure diversified financing for CAP



# Logic model

Program	_	
<ul> <li>Community Advocacy Office</li> <li>Community Action Training</li> <li>Financial Empowerment Program &amp; Tax Clinic</li> <li>Advocates, Mentors&amp; Planning Committee</li> <li>Economic Justice Project</li> <li>Individual Case Support</li> </ul>		► Program goal: To empower and support community members in building healthy, connected and just lives with dignity and through self-determination.
Program	Inputs: Resources we invest	Activities What we do
Objective #1: Skill building  To increase skills and resources within the community to allow community members to support each other more effectively in facing and overcoming challenges.	Advocates	12-week Community Action Training
	Mentors	Workshops
	Funding	Monthly Advocate meetings
	CAP staff Advocacy Coordinator & Team Lead	Monthly Mentor meetings
	Trainers/experts	Program evaluation
	Offices	Planning Committee meetings
	Technology	Special events
	Community members	One-on-one referrals
	Trainees (community members)	Economic Justice course
	External consultants	



	GUIDING PRINCIPLES		
participants  by individuals  ourhoods.  participants  remphasize teaching and  remphasize teac	<ul> <li>▶ informed by the lived experience of program participants</li> <li>▶ emphasize teaching and learning</li> <li>▶ driven by advocacy, participation, and civic engagement</li> <li>▶ make clear links between the lived experience of our community members and persistent systemic challenges of poverty, social injustice, and food</li> </ul>		
Outcomes:  Short-term changes in learning skills, awareness, etc.) & medius changes in action (behaviour, p	m outcomes (e.g. participants report	Impacts:  Desired long-term changes in conditions or systems (social, economic, environmental, etc.)	
Mmunity Action Advocates gain skills and very experience	Individual success stories share	Improved community social health, wellness, and wellbeing: increased resilience and self-reliance among community members and more people taking care of each other	
Advocates are more aware resources that are available them or community members.			
Advocates are equipped added responsibilities in program participants	·		
itors to the			
ties and reports			
programs/			
tes trained			
or activities			
Short-term changes in learning skills, awareness, etc.) & medius changes in action (behaviour, possions delivered)  Advocates gain skills and wexperience  Advocates are more aware resources that are available them or community members added responsibilities in program participants  itors to the  ties and reports  programs/  tes trained	wledge, outcomes (e.g. participants report increased food preparation skills)  Individual success stories share subscribed—it is necessary to increase intake of participants, e.g. satellite offices  Participants report an increased sends to sense of wellbeing, lower stress	Desired long-term changes in conditions or systems (social, economic, environmental, etc.)  Improved community social head wellness, and wellbeing: increase resilience and self-reliance amon community members and more people taking care of each other	

Program	Inputs: Resources we invest	Activities: What we do
Objective #2: Service provision	Advocates & Mentors	
To provide community members with support (info, referral, lightcase	Advocacy Coordinator	Advocacy Office shifts
management, informal counselling) that allow	Advocacy Team Lead	Community Tax Clinics
them to meet their material needs. To do this in an accessible and dignified manner.		Staff supports
digililled mariner.		Coaching/mentorship —ongoing
		Financial Empowerment Coordinator Tax Clinic
		New Advocate orientation
Objective #3: <i>Program</i>		
To explore innovative programs that support	Staff	Fundraising, grant writing
community members in taking useful and	Funding	Program ideation activities
productive actions on the poverty, social justice, and food system issues impacting their	Community researchers	Program piloting activities
	Former Mentors	Program scaling activities
lives.	Community Action Planning Committee or alternative	Program evaluation and reporting
	Former Advocates	
	Community Action Training graduates	

Outputs: Program-based deliverables (e.g. number of program participants, number of sessions delivered)	Outcomes: Short-term changes in learning (knowledge, skills, awareness, etc.) & medium-term changes in action (behaviour, practice, etc.)	Indicators:  How we measure success in outcomes (e.g. participants report increased food preparation skills)	Impacts:  Desired long-term changes in conditions or systems (social, economic, environmental, etc.)
	Visitors to the Advocacy Office report feeling helped after their visit		
# of hours Advocacy Offices are open	Visitors to the Advocacy Office follow through with referrals	CAP staff, Advocates and Mentors observe an increase in solidarity and comradery amongst program participants	
# of Community Tax Clinic attendees	Visitors to the Advocacy Office report feeling helped by a referral	CAP experiences an increased demand for services	
# of follow ups with visitors and/or referral sites	Advocates are following up on referrals made	CAP observes new peer groups forming among community members and participants	
# of one-on-one support case files created, maintained	Visitors to Community Tax Clinic successfully filing tax returns	Tax Clinic participants report increased personal or household income	
# of external referrals to other agencies, services/organizations			

# of Advocates and Mentors re-engaging with The Stop CAP program	TBD	TBD	Reduced poverty, improved social justice, strengthened food security among CAP participants and The Stop community as a whole
# of new program ideas			
# of pilot projects			
# of programs that become part of program delivery (Objective #1)			

Thank you for reading our 12-Year Review & Renewal report.

We hope that the reflections, best practices, and action plan included in these pages are useful to other organizations or groups engaged in similar work.

We are strong believers in cross-sectorial collaboration and resource sharing. This project was completed during the height of the pandemic and we could not hold the knowledge transfer event we had planned. Please contact us if you would like to learn more about our program or the findings of our 12-Year Review & Renewal project.

We are very grateful to the MAYTREE FOUNDATION for supporting this important work.

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# THANK YOU!





