

Written Submission to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Intergenerational Volunteerism

Introduction

Over 12 million Canadians aged 15 and over volunteered for charities, nonprofits, and community organisations in 2018, with striking differences in volunteering participation and types of activities across generations (Hahmann et al., 2022). Volunteering rates tend to decrease from Generation Z (52% volunteering rate) to Baby Boomers (39%) (Hahmann et al., 2022). Youth were also more likely to organise, supervise, or coordinate activities and events compared to older generations, who provided direct person-to-person support for health-related or personal care activities (Hahmann et al., 2021). Despite these generational differences, volunteering remains beneficial for those who are helped—even the volunteers themselves—and for the greater community. For example, volunteering strengthens social networks and support, buffers stress, and is linked to improved mental and physical health (Burr et al., 2021; Knight et al., 2014). Taken together, the high volunteering participation rates and health benefits represent an opportunity to promote intergenerational volunteerism, and to synergise benefits for individuals and their communities.

We are a group of youth volunteers with an average 8 years of experience within nonprofits, charities, and community groups. We bring diverse experiences working with organisations such as Kids Help Phone's (KHP)'s National Youth Council (NYC) and Mood Disorders Society of Canada's (MDSC) National Youth Advisory Council (NYAC). Monica Taing is a Medical Student at McGill University and a former member of KHP's NYC and MDSC's NYAC. Laetitia Satam is the current Co-Chair of KHP's NYC, serves as KHP's Board of Directors member, and is currently Co-Chair of MDSC's NYAC. Raissa Amany and Ray Maji are also students and are current KHP's NYC members. Jill Stringer is a PhD Candidate at the University of Guelph and former Co-Chair of MDSC's NYAC. Together, we are driven to improve health within our communities.

In this brief, we provide 5 recommendations which could promote intergenerational volunteerism. Our recommendations centre on increasing accessibility to intergenerational volunteering opportunities, promoting meaningful activities, and expanding programmes within existing nonprofits and charities to include collaborations between youth and older adults.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Reframe existing volunteering programmes to include mutualistic outcomes for youth and older adults

Underlying motivations for volunteering differ by age groups, contributing to intergenerational volunteering gaps. One of the top reasons for volunteering among Generation Zs was the desire to improve job prospects, as identified by 38% of the youngest volunteers (Hahmann et al.,

2021). Volunteering for career-oriented motivations were less common among older adults with labour force experience. Instead, older adults cited political/social causes or religious/spiritual beliefs as top reasons for volunteering (Hahmann et al., 2021). As such, prioritising mutualistic outcomes for youth and older adults in existing volunteering programmes can bring people from different generations together. A fruitful example comes from Laetitia's experiences volunteering with the YMCA *Media Mentors* Programme as a high school senior in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. This programme allowed highschool students to build senior technology literacy, and in turn, seniors shared stories and advice to the youth for their future careers. Notably, the former Mayor of St. John's participated; he provided advice for young students, all while learning how to set up his new iPad. This proved to be a very memorable experience for all participants even years after its inception. Results therefore demonstrate that programmes which target common, underlying motivations for volunteering may be a compelling way to increase intergenerational volunteer engagement.

Recommendation 2: Increase awareness and accessibility of intergenerational volunteering opportunities

Many people are unaware of the scope of volunteering opportunities. To tackle this problem, we recommend optimising knowledge dissemination approaches according to different age groups. As secondary school is mandatory across Canada, working with schools represents an effective way to disseminate opportunities. Ray, a high school student, attributes his volunteering experiences with local shelters and national organisations to the support of his school's academic guidance counsellor. Academic counsellors and staff who actively support students to engage in their community may therefore help increase access to intergenerational volunteering opportunities.

We can also extend our recommendation to include university partnerships with community organisations. At McGill University's Faculty of Medicine, all second-year medical students partake in a Community Health Alliance Project (CHAP). The CHAP creates awareness of nonprofits and charities that serve marginalised populations facing multiple barriers in health and well-being, and encourages young people to volunteer with one of these organisations. In 2023, over 200 students volunteered with Montreal-based organisations ranging from long-term care homes to community centres.

