

Older and Wiser: Take care of others, and yourself, this holiday season

The Christmas season is a great time to lend a hand to a senior
Margaret Coates December 13, 2021



The holiday season can be a stressful time, so it is important to take care of yourself and others, writes columnist Margaret Coates. Getty Images

During the holiday season while most of us are feverishly buying gifts, baking up a storm, and decorating our houses inside and out, take some time to donate your time, resources, or money to those who most need it in our community.

Seniors could use a lift at this time of year, especially after going through the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic as one of the most vulnerable populations.

One place to lend your support is the Christmas Bureau run by Family Services of the North Shore. Over the last few years, the Christmas Bureau has seen an increase in seniors needing their services during the holiday season. To volunteer, donate, or apply for support, the Christmas Bureau can be reached at 604-984-9627.

My personnel favourite choice is the Greater Vancouver Food Bank, which partners with the Food Bank run out of North Shore Neighbourhood House. The Greater Vancouver Food Bank has been providing food support to community members in Vancouver, Burnaby, New Westminster, and the North Shore since 1983. For nearly 40 years, they have served their communities reliably and consistently through good times and bad. To donate to the food bank, connect to the website [Ways To Give | Greater Vancouver Food Bank](#). To donate directly to the North Shore Neighbourhood House, connect with [their website](#) or drop off a cheque at 225 West 2nd St.

While there are specific programs for seniors at this time, such as the Christmas Bureau, many other North Shore organizations could use your help. Most organizations over the last few years provided support to seniors during the worst of COVID-19. In the response to the onset of the pandemic, they provided programs virtually, they repurposed their on-site food service programs to home delivery, they phoned and/or emailed seniors who were home-bound, they assisted seniors with shopping and getting to appointments, and they performed mental health check-ins.

Lately, these organizations are offering more of their services on-site in combination with the continuing COVID-19 activities. However, this has been incredibly challenging, but necessary, in pursuing the worthy goal of providing programs and services for seniors (one of our most vulnerable populations).

Groups have had to balance the need to provide short-term supports to respond to COVID-19 with resuming normal services. They have had to formulate and adapt safety protocols for staff and participants. All of this is not without incredible challenges. Staff and volunteers have been stepping up to the plate to facilitate the programs while they themselves are experiencing the pandemic and its impacts.

What North Shore organizations have done over the last 18 months has been truly amazing and I think they deserve our support. You could send a donation to any of the North Shore organizations – check out where they are in the 2021 Seniors Directory published by the North Shore News in partnership with North Shore Community Resources available at most seniors' centres and on [NSCR's website](#). You could also support a senior by donating to an organization in a senior's name. Send along a card to let them know you are thinking about them in this special way.

Another way to support organizations is by volunteering. To find a placement, try your nearest organization by phoning the North Shore Community Resources Society at 604-985-7138. Volunteering also has the benefit of protecting you from becoming isolated and disconnected from the community.

Perhaps in addition to volunteering, if you are able, check on your senior neighbours, who may need a hand with such things as putting up their lights (don't forget taking them down), driving them to a Christmas play or concert, checking out the light displays at Park & Tilford Gardens or the winter wonderland at the Shipyards District, driving them to a mall or an appointment, inviting them for lunch, or any other idea you might have. You might also check with a long term care facility and see if you can donate gifts or visit some of the residents who do not have family or friends.

As seniors, taking care of ourselves without getting stressed, eating too much, and neglecting our exercise programs is difficult at this time of year. Seniors may be more at risk for increased stress than a younger person, and this may affect our health. There is the stress of getting everything done in addition to the usual daily activities. Proper self-care could be the gift you give to yourself, and a gift if you are responsible for others or simply want to contribute to the community.

Try to take a few moments for yourself, take a nap or a bath, and be thoughtful about the many activities you might engage in and then prioritize. Make sure you get a good night's sleep and get out for walks. Giving at this time can be a gift to ourselves and the community.