

[Home](#) » [Lifestyle](#) » [Seniors](#)

## OLDER AND WISER: Many organizations depend on charity and goodwill during the holidays

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Jeanette Tripp, Hilde Jaeger and Neil Lerner are busy prepping goods for the annual Silver Harbour Seniors' Activity Centre Christmas Market this Saturday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m at 144 East 22nd St. in North Vancouver. Admission is free and will feature handmade artisanal crafts, homemade baked goods, vintage treasures, craft supplies and much more for sale, with proceeds earmarked to support the non-profit seniors' activity centre. photo Mike Wakefield, North Shore News

It's that time of year when many of us are bombarded with requests to donate to a charity.

As a person who both works for a charity and volunteers for a couple of them, I thought I'd weigh in to let you know that donations can be the life blood for organizations in need. Donating is more important than ever for many reasons.

Of course there are many other reasons to donate: helping others in need, bringing more meaning to your life, giving back to the community, strengthening your personal values, modelling good citizenship values for your children and others, supporting a cause you believe in and, very importantly, donating can simply make you feel good about yourself.

It seems that Canadians understand the importance of donating. Statistics Canada data from the last many years shows that 84 per cent of Canadians aged 15 and over (or, about 23.8 million Canadians) donated to charitable and non-profit organizations. The average individual donation is about \$446 per year. In total, that's roughly more than a billion dollars donated by Canadians every year.

But why donate to a charity? As Martin Turcotte writes, in an article titled "Charitable Giving by Canadians," the "Sources of funding for charitable and non-profit organizations vary significantly according to the particular sector, each receiving greater or lesser levels of support in the form of government subsidies and grants, corporate donations, foundation grants, etc. Despite this diversity, almost all organizations count on individual donations to fulfil their mission and achieve their objectives."

Fundraising in the charitable sector is very challenging. Grants for operating costs (paying the rent, utilities or staff) can be extremely difficult to obtain for many organizations. These organizations rely on volunteers to get the work done, but they still need paid staff support. There is money available federally and provincially but those funds are generally based on time-limited projects for specific programs and services and there is often no administration money attached to the grant. Also, the amount of funds these grants provide does not seem to grow with the increased need for services, which means organizations are competing for thinner slices of the same size pie.

Why give to a senior's organization or an organization that serves seniors?

Many of these organizations, as I have said, don't have access to operating funds, so they must rely on raising donations from foundations, grants from non-senior targeted funding sources or directly from individuals.

I believe that the funding challenge will likely worsen as the older-person demographic grows in the future unless we can persuade government to recognize the importance of funding the seniors sector with operating funds as well as project funding.

As many of us in the seniors sector who fundraise can attest “seniors are a hard sell.” In part this seems to be because of the myths about seniors being undeserving. Many seem to believe that most seniors are well heeled and don’t need special consideration. Of course this is not true – seniors do need our support for services.

In report called “Raising the Profile of the Community-Based Seniors’ Services Sector in B.C.,” it states that “The community-based seniors’ services sector plays a critical role in supporting seniors by providing a broad range of low-barrier and low-cost services that support seniors to remain physically active, be socially engaged, build resilience and be as healthy and independent as possible.”

On the North Shore, seniors’ centres and organizations that offer seniors programs are fortunate to receive some funding from the three municipalities for operating and core funds. We hope the brand new councils will continue to see the importance of funding community groups.

In this gift-giving season, and as we near the end of the tax year, perhaps you too could think about supporting your local seniors program or centre with a tax-deductible donation. You can find a list of seniors’ centres and programs run for seniors in the community in the 2018 Seniors Directory, produced in partnership by the North Shore News and North Shore Community Resources Society or go to NSCR’s web site at [nscr.bc.ca](http://nscr.bc.ca).

Don’t forget: giving can make you feel good, so get out that credit card or your cheque book and find a charity to support.

*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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