



AIC ANNUAL REPORT



ABOUT AIC

ACORN Institute Canada (AIC) is a charitable organization that uses research and training to address the problems in low-income communities. We believe that the poverty, discrimination, and community deterioration that exists in low-income communities is a result of a lack civic engagement, community leadership and financial literacy.

In 2019 ACORN Institute Canada (AIC) continued to work towards the goals of civic engagement and leadership development in communities across Canada. Participants in our programs and workshops focused on addressing the root causes of issues impacting their neighbourhoods, from housing to internet access (among many others). Through AIC leadership development and engagement programming, with the generous support of our community partners, low-income individuals and families are able to build and share communication and leadership skills essential to creating the capacity to address the key issues they face daily.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

AIC has over a decade of experience working in low-income communities, which disproportionately include individuals and families facing challenges such as social exclusion because of their race, age, ability, etc. on top of socioeconomic status. We are careful in our work to meet participants where they are, and to tailor leadership development processes to specific communities and groups of people.

Our Leaderships Schools - which range from two hour meetings to full-day workshops - serve to reach community members from a variety of backgrounds and abilities, helping them to develop skills while working in a communal setting. We believe that positive change can be achieved by diverse groups of people through these community-building programs. Our leadership training program also includes a range of delivery tools to accommodate community members' needs, from one-on-one house visits to large weekend leadership summits.

AIC uses the "train the trainer" approach to leadership development; in addition to building their own skills through our workshops, participants build their capacity to encourage that development in their neighbours, contributing to community growth as well as the program's sustainability.

COMMUNITY WORKING GROUPS

Community Working Groups are made up of participants in the Leadership Schools specifically interested in working on landlord and tenant issues, as well as other policies and issues affecting low-income families. The groups are focused on identifying common issues and finding root causes.

This model involves more direct civic engagement than the Leadership Schools. The groups are supported in building partnerships with other community stakeholders in order to reach a larger audience for their concerns. The groups are largely locally focused, but are not limited in joining forces with other working groups in order to problem solve on a larger scale.

The tenant working group model allows participants to learn about specific civic processes on multiple levels, and how to successfully engage with government processes to improve conditions in their neighbourhoods.

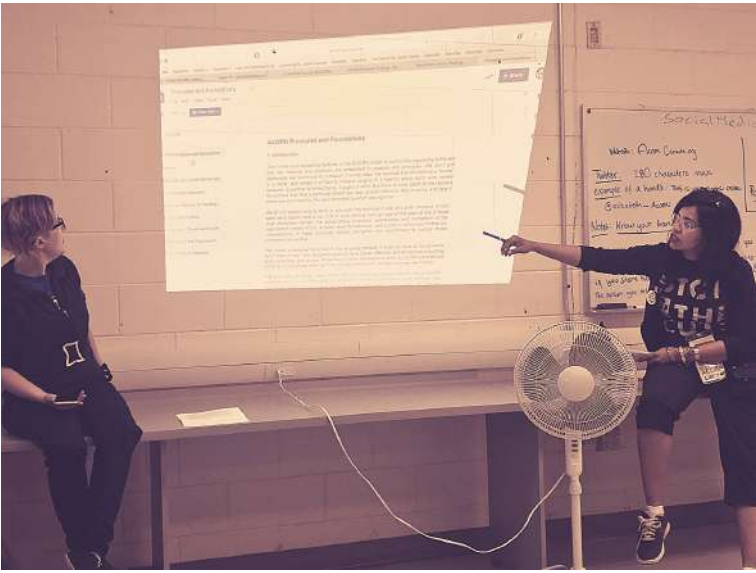
With this model we have been able to develop working groups in various cities around tenant issues; the EI system; newcomer parents; and people with disabilities.



FINANCIAL LITERACY

A key area of leadership development that our program participants have identified is understanding personal finances and how to access and maintain financial resources. This is a pressing issue for many of our participants. AIC has partnered with credit unions and other financial institutions in order to run a variety of programs for low income families around financial literacy. These continue to be among our most asked-for and well attended programs.

