



# Senior Squad: Benefits of Volunteering



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**PLEASE NOTE: This manual is intended as a resource for information pertaining to the health and social benefits of volunteering. However, this is not to be considered inclusive of all existing data.**

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Literature Review .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Social Benefits .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Health Benefits .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Our Process .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Survey Results .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Quote Page .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Appendix A: Survey Questions .....</b>	<b>17</b>



## Senior Squad: Benefits of Volunteering

This project was conducted for Salvation Army Community Venture, Winnipeg: in support of the New Horizons for Seniors Program grant proposal. Individuals often do not seek out volunteer opportunities however most accept opportunities presented to them. According to Statistics Canada<sup>1</sup> nearly half of people who volunteer were asked by someone to volunteer. Volunteering contributes to an individual aging successfully<sup>2</sup>. Our goal of this project is to create awareness in the community on the important role that volunteering plays in the lives of seniors including seniors with intellectual disabilities.



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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. (2009). Caring Canadians, involved Canadians: highlights from the 2007 Canada survey of giving, volunteering and participating. Catalogue no. 71-542-XPE. Retrieved on May 31, 2010 from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/start-debut-eng.html>

<sup>2</sup> Morrow-Howell, N., Hinterlong, J., Rozario, P.A., & Tang, F. (2003). Effects of volunteering on the well-being of older adults. *Journal of Gerontology: Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 58B (3), ppS137-S145.

## What the current literature says....

### Social Benefits

A primary purpose for a senior to volunteer is to socialize, according to Statistics Canada<sup>3</sup> 50% of volunteers surveyed started volunteering to network or meet people. The socialization aspect of volunteering contributes to a more cohesive society as well as a reduction in loneliness and social isolation<sup>4</sup>. Volunteering seniors challenge the biases and societal views of an aging individual. Volunteering creates a stage for relationships to develop<sup>5</sup>. If a senior is single with low education, low income and is socially isolated they will perceive greater benefit from engaging in volunteer opportunities<sup>6</sup>. These seniors may feel empowered and valued through volunteering<sup>7</sup>.



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<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada. (2009). Caring Canadians, involved Canadians: highlights from the 2007 Canada survey of giving, volunteering and participating. Catalogue no. 71-542-XPE. Retrieved on May 31, 2010 from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/start-debut-eng.html>

<sup>4</sup> Warburton, J., Paynter, J., & Petriwskyj, A. (2007). Volunteering as a productive aging activity: incentives and barriers to volunteering by Australian seniors. *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, 26 (4), pp. 333-354.

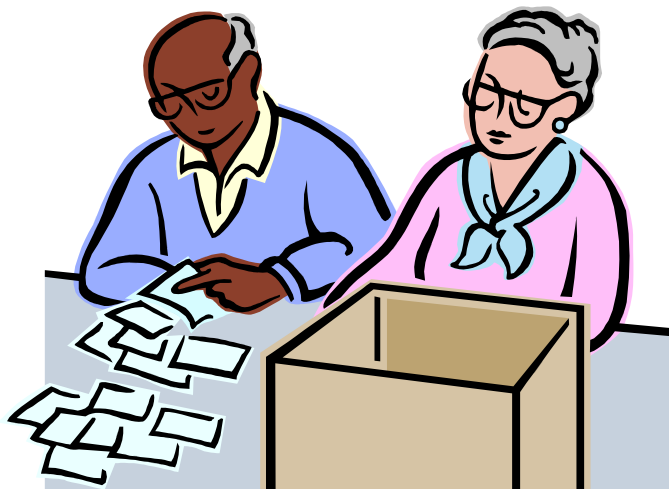
<sup>5</sup> Larkin, E., Sadler, S.E. & Mahler, J. (2005). Benefits of volunteering for older adults mentoring at-risk youth. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 44 (3), pp. 23-37.

<sup>6</sup> Morrow-Howell, N., Hong, S.I., & Tang, F. (2009). Who benefits from volunteering? variations in perceived benefits. *The Gerontologist*, 49 (1), pp 91-102.

