



Located in Scarborough, the neighbourhood of Malvern is home to one of 13 Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) initiatives being supported by United Way

# NOT ANOTHER SURVEY!

## CONDUCTING THE APCOL QUESTIONNAIRE IN KGO

by Joseph E. Sawan

On the heels of two APCOL case studies; the housing case study in Kingston Galloway – Orton Park (KGO) and the food security community leadership development case study with FoodShare the APCOL survey began with the support and direction of a team of animators and organizers who have led antipoverty campaigns in their communities. After a year of survey committee meetings, the survey was finalized and we were ready to conduct our first interviewer training. Rather than rely solely on graduate student researchers, it was clear that our plans to incorporate the energy coming from the case studies could help organize and design a unique approach to survey research.

From our experience with the case studies, it was clear that participants would eagerly take on the research component of antipoverty activity, and that the broader hopes for a truly collaborative university/community research approach could be realized. It was not without contradictions and it took enormous efforts on both

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two-day training, led by D’Arcy Martin in a lively and participatory fashion. Participants in both APCOL case studies came together to learn the ins-and-outs of the APCOL questionnaire, as well as shape and confirm our survey approach. The level of engagement among the participants increased throughout the training and by the end everyone reached a new level of commitment to the project and antipoverty activity in their respective communities.

At this stage, participants faced a shift in their roles with APCOL, and it did not come free of challenges. Working through scheduling and workplans, the time commitment facing the researchers is significant and the honorarium for researchers does not cover the level of diligence and skill required of them. For our work to be successful we had to respect existing commitments and develop realistic workplans that would not stress or alienate them in their community involvement. One solution would be to provide continuity with the case studies and overlap with their existing community activities.

#### THE EAST SCARBOROUGH FESTIVAL MARKET

As a part of the KGO case study, participants engaged in tabling at the Festival Market organized by the East Scarborough Storefront during the months of June and July. They conducted informal interviews to better understand the various housing issues facing residents in the community as a part of the campaign to develop a local affordable

housing strategy. This experience provided the organizers with the knowledge and confidence to administer and understand the potentially powerful role of the APCOL questionnaire in supporting organizing.

The organizers and animators now put on their “researcher hats” and returned to the Market with a new twist to their organizing strategy. With four graduate students and four community researchers on our first day, we managed to complete seven interviews during the four hours there. Most people we approached were receptive to the project and had time to participate. Since the KGO researchers are well-known in the neighbourhood, we had very few issues finding participants.

For the first day, we paired up community researchers and graduate students in order to encourage learning from each other about interview techniques and navigating the questionnaire. This proved extremely helpful as it brought to our attention specific issues with the questionnaire that could be addressed immediately.

In one instance, an interviewer noted that the respondent is quite involved in anti-poverty activities, but in her response to the questionnaire claimed to not be involved. Here we came face-to-face with a term – community activist – that was far more complicated than either we or the research literature had previously imagined. Practically speaking, we realized that the manner in which

interviewers were asking the preliminary questions needed to be further clarified in order to improve the quality of the answers. Also, definitions of phrases such as “anti-poverty campaigns or activities” were necessary to help frame what types of activities are included. Often respondents would feel trapped by such specific terms, and the ability of the interviewer to provide an explanation determined the quality of the data.

The following week, community researchers showed significant development in their command of the questionnaire. Once again,

This was informal activist/researcher learning in action: learning that took place on the ground and was as valuable as the formalized two-day training that occurred in July.

After the first two weeks, researchers began to conduct interviews on their own with neighbours, family and colleagues. Once we completed around 30 interviews, we evaluated the demographic data of interviewees to determine if the breakdown was representative of the neighbourhood. Noting that the majority of respondents were past participants, non participants, women and over 25, we realized that to reach a somewhat representative sample would need to target more male, current participants between 18 and 25. At this point researchers used their networks to reach out to male, current participants and young adults. It proved very effective, and researchers worked together to iden

several student researchers joined the team, but this time most of us conducted interviews alone. Following completion of each interview, the researcher would return to the APCOL table and would debrief with myself or another researcher while reviewing the questionnaire. This process allowed the opportunity to reflect on challenges encountered and strategies for improving the interview process. The informal aspect of this learning process is important to highlight.

