



**INTERNATIONAL
GRANDPARENTS DAY
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 9TH**

Volunteer Grandparent Adel running in a race with her matched grandchildren Catherine and Jesse and family participant, Xaria at the annual Volunteer Grandparents Appreciation Picnic



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www.volunteerburnaby.ca

Volunteer Grandparents

by Kelina Kwan

On a sunny summer day in August, all sorts of silly hats are spotted in Confederation Park in Burnaby. There are children with painted faces and balloon animals. But this is no ordinary fair. It is Volunteer Grandparents' Annual Volunteer Appreciation Picnic. This year's theme was "Silly hats!" Over 100 people showed up to enjoy a fun-filled time with families, volunteers, community supporters, and volunteer grandparents.

Volunteer Grandparents is a unique concept and opportunity offered by the organization for seniors to volunteer. I recently spoke with Veronica Grossi, program manager of Volunteer Grandparents. "We are currently running three programs," Grossi said. The Family Match Program matches children who do not have accessible grandparents with loving senior volunteers as "grandparents" to the children. Volunteer grandparents provide families with support by sharing their skills, knowledge, and experience with the children. Volunteers have the opportunity to be an important member of a family, while offering families the support, love and wisdom of caring seniors.

Volunteer Grandparents also run a School Grandparent Program that matches volunteers with schools to participate in a

variety of elementary school classroom activities such as reading, listening, arts, and crafts. The individualized time that School Match volunteers offer each child is instrumental in their learning.

Thanks to a grant from the New Horizon for Seniors Initiative, their Ambassador Program is also now underway. The program engages volunteers to promote Volunteer Grandparents' programs at community events throughout the summer. "There are so many opportunities from partners and the community" Grossi explained, "But I can't act on all of them because of limited time and resources. To have volunteer ambassadors to get out there to promote our programs and connect with the community, it makes a huge difference."

When asked why seniors volunteer for their programs, Grossi said they all have their own reasons, but all of the volunteers love children. "Some seniors volunteer to stay active, some want to engage in the community and to give back. They want to engage with youth and learn from youth. But most of all, they realize how important it is to have a stable person in a child's life. They also want to connect to parents and broaden the circle they know." Volunteer grandparents are incorporated into the family, some volunteers don't have

family that live close by and volunteering not only enriches a child's life, but also provides a close family relationship to the senior. Although volunteers are initially asked to commit to 2 to 4 hours a week for one year, most stay on and develop a long-term, fulfilling and loving relationship both with the child and the family.

Recently, I had the privilege to talk to a volunteer grandparent couple, Thelma and Manny Cruz. I asked why they choose to volunteer with Volunteer Grandparents. Thelma and Manny volunteer for many organizations, but what they feel is unique about Volunteer Grandparents is that it provides "a continuing nurturing of relationships with beautiful people". Volunteering as grandparents allows them to experience the joy of grand parenting, to bridge generations, to enrich the life of their "grandchildren" as well as their own, and most importantly, "it makes us younger!"

To sum up how fulfilling the experience is for everyone involved, Thelma read me a project her grandchild Allen, did on the Family Match Program. Allen is eight years old and he wrote about his two volunteer grandparents:

*They take care of me.
It's fun to play together.
They come over to lunch.
They teach you how to read.
We give each other presents.
I love you - "lolo" and "lola" (grandpa and grandma in Filipina)*

Grossi is extremely grateful to all her wonderful volunteers who are always willing to jump in and help. Each year, they host a Volunteer Appreciation Picnic to say

thank-you. Thanks to the help of summer students, the picnic has always been a fun, well-attended event. Every year, matched volunteer grandparents can submit a request for a Florio Bursary on behalf of their matched grandchild. This year, Mary and Paul Florio awarded a \$1850 bursary, assisting eight children to pursue different activities in their communities. The Family Match Program is very popular and currently has a list of 25 families waiting to be matched with a volunteer grandparent. The School Grandparent Program and the Ambassador Program also need volunteers and of course, community support and funding is always needed.

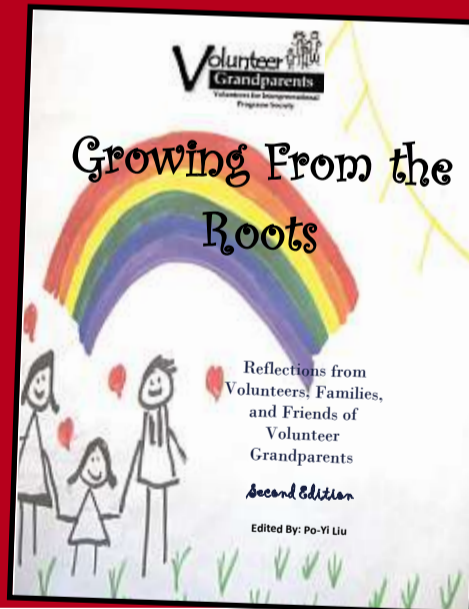
Established in 1973, Volunteer Grandparents is celebrating its 40th Anniversary next year, and what would be more

meaningful than supporting Volunteer Grandparents by volunteering when they reach this milestone.

If you are over the age of 50, believe in the importance of grandparent connections and want to meet new people and share your skills, then volunteer for Volunteer Grandparents. To learn more about how to become a volunteer, and the screening and training process, please call Veronica Grossi at Volunteer Grandparents at 604-736-8271 or visit www.volunteergrandparents.ca.

For more information on how to get involved in your community, please contact Volunteer Burnaby through their website at www.volunteerburnaby.ca or call 604.294.5533.

To read more about the important connections that have been created through this wonderful organization you can purchase a copy of their legacy book titled, 'Growing from the Roots.' It is a collection of stories and reflections from the people who have helped to strengthen the Volunteer Grandparents organization: staff, family, volunteers and supporters. The stories and photos found in the book demonstrate the significance and importance of intergenerational relations, as well as Volunteer Grandparents' programs in the lives of families and within our community.



Volunteer
...you'll be glad you did



VOLUNTEER BURNABY

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