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OLDER AND WISER: Volunteering benefits seniors in a big way

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file photo North Shore News

Did you know that there are more than 12 million volunteers in Canada and many of those volunteers are seniors?

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."

And according to North Shore Community Resources Society 2.1 billion volunteer hours are given by volunteers in Canada. In economic terms, if one were to multiply the 2.1 billion unpaid volunteer hours by a modest \$15 per hour that would be \$31.5 billion, a substantial sum.

So why volunteer?

Many see it as a selfless act as a person gives their time, skills and experience to help others with no expectation of a return.

However, as Volunteer Canada states on its website: "While volunteering is a form of service many volunteers will tell you that 'you get more than you give.'

From opportunities to develop new skills, to finding deep and meaningful connections, the magic of volunteering is that it creates social and economic value for all."

Of course, ask any non-profit organization on the North Shore what volunteers contribute to their organization and the answer would be "We couldn't make our programs and activities work without them."

Many organizations have a ratio of 10 volunteers per one staff member.

The report Volunteer Canada's report states that, "Volunteering provides health benefits to older adults.

It offers them significant physical, emotional and cognitive or brain health benefits. It also enhances social support, social inclusion and civic engagement."

Seniors who are at risk of social isolation may find volunteering an important way to become integrated in the community thus reducing that risk.

They can get to know the community, make new friends and feel valued and part of a team.

What volunteer positions are available?

On the North Shore there are many organizations who seek volunteers.

These volunteer positions offer a range of opportunities, from serving on a board of directors or as part of a committee, participating in a craft group that make gifts for sale, serving and preparing food in a kitchen, providing reception services, coaching a sports team, assisting with computer classes, driving a bus, assisting in school programs, helping out in parks with tours and cleanup, teaching a class, working in a wood shop, assisting a disability group with their clients, facilitating a workshop, counselling a senior, supporting an exercise class, and more. Where do I find these opportunities?

According to govolunteer.ca giving back to your community has never been easier. The website allows volunteers to sign up for free and search for opportunities in their own neighbourhood.

Closer to home, the North Shore Community Resources Society provides a service on their website at nscr.bc.ca/volunteer/searchvolunteer.asp.

There you can find more than 500 volunteer positions listed for the North Shore, and these include many of the opportunities listed above.

If finding a position through the internet is difficult, you can always phone NSCR at 604-985-7138.

Also, many of the organizations seeking volunteers may not advertise through NSCR, so it's worth reaching out to the organization directly.

To help you find the phone numbers of organizations near you check out the 2018 Seniors Directory published by NSCR and the North Shore News. The directory can be found at many seniors' organizations and on the NSCR website.

National Volunteer Week is April 19-25 this year. It's a time to celebrate and thank Canada's volunteers and across the North Shore many organizations will show their appreciation by hosting events.

I want to thank everyone for volunteering and thanks in advance to everyone who is considering a volunteer position.

Though senior adults may experience challenges and barriers to volunteering related to transportation and scheduling issues, as well as out-of-pocket expenses, most organizations try to find a way to facilitate your participation.

Just let them know your barriers.

Now get out and volunteer – you'll be glad you did.

Margaret Coates is the co-ordinator of Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. She has lived on the North Shore for 47 years and has worked for and with seniors for 20 of those years. Ideas for future columns are welcome Email: lions_veiw@telus.net.

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