Wellness

The Survey says… NBSRT "Volunteering"

During 2022-2023, Ann Kennedy and myself, with the help of the provincial wellness representatives, administered a survey focused on Volunteering. The goal was to find out more about our membership's level of engagement and what kinds of volunteering opportunities exist. Along with this, we asked for the benefits our members received by the giving of their time and expertise.

The survey responses were overwhelming and continue to arrive, with over 160 respondents to date. Knowing that this is only a 6% response rate of our total membership, the wellness team does feel that the data is valuable and can provide insightful information for NBSRT. The survey is considered a fluid operation with all additional completed surveys to be added to the results as they are received. Special thanks to all those who took the time to complete the one pager and return to our wellness team. The survey form is provided so that those who wish to complete and return.

The survey relates a key finding, that when making the effort to assist others, the data reveals to us that the act of volunteering plays a significant role in the helping of ourselves. Therefore, impacting our Wellness. *Health Fitness Revolution* indicates that 'volunteering brings the community together to help the less fortunate and/or improves the quality of life for everyone.' Alongside the general benefits, HF states that medical health experts have also discovered that it imparts many health benefits to the volunteer.

Our NBSRT volunteer survey had 73% females and 27% males share their involvement in various volunteer activities as they continue their retirement journey. An interesting statistic, 62% of our reporting volunteer members are 70 plus in age. Overall, 63% of our NBSRT survey respondents stated that they are actively engaged in some aspect of volunteering as 20% not engaged (17% did not provide information, either yes or no). The Wellness team were very pleased that we received responses from all branches. Finally, dealing with data, the survey also asked, just for interest, if our members visited the NBSRT website. An overwhelming 72% have, with 9% not, leaving 19% not sharing a response on the question. This information does

not impact our question regarding volunteering but does tell us that our NBSRT website is being visited and hopefully, serving as a useful resource to our members.

So, what kind of volunteering are our members engaged? Church was a front runner in terms of volunteering time for our members with 32% of our respondents indicating that this was the area where they spent their volunteer energy and time. Another interesting piece was that 13% stated that they are involved in some type of leadership role in the various volunteering opportunities. The following is a list of the awesome volunteer activities that our members participate to provide support to others and their communities:

Church related activities	Recreation Centres	Lions / Legion / Knights of Columbus / Kiwanis / Rotary
NBSRT Committees	Public Library	Adult Literacy Programs
FECN (Family & Early Education)	Community Newspaper	Irish Canada Cultural Association
Big Girls/Boys	Group Homes	Income Tax Support
Special Olympics	Crime Stoppers	Hospice House/Store
Community Sports programs Leadership / Coaching / Officiating	Assisting Seniors / Driving / Visits / Deliveries	Bowling / Golf / Curling / Hockey / Bridge / Garden / Quilting / Cards / Sewing
Coop Board / Cemetery / Library / 'Steppingstone' Seniors / Community Kitchen	Thrift Store worker	Terry Fox & Special Events SPCA / Animal shelters
Nursing Home / DECH / hospitals	High School Brunch & Breakfast programs	World Pond Hockey
City / Village / Town Councils	Meals on Wheels	Reading Buddies
Multicultural Society	Adopt a Street	Heart & Stroke / Run for Cure
Fish Friends Program	Les dames d'Acadie	Mentally challenged youth
Vaccine clinics	Food Drives	Choral groups

The above list illustrates the vast tool kit of expertise that our members possess and are willing to share with their respective communities. By giving of their time and talents, our members also state that they receive many benefits through their efforts. This tells us that there are health benefits to be had from being a volunteer. So, what are they? Organizations that have studied this area agree that there are in fact health benefits of volunteering. Here are two mental and emotional benefits that the wellness team found that you may be interested in:

1. Connects you with other people – being a volunteer brings you together with like-minded individuals. Ability to share your personal likes and passion for an activity or cause.
2. Contribution to a Cause – fantastic way to become connected to something larger than yourself.

3. Gets you out of the house and into the community – As well as strengthening your bond with your community, volunteering provides an opportunity to strengthen your network with whose you meet, work and help.
4. Reduces Depression and Stress – studies tell us that lower rates of depression, personal stress, and increased general well being can be achieved.
5. Improves self-confidence – any time you are engaged in speaking, sharing, advocating, or canvassing, you are working on enhancing your personal skill set and knowledge base.
6. Boosts Happiness – what makes you happy does depend on the individual and the activity. Knowing that you are contributing to a cause and community can bring you, joy.
7. Knowledge boost and the learning of new skills – no matter the volunteer activity, this work can push you to learn new things and improve critical thinking.

The chart below shows a number of benefits that the researchers are sharing, are also the benefits that our NBSRT members have experienced.

Increased personal wellness, happiness, warm fuzzy feelings	Overall good feelings – 18% reported this benefit	Community Bonding, Meeting people, Social – 18% reported this benefit
Sharing similar interests	Serving Others, Helping the community – 21% reported	Sense of purpose, being useful – 6% reported
Keeps mind and body active	Learning of new skills	Personal importance
Change of routine	Satisfaction/Fulfilment	Increase growth of the activity or cause
Keeping busy, engaged, involved	Sharing expertise with others	Giving back to our society
Networking	Creating new friendships	Working with Youth/Seniors

Our members certainly agree with what the experts/researchers are stating. The adage, "you receive as much or more than you give", rings true. As with anything, there are also barriers that our members face. Our members shared via the survey that the constraints of time, resources, current life situations (caring for family members, personal health issues), continuing to be engaged with work, and the lack of transportation impacted their ability to volunteer.

That being said, our NBSRT membership who have given much of themselves over the years to their respective schools and school communities, continue to be engaged in numerous volunteer opportunities that make our communities stronger. So, why do it? Hopefully, by seeing the many benefits received, our members overwhelmingly illustrate that volunteering is an integral part of our individual character and make-up. Each, finding their own personal motivation to become more engaged with our respective communities and causes. Well done! The NBSRT wellness team are so proud of the time and effort that our membership gives.

This is just part of what ‘wellness’ is…

- knowing what your real needs are and how to get them met, acting assertively,
- being engaged in meaningful projects that reflect your most important inner values.
- All this allowing you to create the life you really want, rather than just reacting and enjoying a basic sense of wellbeing.

Thank you for all that you do!

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