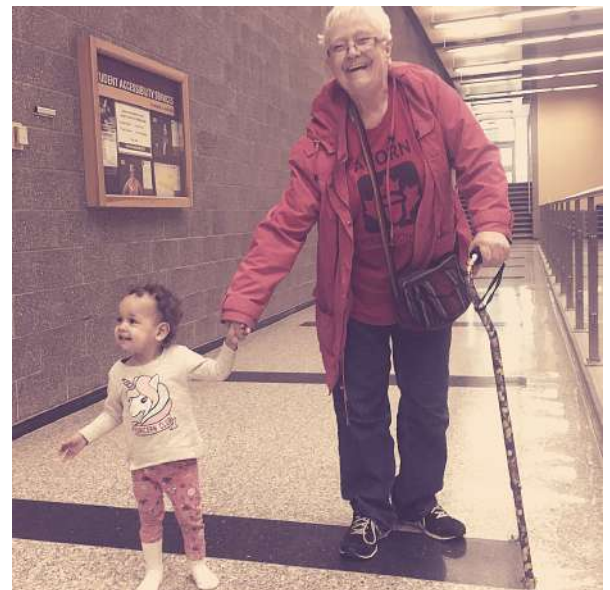
Through financial literacy classes, we have provided guidance on how to avoid predatory lending practices, understanding tax benefits, and various other concerns as identified by participants. We are continuing to expand our ongoing projects and developing new partnerships in this area to meet the needs of our communities.



DIGITAL LITERACY

Digital literacy is an increasing concern for the communities we work with. In recent years with the support of funders we have been able to run leadership development workshops specifically around digital literacy and building and sharing digital skills.

Participants in these workshops are able to develop digital literacy skills, to aid their children with success in school, understand digital privacy, find tools for economic relief, and build their capacity to get out of poverty. We have also been able to conduct community-based research to build on our understanding of internet accessibility issues in Canada.





MODERNIZING EI

In 2019 we continued to build our GTA Modernizing EI and Good Jobs Working Group, building leadership skills and capacity of precariously employed and unemployed workers, specifically around improving EI policy federally.

Community members were engaged in the Modernizing EI project through engagement at regular leadership meetings and workshops, and identifying and engaging participants vulnerable to EI to make sure they were invited to join the working group. The working group has built on the project (starting in 2018) by engagement with the wider community, and with stakeholders and policy makers on the issue. This included working group leaders facilitating a workshop on Modernizing EI at our National Leadership Summit in June 2019.



2019 HIGHLIGHTS

- ☆ In June, 300 community leaders from across Canada came together at our National Leadership Summit in Hamilton. Community leaders from BC, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Alberta and Quebec gathered at McMaster University for a weekend-long summit, including leadership development workshops addressing participant-selected issues such as housing, banking, internet access, financial literacy, and many others.
- ☆ With the support of our community partners and institutional funders, we continued to grow the Financial Literacy program this year. We ran income tax preparation and benefits centres, and financial literacy programs in BC and Ontario, helping hundreds of low income families to file their taxes, connecting them to unrealized benefits, and providing financial management skills.
- ☆ In 2019, with the continued support of the Omega Foundation and in partnership with local organizations across the country, including the Toronto District School Board, the Winnipeg Promise initiative, and various financial institutions, we have continued to expand our Canada Learning Bond program, connecting hundreds of eligible low-income families to this free RESP benefit for low-income parents of young children.



2019 ORGANIZATIONAL FUNDERS

Atkinson Foundation (Ontario)

BC Rehab Foundation (Metro Vancouver)

Continuing to work with people with disabilities to provide free and low-cost tax preparation including maximizing returns; connecting participants with unclaimed benefits and financial literacy programs; and providing volunteer opportunities for marginalized communities.

Hamilton Community Foundation (Hamilton)

Edith H. Turner Foundation Fund. Developing and facilitating workshops with low-income tenants to expand knowledge and engagement on local housing issues.

Hamilton Community Foundation (Hamilton)

Kenneth Boothe Young and Marie Catherine Young Fund. Developing and facilitating replicable workshops to protect against tenant displacement.

Maytree Foundation (National)

Strengthening the policy articulation and communications capacity of the organization; building capacity of members and leadership to achieve the policy goals; creating research and policy materials for members and staff on policy research, and community leadership development at both local and national level.

Metcalf Foundation (Toronto)

Continuing work on our GTA working group to engage workers who were denied or vulnerable to needing EI in the policy debate around improving EI policy federally.

Omega Foundation (National)

Conducting outreach and connecting low-income families nationwide with the Canada Learning Bond.

Ottawa Community Foundation (Ottawa)

In partnership with the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa, strengthening knowledge of housing policy in low and moderate income communities, and building tenants' capacity and skills to cultivate new community leadership on housing issues.

Toronto Foundation (Toronto)

MacFeeters Family Fund

Vancouver Foundation (Metro Vancouver)

Developing programming to engage low-to-moderate-income tenant communities in action planning around preventing displacement and preserving affordable rental housing in Metro Vancouver.

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR GENEROUS DONORS AND FUNDERS