

OLDER AND WISER: Volunteering a valued activity for many seniors

[Margaret Coates](#) / North Shore News

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Across the North Shore next week volunteers will be honoured for their commitment to helping organizations with their work in the community.

Volunteer week in Canada is designated as April 23-29 this year, and as Volunteer Canada's website says: "however you recognize volunteering in 2017, one thing remains timeless . . . and that is volunteer efforts create positive impact in communities across Canada."

Volunteering can make a difference to the lives of others, help the environment and help others less fortunate or without a voice. Volunteering allows one to give something back to an organization that has impacted a person's life. It is a way to meet new people and make new friends. Many volunteers like the added benefit of feeling valued and part of a team. Volunteers can gain confidence and self-esteem through their work.

A number of newcomers to Canada find volunteering a way to get to know the community, learn about Canadian customs, and learn English. Volunteering can also provide newcomers with job skills and job readiness.

On its website, Volunteer Canada says there is a correlation between volunteering and healthy aging. They say: "Remaining active and staying connected to the community can have a tremendous positive impact on a person's social, physical and emotional well-being. Studies have found that older adults who volunteer have reduced stress-related illnesses and higher self-esteem and are less likely to feel isolated. Volunteering can also have a positive impact on lifestyle transitions in older adults as they retire, downsize their housing or deal with health issues."

A 2016 Statistics Canada report, *Volunteering and Charitable Giving in Canada* by Martin Turcotte, says that older volunteers contribute an average of approximately 231 hours a year, more than any other age group. The report says "Overall, volunteers aged 55 and over contributed 39% of the 1.96 billion hours volunteered by Canadians aged 15 and over in 2013. This proportion was higher than their share of the total population of volunteers."

Organizations, churches, hospitals, service clubs and schools all benefit from volunteering. In fact, most organizations would agree that they could not operate their programs without the use of volunteers. Silver Harbour Seniors Activity Centre's executive director Annwen Loverin says volunteers at her organization contribute more than 40,000 volunteer hours per year, equivalent to the work of more than 20 full-time employees.

Volunteers on the North Shore provide peer support to clients, assist people with income tax returns, wash dishes, create products for sale at fundraisers, assist children at schools, fundraise for playground equipment, referee and coach sports for kids, supervise bridge games, do clerical work, and much more.

Volunteer opportunities on the North Shore abound. You can volunteer at Keep Well as a site co-ordinator, provide peer support at North Shore Neighbourhood House, help with a seniors program at Parkgate Community Centre, assist the drop-in program at North Shore Volunteers for Seniors, be a receptionist at Mollie Nye House, deliver meals for Meals on Wheels, work in the cafeteria at West Vancouver Seniors' Activity Centre, or act as a telefriend for the Seniors Hub program. You can serve on the board of a community organization or join a committee such as one of the Seniors Action Tables. To find a volunteer opportunity try Volunteer North Shore at 604-985-7138.

The B.C. Seniors Advocates Office also relies on a team of volunteers from around the province to advise and provide feedback for its ongoing work for seniors. And by the way, you have a chance to hear directly from the seniors advocate, Isobel Mackenzie, when she speaks about her continuing work at a presentation organized by Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society, on May 16 at 1:30 p.m. at Silver Harbour Centre.

Finally, of course, a big thank you to all you North Shore volunteers, young and old.

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. lions_view@telus.net (mailto:lions_view@telus.net)

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