Recommendation 3: Encourage nonprofits and NGOs to include both youth and older individuals in existing programmes

We also suggest expanding the scope of programmes within existing non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to serve a wider audience. Programmes that primarily involve youth could also include older individuals, and vice versa. For example, the Mood Disorders Society of Canada (MDSC)—a NGO that has an overall objective of improving quality of life for people with mood disorders—has a well-established National Youth Advisory Council (NYAC). Since the NYAC, several new programmes have expanded beyond youth-to-youth interactions to include youth-older adult connections. For example, through the *Chatting to Wellness* and *Supporting Veterans Wellness* programme, youth provided compassionate companionship calls for older adults and veterans to support mental health and combat social isolation. Volunteers reported

feeling more connected to older adults of their communities, and expressed feelings of pride in knowing they made someone's day better. Older adults reported decreased feelings of isolation, improved moods, and greatly enjoyed the conversations. These examples illustrate the feasibility and success of integrating older adults within existing youth-focused programmes.

Recommendation 4: Prioritise intergenerationality in existing funding schemes

Canada has existing funding schemes from the Government of Canada aimed to improve youth engagement across a range of domains—from jobs or apprenticeship training to arts, agriculture, and sports—representing opportunities where employers can prioritise older adults and youth working together. For example, the Canada Summer Jobs wage subsidy invites employers from not-for-profit organisations, the public sector, and select private sector organisations to create quality summer work experiences for young people aged 15 to 30. Data showed that 115 003 confirmed jobs were created in 2022 alone, representing a huge opportunity to explicitly prioritise the collaboration between youth and older adults (Government of Canada, 2022). Adding intergenerationality to the existing national and provincial priorities listed within the application guide would be our recommended next step.

Furthermore, funding schemes can be expanded to not only support youth employment, but to also include youth volunteering efforts. For example, Canada Service Corps (CSC) is a programme that promotes civic engagement among youth between age 15 to 30 through funding youth-led, small-scale community service projects and providing volunteer service placements with CSC-funded organisations across Canada. Currently available micro-grant opportunities tackle prevalent issues, although no organisation currently addresses intergenerational volunteerism. Therefore, youth volunteering efforts can also be strengthened by making intergenerationality an explicit priority.

Recommendation 5: Promote meaningful youth engagement

While the importance of youth engagement has increasingly been recognised in intergenerational volunteering efforts, power imbalances often persist between youth and older adults, which can impede equitable partnerships. We recommend that the government incentivise intergenerational volunteering programs—through funding training programmes and youth committees—to engage youth as equal partners in the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of projects. When youth are empowered to take leadership, we see transformative impact. From our own experiences, Laetitia started volunteering with Kids Help Phone (KHP), the largest provider of free mental health services in Canada, when she was 12 years old. She was provided diverse volunteering opportunities (*e.g.*, advising on new projects, leading youth engagement subcommittees), and now sits on KHP's Board of Directors. Her work impacts over millions of young people who have accessed KHP services. She credits being able to volunteer with Kids Help Phone at such a young age to her vast passion for mental health, and her hope to work in the field in the future. Similarly, Monica, a former KHP National Youth Council member, is currently a medical student whose passion for child health can be directly traced back to her early experiences with KHP. The organisation provided her with the opportunity to lead mental health resource development projects, which have since been accessed over 40 000 times. Ultimately, we recommend the mainstreaming and

institutionalisation of meaningful youth engagement in all intergenerational volunteer opportunities, such as by encouraging autonomy and complementing opportunities with capacity building efforts. We recommend actively engaging youth to develop the requisite skills and networks to meaningfully contribute to their communities.

Conclusion

We strongly believe that implementing our recommendations with a collaborative approach between individuals within an organisation, schools and universities, and government programmes will unite youth and older individuals through meaningful volunteering experiences.

Signed,

Laetitia Satam, Kids Help Phone Board of Directors Member, Kids Help Phone's National Youth Council Co-Chair, Mood Disorders Society of Canada's National Youth Advisory Council Co-Chair

Jill Stringer, Former Mood Disorders Society of Canada's National Youth Advisory Council Co-Chair

Ray Manji, Kids Help Phone's National Youth Council Member

Raissa Amany, Kids Help Phone's National Youth Council Member

Monica Taing, Former Kids Help Phone's National Youth Council and Mood Disorders Society of Canada's National Youth Advisory Council Member

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