

Older and Wiser: Volunteering is a great way for seniors to stay active

As COVID-19 wanes, volunteer opportunities are opening up again

Margaret Coates

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A grandfather and granddaughter pick up water bottles and recycling. Volunteering is a great way for seniors to stay active. Getty Images/RgStudio/E+

This year National Volunteer Week is April 24 to the 30, and the theme for 2022 is Empathy in Action.

The Volunteer Canada website says “volunteering can help us develop empathy, to see the world through the eyes of others. It can connect people from diverse backgrounds and life experiences, expanding our views. It can build our capacity to work collectively and contribute to a vibrant, inclusive society.” Lofty ideals for volunteering, indeed.

Volunteering hours in Canada are considerable in terms of the value they represent to our society. The Conference Board of Canada, in a 2018 publication called *The Value of Volunteering in Canada*, said “about 44 per cent of Canadians volunteer an average of 156 hours a year. This is a massive work effort, providing services that are equivalent to 6.5 per cent of employment –

about the size of employment in education. If measured, volunteering would add an estimated \$56 billion to economic activity.”

Volunteers everywhere are to be warmly thanked and acknowledged for their dedication, time, and contributions. But why volunteer, you might ask?

For many of us the benefits of volunteering may not be as lofty as the ideals expressed by Volunteer Canada, but there are many other advantages. In addition to helping people in need, furthering good causes and contributing to the good of the community, the benefits of volunteering can be great for you as an individual. Volunteering can offer seniors significant physical, emotional, and cognitive/brain health benefits. For me personally, I love the interaction with my community, and I love the added value that volunteering gives to my life.

After retiring you might find yourself adrift with less to occupy yourself than when you had a job. Volunteering can be a great way to share your talents, wisdom, and the experience that you gained over a lifetime of working. If you volunteer at this stage of your life, you can still do all the post retirement things you dreamed about as a job holder – organizations are glad to have you on board for any time that you can give.

Volunteering connects you to others, is good for the mind and body, and it can bring fun and fulfillment to your life. Volunteering can give you opportunities to learn new skills, expand your horizons, stay active, and give you a sense of belonging. It can reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. Volunteering can also reduce low self-esteem and social isolation.

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 effort.

During the worst of the COVID -19 pandemic, volunteer opportunities decreased, and this was a difficult time for some “die hard” volunteers. However, when possible and as organizations pivoted their programs, numerous people stepped up to volunteer in new ways, thus contributing to their society in a very real way during a crisis. Volunteers provided distanced rides to appointments and friendly phoning services. They dropped off cheery gift baskets for special events (Thanksgiving, Christmas, Valentine’s Day). They grocery shopped, made meals, picked up prescriptions, and wrote cards to send out to isolated folks. Some worked at the North Shore Food Bank, while others did Vaccination Passport checks.

Now that COVID-19 is on the wane, many organizations are increasing their programs and services for seniors. With the reopening of activities on the North Shore, there is an increasing need for volunteers for a wonderful array of opportunities.

You could help with administrative activities, serve on a board or committee, work in a kitchen, hook up with a team of crafters, or co-ordinate an exercise program. Volunteers can coach a sports team, assist with or teach computer classes, help in parks with tours and cleanup, teach an arts class, work in a wood shop, assist a disability group with their clients, and facilitate a

workshop. I hear that volunteer bus drivers, who ferry seniors to appointments, programs or other services, are a hot item this year. It seems that there is something for everyone.

To find an organization which has a volunteer program near you, try checking out the 2022 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 the NSCR website which has a [brand-new volunteer database](#). There you can find volunteer positions listed for the North Shore, and these include many of the opportunities listed above.

Every hour served by a volunteer deserves our heartfelt thanks.

Margaret Coates is the co-ordinator of Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. She has lived on the North Shore for 51 years and has worked for and with seniors for twenty-six of those years. Ideas for future columns are welcome – email lions_view@telus.net.

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