<sup>7</sup> Tang, F., Choi, E.H., & Morrow-Howell, N. (2010). Organizational support and volunteering benefits for older adults. *The Gerontologist*, advanced access, pp, 1-10. Retrieved on May 17, 2010 from <http://gerontologist.oxfordjournals.org/>



Our research found that 93% of participants interviewed chose “being with others or social interaction” as what they like the most about volunteering, refer to Table 4. The majority of participants have made new friends, as a result of volunteering: refer to Table 5. Also, 71% of participants felt like “part of a team” refer to Table 7. Figure 1 demonstrates the importance of socialization when volunteering.



## Health benefits

There is an “extensive body of literature which documents the positive relationship between late-life volunteering and health including better mental health, better physical functioning, improved self-rated health and delayed mortality<sup>8</sup>”. Some of the health benefits from volunteering are lower morbidity, longer survival, less depressive symptoms, lower utilization of health services, greater life satisfaction and higher life quality<sup>9</sup>. Others benefits include “increased physical functioning, enhanced muscular strength, reduced pain, and delayed mortality<sup>8</sup>”. Perceived benefits are important. Equally important are the indirect benefits. Research shows that people do not volunteer to improve their health but their health improves or declines less when they volunteer. “Public health interventions embedded in civic engagement have the potential to engage older adults who might not respond to direct appeal to improve their health<sup>10</sup>”. We found that when participants were asked “do you think that volunteering makes you a healthier person?” no participant chose a response of “no”, refer to Table 6.

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<sup>8</sup> Tang, F., Choi, E.H., & Morrow-Howell, N. (2010). Organizational support and volunteering benefits for older adults. *The Gerontologist*, advanced access, pp, 1-10. Retrieved on May 17, 2010 from <http://gerontologist.oxfordjournals.org/>

<sup>9</sup> Gottlieb, B.H. & Gillespie, A.A. (2008). Volunteerism, health, and civic engagement among older adults. *Canadian Journal on Aging*, 27 (4), pp 399-406.

<sup>10</sup> Tan, E.J., Tanner, E.K., Seeman, T.E., Xue, Q.L., Rebok G.W., Frick, K.D., Carlson, M.C., Wang, T., Piferi, R., McGill, S., Whitfield, K.E., & Fried, L. (2010). Marketing public health through older adult volunteering: experience corps as a social marketing intervention. *American Journal of Public Health*, 100 (4), pp. 727-734.

## Our Process

We spent a significant amount of time building rapport with the members in the Community Venture Program, during this time we assessed the members' communication skills and cognitive abilities. Engaging in the daily activities and programming led to an understanding of the daily lives of the members. We were influenced at the University of Manitoba by the recent research method "photo voice"<sup>11,12</sup> which is giving the participants a camera to take pictures that represent a specific topic. We adapted this by taking candid photos of Community Venture members participating in volunteer work. These photos assisted the members to focus on the place and time when they volunteered, to more accurately gain responses to the survey questions.

We did a literature review to gain background information on the topic and to link with the survey responses and increase their validity. We then formulated qualitative survey questions based on the literature review. In addition to photos, we used a visual analog scale from one to ten with smiley face pictures, and descriptive terms for use with some of the questions. We made word cards to help with the answers and to make the experience more game like and enjoyable for the participants. Prior to conducting the interviews, we considered the ethical issues surrounding informed consent with vulnerable populations and took appropriate steps to ensure this was obtained.

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<sup>11</sup> Booth, T., & Booth, W. (2003). In the frame: photovoice and mothers with learning difficulties. *Disability & Society*, 18: 4, pp. 431-442.

<sup>12</sup> Wang, C.C., & Redwood-Jones, Y.A. (2001). Photovoice ethics: perspectives from flint photovoice. *Health Education and Behaviour*, 28; pp 560-572.

We collaborated with the Senior's Circle and the Logan sites of Community Venture program, which use volunteer opportunities to offer a broad range of experiences and growth opportunities as expressed in the Community Venture mandate. We also collaborated with Good Neighbours Active Living Centre, which has a comprehensive volunteer organization in River East, as well as colleagues from other agencies.

