

# OLDER AND WISER: Volunteering won't make you money, but it could profit your health

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Who wants to feel good about themselves? Who wants to increase their skills and gain new experiences? Who wants to connect with people in a positive way?

These questions are at the heart of why some of us volunteer. I for one know that my volunteering is part of who I am. I get pleasure out of doing something for someone or my community. I learn something new just about every time I volunteer and my connection to people keeps me from becoming isolated or maybe just plain cranky.

So how do we celebrate the work of volunteers? National Volunteer Week is running from April 7 to 13 this year, and this is a time to celebrate the 12.7 million volunteers across Canada. According to Volunteer Canada: “As we recognize the collective efforts of volunteers, we reflect on the multitude of actions taken locally to help people, communities and neighbourhoods become better prepared to respond to the unexpected, and better positioned for a more sustainable future.”

This year, Volunteer Canada’s campaign will focus on “The Volunteer Factor – Lifting Communities.” The organization states that when people volunteer together, the sky is the limit when it comes to what they can achieve.

According to Imagine Canada’s website, 47 per cent of Canadians volunteer – and the equivalent of one million full-time jobs are represented by volunteering.

According to North Shore Community Resources Society, two billion volunteer hours are generated by volunteers in Canada every year. In economic terms, if we were to multiply the 2.1 billion unpaid volunteer hours by a modest \$15 per hour that would equate to more than \$31 billion, a substantial sum.

Volunteering can be instrumental in providing health benefits to older adults and seniors. According to the B.C. government's website, "Volunteering can be an important part of a healthy, active retired life. If you're planning for retirement, consider how you'll spend your time. Many people retire and find they don't have enough to do. Volunteer work can make the transition from formal employment to retirement easier."

It has been found that volunteering offers seniors significant physical, emotional and cognitive/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.

On the Imagine Canada website, in a blog post titled "Beyond the application: attracting, motivating and retaining volunteers in today's landscape," it states that competition by organizations for volunteers is fierce.

"The question many organizational leaders are asking is: how do we ensure we are giving our volunteers the opportunity to make a difference while still meeting our own priorities with less human and operational resources?" the blog post reads, offering organizations 10 tips for creating a vibrant program which should give them a leading edge in recruiting and retaining volunteers.

Organizations that have a volunteer program often say without volunteers assisting in providing programs and services, the valuable work of the organization wouldn't get done. It is often said that for every staff person working in a not-for-profit community resource there are 10 volunteers providing assistance.

On the North Shore, there are many organizations who seek volunteers. At Silver Harbour Seniors' Centre, volunteers can participate in a craft group that makes gifts for sale, or perhaps serve and prepare food in a kitchen, sit at the front desk, or serve on a board of directors or committee.

Volunteers can assist in a Keep Well program which helps seniors through an exercise program. At Capilano Community Services Society volunteers can drive a bus, assist in the youth programs or assist with the Red Cross program. At North Shore Neighbourhood House volunteers can provide counselling to a senior. Volunteers can coach a sports team, assist with computer classes, help out in parks with tours and cleanup, teach a class, work in a wood shop, assist a disability group with their clients, and facilitate a workshop. It seems that there is something for everyone.

To find a volunteer program near you try checking out the 2019 Seniors Directory published by the North Shore Community Resources Society and the North Shore News.

The directory is available at many organizations and is also available at the NSCR office located at Capilano Mall. For volunteering you can visit their website at [nscr.bc.ca/volunteer/jobs.html](http://nscr.bc.ca/volunteer/jobs.html). There you can find more than 500 volunteer positions listed for the North Shore, and these include many of the opportunities listed above.

If you want to branch out further, the provincial government also has a website, [govolunteer.ca](http://govolunteer.ca).

Thanks to all the volunteers on the North Shore, you deserve a huge pat on the back.

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