Second, rather than approaching the questionnaire as strictly data collection, researchers learned to conduct the interviews in a professional and scientific manner while building new networks with interviewees who showed interest in the local campaign.

Such an unorthodox approach to quantitative research has so far proved to have significant advantages in the quality of data, as well as opportunities for building stronger community-university relations. At the same time, there are inherent challenges as well that we mustn't ignore, but in our first com-

# ROOMING HOUSES = AFFORDABLE HOMES

by Regini David and Sritharan Kannamuthu

For over 21 years, West Scarborough Community Legal Services (WSCLS) has provided legal advice and representation on laws relating to poverty for low income persons in Scarborough. One of the major areas of our work is helping tenants with housing issues. WSCLS currently is working on a campaign along with other housing advocates and organizations on rooming house issues.

A rooming house is a dwelling where three or more people share a bathroom or a kitchen.

# *The current City by-law pushes common working class people into very vulnerable situations and strips them of their basic right to safe and affordable homes.*

minimum wage of \$ 10.25 an hour, or a student on OSAP with a limited budget mainly can only afford rooming houses.

## UNSAFE CONDITIONS

Many people are living in unsafe conditions. The current City by-law pushes common working class people into very vulnerable situations and strips them of their basic right to safe and affordable homes.

*"I share a basement apartment with other tenants. My landlord has not given me any key. My room window does not open. The ceiling is covered in Styrofoam. If rooming houses were legalized and inspected across the City, landlords would be forced to provide safe living conditions. This is essential as rooming houses are the only option to keep me away from the streets or the shelters." Kumari.*

The Toronto Housing Charter says: "All residents should be able to live in the neighbourhood of choice without discrimination."

## TAKING AWAY MY CHOICE TO LIVE IN MY NEIGHBOURHOOD IS DISCRIMINATION

*"I am very upset and disturbed to know that rooming houses are illegal in Scarborough and especially that last fall the Planning Committee proposed that they would permit rooming houses in certain areas but not in residential*

*areas. This is discrimination and City Councillors are not ready to address this reality. I have always lived in residential areas with many other rooming house tenants. I know there are many rooming houses in my neighbourhood. I do not want to identify the location because I do not want myself or my friends to end up on the streets" Kannamuthu*

The City by-laws target people who are the most marginalized, the most vulnerable and most in need. According to the United Way Report, Scarborough saw a 136% increase in the number of "poor families" between 1981- 2001. Further, according to the Shared Accommodation, June 2008 Report, there are over 165,000 low income single adults in Toronto, for whom rooming houses are the most affordable option. Ontario Human Rights Chief Commissioner, Barbara Hall has informed the City of Toronto Planning and Growth Management Committee that the City by-law has the potential to violate the Ontario Human Rights Code.

*"I am a person with epilepsy and I am emotionally disturbed due to a war in my country. I was a government officer back home. Due to my health condition and economic status, I am now in this living condition. I see many other immigrants, people with low-income in the same situation as me. We already face so many barriers to surviving in this*



*city due to our status and health. Not allowing rooming houses in our neighbourhoods adds another barrier by making us occupants of illegal houses.*

# THE FOOD ACTIVIST PROJECT AT FOODSHARE: AN INSIDE VIEW

by Christine McKenzie

Starting in the fall of 2009 until the spring of 2010, APCOL in partnership with FoodShare, undertook the Food Activist project in an effort to understand and address food security as a part of the broader anti-poverty movement. I was a member of the team as a popular educator and Graduate Assistant from OISE, University of Toronto, along with Rachelle Soulliere.

FoodShare is a hub of food activism. It describes itself as taking “a multi-faceted, innovative and long-term approach to hunger and food issues. Its projects are based on the principles of self-help and community building” in order to “address short-term issues of household hunger, while also providing longer-term benefits by building the capacity of individuals and communities.”

The Food Activist group made an important contribution to food activism through connecting community leaders active on food issues across the Greater Toronto Area and developing workshops that would expand



diverse approaches and visions when working in a group, the importance of listening and how styles of leadership impact the group. The group members also appreciated learning about new tools and ways to run workshops, such as different approaches to storytelling.

While initially the Food Activists said they experienced a huge learning curve, they gradually felt more confidence in problem solving. Overwhelmingly, they spoke about feeling empathy, connection and a willingness to share with others in the group.