To help put participants at ease we connected with them in environments where they are comfortable, such as going to Community Venture sites, at the community centre where they volunteer and participate in programming, their home or by telephone. We usually conducted the surveys with small groups of participants to shift the power equilibrium in their favour. For participants with lower levels of literacy we read the questions to them in random sequence to encourage individual response rather than echoing the responses of other participants and recorded their answers. We anticipated certain obstacles such as consent, word selection and interview style. We addressed these obstacles with various approaches such as consulting with multiple levels of staff to address consent requirements, created multiple choice answers and word cards to address word selection difficulty and interviewed in groups when possible to create a comfortable environment. When we encountered other obstacles we adapted our process as needed. After all surveys were completed, we amalgamated the data and created this resource.

## Survey Results

A total of 14 volunteers in Winnipeg participated in the survey between June 9, 2010 and June 16, 2010. [See Appendix A]. All participants surveyed were at least 55 years of age or older. Seniors are a critical resource as they are large in number, flexible with time, and often have patience<sup>13</sup>. Seniors are only going to increase in numbers as the baby boomer generation enters senior status. “Because of their sheer numbers, baby boomers influence and redefine every stage of their lives. Volunteering will be no different.”<sup>14</sup>

<b>Table 1</b>
<b>How long have you been a volunteer?</b>
6 months
4or 5 years
8 years
16 years
20 years
30 years
35 years
40 years
“Few years”
“Years and years”
21% were unable to provide an answer

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<sup>13</sup> Larkin, E., Sadler, S.E. & Mahler, J. (2005). Benefits of volunteering for older adults mentoring at-risk youth. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 44 (3), pp. 23-37.

<sup>14</sup> Volunteer Canada. (2009). Baby boomers - your new volunteers. An introductory workbook: rethinking your organization’s approach to baby boomer volunteers. Retrieved on June 8, 2010 from <http://www.volunteer50plus.ca/retaining.php>

<b>Table 2</b>	
<b>How do you “feel” when you do volunteer work?</b>	
79%	Happy
79%	Helpful
71%	Part of a team
57%	Useful
57%	Proud
57%	I have a sense of purpose
29%	Obligated
7%	Frustrated
7%	Not welcomed
<b>Other Responses</b>	
“giving back to community”	
“feel like doing something”	
“wanting to finish job”	
“pretty good”	
“good”	

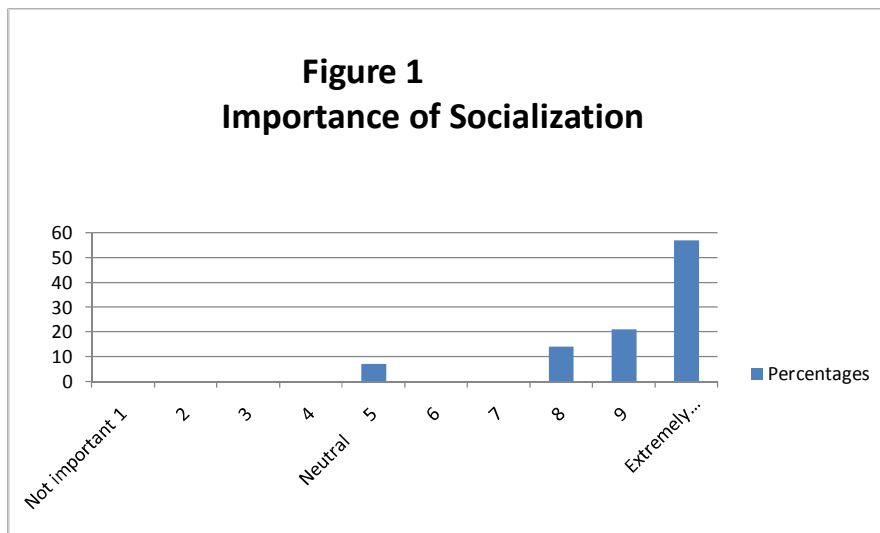
<b>Table 3</b>	
<b>How do you “feel” if your volunteer work is cancelled?</b>	
36%	Disappointment
29%	Loneliness
21%	Relief
14%	Sadness
<b>Other Responses</b>	
“Pretty good”	
“Has not happened yet”	
“Loss of time to occupy time”	
“Okay if can’t be controlled”	
“No big deal”	
“Doesn’t bother me”	
“No good”	
“Upset”	

