

Services to Seniors Coalition – North Shore

Notes

Co-Chairs

- Trish Alsop, *North Shore Neighbourhood House, and John Braithwaite Community Centre*
- Margaret Coates, *Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society*

About the Coalition

Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society is the host agency for the Services to Seniors Coalition – North Shore. The Coalition has been operating since 1992 and is the planning table for issues facing seniors and services to seniors on the North Shore. The 50+ participating organizations and individuals represent a wide spectrum of service providers. We come together as the Coalition to network, plan services and supports strategically and set priorities and target resources for collaborative action.

Contact the Coalition

C/o Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society
1733 Lions Gate Lane
North Vancouver
Tel: 604 988-7115 ex 4001
Email: lions_view@telus.net
www.lionsviewseniorsplanning.com

Tuesday, April 21, 2026

12:00 pm to 1:30 pm

At Silver Harbour Centre

1. Welcome – Trish Alsop

2. Land Acknowledgement

Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society acknowledges and honours that we live and work on the unceded territories of the Coastal Salish people, including the St'at'imc, Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) and səliłwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

3. Introductions

Lionsview Seniors Planning Society: Margaret Coates, Lindsay Macklin, Wallis Dixon, Margarete Wiedmann

Coalition member: Adele Wilson

Hollyburn Community Services Society: Veronica Traille, Lindsey

North Shore Neighborhood House: Trish Alsop, Lea Howard

North Shore Community Resources: Anne-Marie Jamin, Alex

City of North Vancouver Library: Rakhshanda Ansari

Alzheimer's Society: Aiswarya, Jillian Wychopen

Capilano Community Services: Austin Neaves

Connect!Age SFU: Eireann O'Dea, Elise Stone

Memory Café: Cindy Bouvey

West Vancouver Recreation & Culture: Jennifer Jefery

Impact North Shore: Marianne

MONOVA: Andrew Hildred

CFUW: Eleanor Scarth

Volunteer Cancer Drivers: Gail Coffman

Comfort Keeper: Carlie Smith

North Shore Women's Centre: Gabriella

Lynn Valley Services Society: Victoria Balasubramanyam

4. Presentation by Connect!Age SFU

Presenter: Dr. Eireann O'Dea

Researchers from the Connect!Age project shared preliminary findings on volunteerism, along with research-informed strategies and opportunities for collaboration to strengthen volunteer capacity on the North Shore.

Project Overview

- Connect!Age brings together academic and community partners across BC and Quebec to address social isolation among marginalized older adults.
- Focus on developing and testing evidence-based, co-designed approaches across organizations.
- Volunteerism identified as a key priority among participating organizations.

Importance of Volunteerism

- Essential to the delivery of community-based services and supporting aging in place.
- Contributes to social connection, trust, and community wellbeing.
- Linked to positive physical, mental, cognitive, and social health outcomes.

Key Challenges: Preliminary Connect!Age research has found:

- Increasing demand for services alongside limited organizational capacity.
- Constraints in funding, staffing, and space affecting volunteer recruitment and support.
- Staff taking on additional volunteer coordination responsibilities.
- Difficulties with volunteer matching and retention.
- Shift toward short-term or episodic volunteering.
- Need for more diverse and multilingual volunteers.
- Limited funding specifically for volunteer programs; volunteer coordination often under-resourced.

Research-Informed Strategies

- **Recruitment & Training:** Simplify sign-up, clarify expectations, offer flexible roles, broaden outreach, and strengthen onboarding processes.
- **Retention:** Foster supportive environments, maintain clear communication, involve volunteers in decision-making, and address burnout.
- **Recognition:** Provide ongoing appreciation through consistent acknowledgement, events, and personalized recognition.

5. Discussion on Volunteerism

Facilitators: Dr. Eireann O'Dea & Elise Stone (Connect!Age, SFU)

A facilitated discussion explored key challenges, practices, and opportunities to strengthen volunteerism across organizations.

Volunteer Recognition & Engagement

Recognition events are meeting the needs of some volunteers, but not all

- Some volunteers prefer not to participate in formal recognition, while others value social interaction.
- This creates challenges in designing inclusive and meaningful recognition approaches.
- Emphasis on understanding individual preferences and how volunteers want to be recognized.
- Ongoing question of how to build relationships and shared purpose when levels of engagement vary.

Practices shared:

- **Hollyburn:** Uses a job interview-style intake to understand volunteer goals and expectations; serves as a form of recognition and relationship-building.
- **NSCR:** Volunteer coordinators provide clear scope and expectations to support matching; recognition varies by role (e.g., office-based vs. drivers who are more difficult to engage).
- **Cancer driver programs:** Weekly volunteer spotlights on social media based on interviews, highlighting motivations and contributions.
- **General practice:** Inviting all volunteers to events and allowing for self-selection.
- **Impact North Shore:** Hosts regular virtual meetings (once or twice per month) to encourage discussion, feedback, and accessible engagement.