The Food Activists also spoke in detail about how they gained an appreciation for nurturing the connection between people



## APCOL SURVEY

Sample surveys of poor neighbourhoods remain a rarity in studies of community organizing to date. A notable exception is a survey of the attitudes and conditions of Brazilian youths in a poor urban neighbourhood, conducted by a research team of local academics, NGOs, community representatives, and with youths from the neighbourhoods as interviewers (Verner and Alda 2004). But the APCOL Survey may be the first one in which the survey results will be produced with assistance of neighbourhood researchers and combined with case study findings to aid in further anti-poverty campaigns.

In the first year of the project, APCOL researchers and community case study partners have cooperatively developed the survey questionnaire. Pilot studies have identified specific generative themes based on discussions in the neighbourhoods.

The main purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information regarding anti-poverty issues as well how and what people learn from participating in anti-poverty campaigns and related activities.

The survey questionnaire addresses actual conditions and attitudes towards the four basic needs, community involvement and anti-poverty organizing; formal and informal learning in anti-poverty community organizing and basic demographic information.

The APCOL Survey will be conducted in 2010-11 and again in 2013-14 in the same general neighbourhoods as the case studies in eight of the poorest neighbourhoods in GTA (United Way 2004). In each neighbourhood, purposive samples will include both current and past participants in anti-poverty campaigns as well as non-participants. The surveys will also be conducted by teams of academics, graduate students and

# SPOTLIGHT: DISCUSSING ACTIVIST L

JC: That's right

PS: What we are going to do doesn't matter until we learn that lesson.

JC: Yes, yes that's right.

PS: Okay, so I think of this idea of learning agency as a kind of fundamental aspect, it's kind of learning a new sense of your relationship to the world around you. A very big and important lesson. Abstract but really also the most concrete thing of all. But are there other kinds of more, I guess you would say, more technical skills that are needed to be taught to activists? Especially after that first lesson is learned? Is there anything there that is discussed at OCAP?

JC: There is to some degree, there are particular people who become active and start to



for people to come out and participate, we expect people to come out and participate, and that would be an opportunity in a way to talk about all sorts of expansive ideas and

When people are gathered, let's say 25 people, you know there is going to be discussions amongst them. What are we doing this for? Which directions could we go with this and what could be achieved through it?... I don't want to overstate what we do, but probably everyone in OCAP would agree with me that we tend to get so caught-up in the day to day stuff that actually developing our ideas and educating even our members, let alone broader groupings of people that we have contact with, it doesn't get nearly enough attention...

PS: So in terms of how the left can build on this model or where things might be heading in the future in terms of organizing effectively, what do you think?

JC: I think of something much more community based. In the 30s the unemployed organized on the basis of block community, and I could actually see something along those lines...

We are actually starting to see the beginnings of that in the work that OCAP is doing with the Somali community. We started to find that we were building a real base in the Somali community, in Etobicoke largely, and it's a fascinating community because it is one where the normal multicultural controls are quite weak... So what we have now is actually an OCAP organizer in the Somali community who is doing fantastic work. So we have got the sort of workings that I'm talking about for the first time not taking place at the downtown OCAP office, but taking place in and around people's kitchen tables and in a neighbourhood which really means something.

November 2010 marks the 20th Anniversary of OCAP. For more information go to <http://www.ocap.ca/>

The full transcript and audio version of this discussion, as well as other SPOTLIGHTS can be found on the APCOL web site at <http://www.apcol.ca>

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## POLITICS MATTER:

### "ZERO DOLLAR LINDA" AND THE TRAPS IN SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

**This is an excerpt from "Zero Dollar Linda" a report by John Stapleton, published by the Metcalf Foundation in November 2010. The complete report can be accessed at [www.metcalffoundation.com](http://www.metcalffoundation.com)**

Linda Chamberlain is a Toronto woman with serious disabilities living in subsidized housing. Through one of her support agencies, she found part-time work to supplement

her disability income. Instead of bolstering this success story, her public housing landlord immediately made her rent unaffordable, while her disability support program severely cut her benefits. [...] she too could have done better had she received the help and advice she needed. But she came to the conclusion she could only prosper by leaving the work she loved.

APCOL is

## FURTHER READINGS OF INTEREST: METHODS OF INQUIRY

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