

# Three cheers to volunteers

*Pete & Shelley Aarssen - April 2024*

Did you know that National Volunteer Week runs from April 21 – 27? It celebrates the many men and women who freely give of their time and talent to create a well woven fabric of needed volunteers for society. What does this have to do with elders? Suffice to say that our demographic; elders, contributes the greatest number of volunteer hours among volunteers, each year! Here are some facts we learned when reading a 2018 study:

- 2.5 billion hours were spent volunteering (in dollar value: \$55 billion)
- 24 million Canadians gave of their time voluntarily.
- while elders contribute the most hours, younger folks are more numerable among volunteers.
- women from Baby Boomer and millennial generations are more likely to volunteer than men in the same age group.
- hospitals get the highest formal support from volunteers with the religious sector second and the sports and recreation sector third.

What do volunteers do?

- informal volunteering examples: yard work for a neighbor, care of a sick family member, driving those without a license to appointments and the list goes on and on.
- helping with community projects examples: Habitat for Humanity home builds, service clubs/groups.
- organizing and supervising any number of community events.
- fundraising, which encompasses too many types to even list.
- mentoring/teaching others in a variety of ways.
- serving on a volunteer based, board of directors

This is only a fraction of what volunteers can do. They are superheroes disguised in plain clothes. This year's National Volunteer Week theme is "Every Moment Matters". Perhaps you've thought of volunteering in some way but were discouraged by a perceived lack of time or energy for such an activity? Maybe the reason that we don't jump in is because there is a bit of fear lingering in our subconscious about picking up an illness due to being among others. Sadly, this fear is cited as having contributed to a drastic drop in volunteers since 2020. This year's theme could be to encourage ourselves to think of some way to put ourselves out there in a new volunteer role because each effort to help others makes a positive difference in the way our society operates. There's a term used to distinguish, "Top Volunteers". This description requires them to contribute at least 132 hours/year volunteering. Here are some more stats on their status:

- 25 per cent of all volunteers come from this group
- 40 per cent of them were born before 1946
- 31 per cent of them are Baby Boomers (1946-1965)

We find that when we have given of ourselves, it benefits not only those served but also, ourselves. Let's take a minute here to consider how volunteering benefits the volunteer. This isn't an exhaustive list but here goes. We can gain a new sense of purpose to our life which can be sometimes lacking right after retirement. There is often training involved allowing us to gain self-confidence and to learn some new, valuable skills. A few years back, Shelley volunteered for an all-women's Habitat for Humanity build. She hoped she would gain some new skills used in home construction. She ended up assigned to paint, a somewhat perfected skill already. The unintended benefit of this allowed her to meet some great women and she enjoyed the experience immensely. Another surprising benefit is that giving to others can help protect our mental and physical health. The connections made while working with others will often be the high point of an activity so let's all consider a new volunteer role and give three cheers to all volunteers!