Additional approaches:

- Exit interviews to acknowledge contributions and gather feedback, alongside structured onboarding processes.
- Ongoing training and regular check-ins throughout the volunteer experience.
- Opportunities to better integrate volunteers into the organization and community.
- Need for more inclusive approaches to support volunteers facing barriers (e.g., limited English, cognitive decline).
- Connect!Age noted that resources are available to support volunteers who may require additional support.

Recruitment & Retention

- Clear expectations and defined roles support better matching between volunteers and opportunities.
- Increasing preference for short-term or flexible roles.

- Importance of ongoing training, mentorship, and check-ins.

Strategies shared:

- Pre-orientation information sessions to set expectations and explain different types of volunteer roles.
- Volunteer mentors supporting onboarding and peer learning.
- Opportunities to streamline recruitment and orientation processes across organizations.
- Potential to refer volunteers to other organizations when there is a better fit or unmet need (e.g., sharing specialized roles such as drivers).

Shifting the Work Culture to Value Volunteers

Ongoing tension around the perception that volunteers are “free,” despite requiring significant resources and infrastructure.

- Volunteer-related funding (e.g., recognition) is often the first to be reduced.
- Need to better understand volunteer motivations (e.g., purpose, connection) and reflect this in program design.

Importance of embedding the value of volunteers within organizational culture:

- Ensuring staff understand the role and importance of volunteers.
- Example: **NSNH** includes volunteer engagement in staff orientation, reinforcing reliance on volunteers.
- Assigning responsibility for volunteer recruitment, onboarding, and support.
- Use of volunteer mentors to support training and peer connection.

Collaboration & Shared Approaches

Interest in strengthening collaboration across organizations to address shared challenges.

Volunteer North Shore (led by NSCR) identified as a key resource:

- Community of practice (three meetings annually).
- Volunteer fair (approx. 35 organizations and 350 attendees).
- Central platform for posting and accessing volunteer opportunities.

Opportunities discussed:

- Sharing and referring volunteers between organizations based on capacity and fit.
- Coordinating volunteer roles across organizations (e.g., sharing drivers or specialized roles where needed).
- Increasing Coalition engagement with Volunteer North Shore.
- Collaborative outreach, including multilingual engagement.

- Streamlining onboarding, training, and recruitment processes to support cross-organizational volunteer movement.

Advocating for Change: Systems, Infrastructure & Advocacy

Interest in exploring shared volunteer databases or centralized systems (noting past models such as United Way during COVID).

- Consideration of a shared or subscription-based volunteer pool
- Acknowledgement that managing such systems requires significant time and resources.

Utilizing and improving existing resources

- NSCR as the hub for volunteers to access opportunities and as a network for organizations looking to fill volunteer roles
- Impact North Shore can connect organizations with newcomer volunteers who are often highly skilled and multi-lingual.
- Work with these existing programs to encourage information and resource sharing (i.e. training resources for volunteers; orientation resources for staff, etc.)

Criminal record checks identified as a barrier (cost and time)

- Discussion on the potential for a streamlined or transferable “one-time” criminal record check recognized across organizations

Need to advocate for volunteerism at systems and policy levels:

- The Office of the Seniors Advocate identified as a potential starting point, noting a current gap in focus on volunteerism within the community sector.
- Emphasis that communities rely on volunteers to function and support aging in place

Funding and sustainability challenges:

- Volunteer coordination and infrastructure are often underfunded and there is an existing assumption that volunteers are a “free” and “expendable” resource.
- Need to shift funder perspectives to recognize volunteer-related costs.
 - Volunteers are not free! There is a disconnect in how volunteer costs and value are perceived
- Importance of using data and evidence (e.g., volunteer hours, impact on social isolation and health outcomes) to strengthen funding requests.

Applying Research to Practice

- Recognition that volunteering supports physical, cognitive, social, and mental health, as well as social connection and aging in place.

- Opportunity to use this evidence to strengthen recruitment and retention messaging.
 - Incorporating qualitative importance (i.e. supporting aging in place) and the quantitative significance (i.e. the number of hours volunteers have contributed)
- Connect!Age expressed interest in providing real-time, practical resources to support organizations and test new approaches to volunteer engagement.

6. Updates

- **Silver Harbour:** Last program day June 26; relocating for three months; reopening July 20 with official opening July 25.
- **North Shore Neighbourhood House:** Tax clinic continues for two more weeks (Mondays, 10:00–2:00); one accountant available for multi-year filings (income under \$40,000).
- **North Shore Community Resources:** Ongoing drop-in tax clinic; Caregiver Expo next Saturday at 12:00 PM.
- **North Shore Women's Centre:** Tax clinic available in May, including support for multiple years.
- **CFUW:** Hosting Elder Action Day webinar focused on conditions of home care.
- **Capilano Community Services:** Friday morning breakfast program seeking seniors and volunteers.
- **Walk for Alzheimer's (West Vancouver):** May 31.

7. Next Meeting: May 19, 2026 at 12:00 PM