

Mark Your Calendar:

Unwrapped Charity Event at
Coquitlam Centre- November
26, 2013

Tickets for this event can be
purchased for \$10 with 100%
of the proceeds coming to
Volunteer Grandparents.
This event is for those 19
years of age or older. Please
call us for more details:

604-736-8271

Program Update:

In September, we have placed 9 school grandparents in the elementary schools to help with the one to one reading programs. Additionally, because of recent positive exposure in the local Burnaby Now newspaper, we have been busy screening new volunteers who have expressed an interest in this program. I would like to thank Pat for taking the time to participate in an interview to help promote this program. To read the full article please click [here](#). Our article is located on page A09.



Four Decades of Volunteer Grandparents: A Reflection with Nancy Kirk

By Paige LaBar, Volunteer Grandparents Summer Student 2013

One of our founding members, Nancy Kirk takes a seat in her kitchen to discuss Volunteer Grandparents - not the bustling and diverse organization it is today - but its roots from forty years ago. The compassion and warmth reflected within this kitchen comes out in the woman sitting across from me. However, before delving into the stories and anecdotes from Nancy Kirk, let us reflect on the beginning and what we do know.

The story of Volunteer Grandparents' inception begins at the Vancouver Crisis Centre, back in 1973. This was when a caring and determined social worker, Marjorie Anderson, proclaimed 'something needed to be done' because she received back to back calls from a senior who was feeling isolated and a new mother struggling with parenthood. Marjorie posed the question "Why doesn't someone arrange for these people to meet each other?" and to that, Nancy Kirk asked Marjorie, "Why don't you?" And the rest is history, or so we thought. This afternoon however, Nancy illustrated the challenges and successes alike that occurred from an organization starting-up, to one now celebrating its 40th Anniversary.

Nancy served on the Board of Directors right from the inception of Volunteer Grandparents. This journey on the Board saw many ups and downs. Nancy served for about eight to nine years before taking a short hiatus, subsequently she then came and went in periods of about four to five years. Over the last ten years her involvement has lessened, however her passion for this organization has not faded. Nancy has always maintained goals for this organization: increasing funding for the organization, strengthening the School Program, and spreading the breadth of Volunteer Grandparents outside of the Lower Mainland.

During this point in our discussion, Nancy gave Bea, a retired Volunteer Grandparent who was with the organization since 1979, a call to share her stories. Between the two ladies, both discuss and reiterate their goals for the organization. Nancy and Bea explain that finding funding for Volunteer Grandparents is a crucial part to keep it going and being able to provide the resources and opportunities that program participants require. Both ladies recounted stories of bingo nights and casino nights as ways the organization found funds as the organization would need to send representatives to ensure the gaming funding commitment was fulfilled. Nancy stated that the push to find funds from various sponsors must stay strong.

Another goal of Bea and Nancy was to strengthen the School Program and have it grow. As Bea spent the better part of ten years in schools volunteering in the program, she has a strong understanding of the benefits this program has on children. Bea and Nancy both mention the positive effects that come from Volunteer Grandparents spending just a couple hours a week with children helping them with reading, homework, crafts, or simply listening. This is still a significant program

within Volunteer Grandparents, and as both of these ladies suggested, one that needs to grow to support the many children who are not receiving the love and patience of a senior in their life.

The final goal to spread the reach of Volunteer Grandparents beyond the Lower Mainland is one that Nancy spent a lot of time dedicated to. In the 1990's, over several years, Nancy invested time trying to start Chapters of Volunteer Grandparents in other regions throughout British Columbia. She participated in the implementation of Volunteer Grandparents offices in Prince George, Smithers, and Quesnel. Although Prince

George and Smithers did not last long, Quesnel maintained program delivery for six years! To this day, the organization is still getting messages from people around various parts of Canada, the United States and the world in regards to looking for a program such as Volunteer Grandparents in their region! These goals were not met without challenges but we have grown with each challenge that we have overcome.



Nancy's collection of Volunteer Grandparents pins that were distributed over the years.

Over the years, Volunteer Grandparents frequently faced a large turnover in staff and board members. It seemed every time Volunteer Grandparents was on its way up, a new person would come in with a different direction for the organization. It was in the first ten years of the organization that differing opinions between a new Executive Director and Nancy prompted her to cut her involvement with the organization. However, Nancy did not stay away for long. During her time she was with Volunteer Grandparents, she explained that the overturn of new members brought many new skills, experiences and ideas for this organization. Although this brought many great opportunities, this also led to inconsistency and conflict. Nancy explained they were in some of their darkest days as an organization when Dave Baspaly (current Executive Director) took over and brought Volunteer Grandparents through the unrest. By offering free rent and the resources necessary, and the freedom to carry out their mission, Volunteer Grandparents was on the rise to build itself up again. This only got better when Veronica Grossi, current Program Coordinator, took her role within Volunteer Grandparents. Nancy described how Veronica has worked to add diversity and a sense of belonging to this organization. Finally, Volunteer Grandparents was on the rise again.

As Nancy reflects on the past forty years of this organization, I can see her pride shine through. Although there were periods throughout the past four decades where Nancy's involvement with Volunteer Grandparents wavered, it is obvious there was never a moment where her pride, optimism and hope for this organization were lacking.

I left Nancy's house knowing that regardless of the limitations and challenges this small non-profit may face, it has lasted forty years because it was built on the hope and belief that by creating these intergenerational relationships, lives can be enriched.



40th Anniversary pin issued to volunteers, families, and supporters in 2013

So, thank you Nancy and thank you Bea for taking the time to speak with me and share your insights on this organization. Thank you for being part of an organization that has and will continue to enrich lives throughout generations by spreading love and support. Finally, happy 40th Anniversary Volunteer Grandparents! Our future of the organization will be strengthened because of our diverse past history!

Bridging and enriching generations since 1973