<b>Table 4</b>	
<b>What do you like most about volunteering?</b>	
93%	Being with others/social interaction
86%	Helping others
64%	Getting outside
57%	Change of scenery/environment
<b>Other Responses</b>	
"Helping in the kitchen"	
"Nice relationships with cancer patients, I am happy to see them still alive each time"	
"Place to go and be occupied"	

<b>Table 5</b>	
<b>Have you made new friends as a result of volunteering?</b>	
86%	Yes
14%	No
7%	"Lots"

<b>Table 6</b>	
<b>Health is not just the absence of disease. Health is holistic including spiritual, emotional and physical health. Do you think that volunteering makes you a healthier person?</b>	
79%	Yes
0%	No
14%	"I don't know"
<b>Other Response</b>	
"Interacting with peers keeps you alert and involved"	

<b>Table 7</b>	
<b>Research has shown that people feel they are contributing to the community through volunteer work. How do you feel about YOURSELF after volunteering?</b>	
93%	Sense of accomplishment
79%	Sense of pride
71%	Useful
71%	Part of a team/sense of belonging
64%	Sense of purpose
57%	Eager for next volunteer opportunity
14%	Lonely
7%	Frustrated
<b>Other Responses</b>	
"Doing something good"	
"Feel bad leaving"	
"good" stated by 21%	





<b>Table 8</b>	
<b>Do you feel that volunteering has contributed to your life satisfaction?</b>	
93%	Yes
7%	No answer provided

## Quotes

Many respondents shared stories about their volunteer experiences while completing the survey. We provided respondents an opportunity to share anything about their volunteer experiences as one of the questions in the survey. Some of the responses written or recorded include:

*“I’m enjoying my life”*

*“Cooking class, every Tuesday, playing bingo and other games.*

*Whatever there is I join in”*

*“Get along with everyone in program, no problem”*

*“We’re okay”*

*“Careful how you talk to people and what you say; could be mayor or dignitary you do not know who you meet.”*

*“Started young before marriage; parents volunteer; got husband and kids to volunteer, it’s a family thing, 12 year old grandchild volunteers, different types, you chose something you like, choice”*

*“Helping others and the company of others”*

*“Most enjoyable when there is variety”*

*“Wonderful place, great people”*

*“I like helping out”*

*“It enhanced my skills”*

*“Introduced me to many people who remained friends”*

## Appendix A

### Senior Squad: Benefits of Volunteering Survey

1. Are you 55 years of age or older?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
2. How long have you been a volunteer? \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. How do you "feel" when you do volunteer work?
  - a. Happy
  - b. Proud
  - c. Useful
  - d. Helpful
  - e. Needed
  - f. I have a sense of purpose
  - g. Frustrated
  - h. Obligated
  - i. Not welcomed
  - j. Part of a team
  
4. How do you "feel" if your volunteer work is cancelled?
  - a. Sadness
  - b. Disappointment
  - c. Relief
  - d. Loneliness
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. What do you like most about volunteering?
  - a. Being with others/social interaction
  - b. Helping others
  - c. Getting outside
  - d. Change of scenery/environment
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. Have you made new friends as a result of volunteering?
  - a. Yes
  - b. no
  
7. Health is not just the absence of disease. Health is holistic including spiritual, emotional and physical health. Do you think that volunteering makes you a healthier person?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Example \_\_\_\_\_

8. Research has shown that people feel they are contributing to the community through volunteer work. How do you feel about YOURSELF after volunteering?
- a. Sense of pride
  - b. Useful
  - c. Sense of accomplishment
  - d. Sense of purpose
  - e. Frustrated
  - f. Lonely
  - g. Part of a team/sense of belonging
  - h. Eager for next volunteer opportunity
  - i. Other \_\_\_\_\_

9. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being not important and 10 being extremely important, how important to you is the socialization part of volunteering?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Not Important

Neutral

Extremely Important

10. How satisfied are you with your life on a scale of 1-10, 1 being not at all satisfied and 10 being extremely satisfied

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Not Satisfied

Neutral

Extremely Satisfied

- a. Do you feel that volunteering has contributed to your life satisfaction?

11. Is there anything else would you like to share about your volunteer experience?

Completed by: Self\_\_\_\_\_ Student Nurse\_\_\_\_\_