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## OLDER AND WISER: Seniors contribute to fabric of Canada

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Oct. 1 is the International Day of Older Persons. file photo North Shore News

On Oct. 1 Canadians will celebrate seniors and their lifelong contributions to our society.

This day is also celebrated around the world as the World Health Organization has declared it the International Day of Older Persons. In addition to celebrating seniors, the organization wants to remind us of the many issues facing older people in the world, such as elder abuse, poverty, homelessness and age-related health problems.

Though you may have heard about the drain on Canadian society by seniors who are supposedly sucking up health-care dollars (a fact disputed by the B.C. Seniors Advocate), people often neglect to look at the contributions seniors have made in Canada.

Seniors contribute to the economy, they contribute many hours of volunteering and they provide support to family and friends through caregiving and transfer of wealth to the next generation. Seniors have also contributed their time to making our society what it is through their work, building culture and community, fostering values and keeping us informed about our history – after all, they were part of building that history.

A report from Volunteer Canada states that: “Older adults have a lower volunteer rate than younger age groups but they contribute, on average, more hours per year. This is likely due to health and mobility issues that increase with age, while availability tends to increase with age, due to fewer work and family responsibilities.”

According to North Shore Community Resources Society, more than two billion volunteer hours are produced by volunteers in Canada. In economic terms, if one were to multiply those unpaid volunteer hours by a modest \$15 per hour that would be more than \$30 billion– a substantial sum. Many of those volunteer hours are performed by seniors because of their availability and commitment to building community.

Caregiving is also often performed by seniors and this is mostly unpaid. In a report by Marie Sinha called Portrait of Caregivers, she states that: “Seniors aged 65 years and older were the least common group of caregivers, but they were most likely to spend the longest hours providing care. In particular, 23 per cent of senior caregivers provided 20 or more hours of care per week, compared to 10 per cent of those aged 15 to 24, 13 per cent of those aged 45 to 54, and 17 per cent of those aged 55 to 64.”

She further states that often times those seniors giving care may also have “unique needs” which, with caregiving, may have a negative impact on their lives.

So now that I have convinced you that seniors are very valuable to our society, here are some ways we can celebrate seniors and their contributions. Merely saying thank you is a great way to acknowledge their contributions and conversely try not to buy into the myths you hear about older adults.

It seems that society has created a situation where seniors are often treated as irrelevant, infirm, feeble and in a state of losing their abilities to make judgements. They can also be infantilized (we know what's best for our aging senior).

But as we know, though older people's bodies and minds do go through some changes, we also gain skills and abilities as we age.

Another way to celebrate older people is to go to the North Vancouver City Library where they are celebrating National Seniors Day on Oct. 1 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

It is a day to meet seniors, find out what resources are available to them, view community displays, see a dietician and perhaps get your blood checked. There will be a raffle, dancing and tables to sit at and chat with one's peers.

Finally, being age-friendly is a great way to celebrate seniors. On the B.C. government's official website about age-friendly communities, it states that age-friendly means that: "people of all ages and abilities benefit from safer, barrier-free buildings and streets, better access to local businesses and facilities, and more green spaces. Businesses benefit from the increased support and spending power of older customers, and are better able to support older workers. The community benefits from the increased participation of older adults in community life."

It's great to know that all across the North Shore we are designated as age-friendly.

I hope that I have convinced you that seniors in Canada contribute more than their fair share to Canada's wealth and well-being. Let's recognize older people for the contributions they have made and say thanks.

*Margaret Coates is the co-ordinator of Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. She has lived on the North Shore for 48 years and has worked for and with seniors for 20 of those years. Ideas for future columns are welcome Email: [lions\\_view@telus.net](mailto:lions_view@telus.net).*

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