

# Bridging Generations Newsletter

50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION



## PROGRAM UPDATE

We have now fully opened our Family Match Program and are busy accepting new program volunteers and families. We welcome all of our new members! Additionally, our Letters To Seniors Program remains incredibly busy. We thank all of our volunteers who have made this program such a success.

## IN THIS ISSUE:

**2023 SUMMER EVENT:  
THE BC LIONS GAME**

**50TH ANNIVERSARY  
CELEBRATION AT THE  
AGM 2023**

**PARTICIPANT  
SPOTLIGHT**

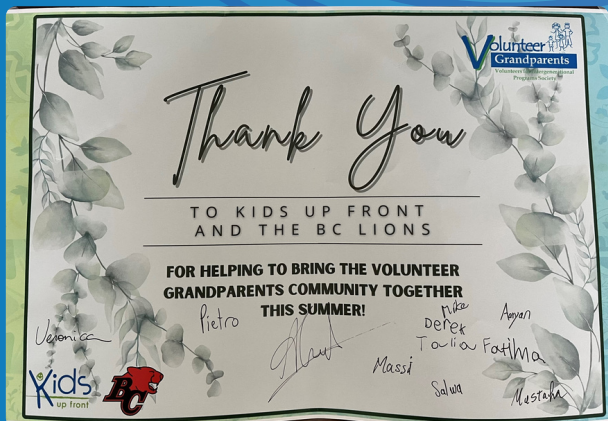
**OUR 2023 SUMMER  
GUIDE**

**THE LEGACY OF VG  
WITH VERONICA  
GROSSI**

**THE FAMILY MATCH  
PROGRAM**

# 2023 AGM

On May 25th, 2023, Volunteer Grandparents held its Annual General Meeting at the Shadbolt Centre. In addition to reviewing the year gone by, this year's AGM was an opportunity to celebrate a very special milestone - Volunteer Grandparent's 50th Anniversary. The board, members of the Volunteer Grandparents staff, and our beloved community came together to honor the organization's legacy, watch a special video tribute, and cut a cake!



~ SOME OF THE ATTENDEES  
SIGNED A THANK YOU CARD  
FOR KIDS UP FRONT AND THE  
BC LIONS ~

# SUMMER EVENT

On Saturday, July 22nd, Volunteer Grandparents held its 2023 Summer Event at the BC Lions Game. We thank Kids Up Front Vancouver and the BC Lions for providing tickets to our members and giving our community the opportunity to come together and cheer on the Lions to a 19-9 victory over the Roughriders.

# PARTICIPANT SPOTLIGHT



During the pandemic, we launched a new program called Letters to Seniors which enabled us to create intergenerational connections within the community in a safe and engaging manner. Today, this program has continued to remain engaging for all participants. Despite the circumstances in which it came to life, the Volunteer Grandparents' Letters to Seniors program is a unique and exceptionally accessible opportunity to build bridges between generations. With the help of some warm salutations and signatures, distinctively hand-written sentences, and of course, the satisfying sharing of stories, program participants are given the space to establish enduring relationships with one another.

We recently connected with Katherine, a senior participant in our Letters to Seniors program to learn more about her program participation. In the discussion, she shared her program experience with us, discussing everything from her thoughts on intergenerational relationships to the interesting dynamic she shares with her pen pals.

Katherine was introduced to the Letters to Seniors program after the Red Cross did a friendly call out and she told them of her passion for letter writing. Today, she is matched to three pen pals and is well settled in the program. Katherine said that one of her pen pals is bubbly and enthusiastic, telling us just how contagious this positive energy can be. She explained that receiving a letter from this pen pal prompts her to feel quite uplifted! Katherine also discussed an older youth pen pal, whose busy school schedule has never stopped her from taking the time to share some stories. Once, this pen pal even sent her a box of chocolates and some perfume, a memory that lives particularly close to Katherine's heart.


Although Katherine found her way to the program because of her passion for letter writing, she found that the exchange of letters offered so much more than a chance to partake in a hobby. Katherine explained that the holidays can be a lonely time, but with all the sending and receiving of letters, she felt encouraged and came to realize the good and the feeling of connection that stems from a program like this. Katherine truly believes that when you volunteer, you get back what you give. For instance, she helps out at a care home and is constantly thanked for her hard work. In those moments, she knows that she is getting back what she gives because the letters she receives from volunteers like herself are such a light for her. Reflecting on her experience as a whole, Katherine said the most important thing this program has taught her is that people really do care for other people. She thinks it is great to see people opening up to one another.

When asked what intergenerational relationships mean to her, Katherine explained that the age difference between herself and her pen pals allows her to feel connected to and gain knowledge of other generations. This feeling encapsulates the mutually beneficial nature of intergenerational relationships, wherein the bonds between older adults and younger individuals feed one another, allowing each person to flourish and grow. Katherine's story is one of hope and positivity. Her experience with the Letters to Seniors program inspires us at Volunteer Grandparents to continue facilitating the bridging and enriching of generations through letter writing.



# VOLUNTEER GRANDPARENTS'

# Summer Guide



Volunteer Grandparents has put together a guide of the best free and fun Burnaby events for grandparents to share with their grandchildren this summer! From community fairs to live performances to farmers' markets, this guide has something for everyone! For the full list, check out our social media profiles, and for more information about these events, visit [burnaby.bc/recreation-and-arts/events](https://burnaby.bc/recreation-and-arts/events).

## Summer Stages

A free live performance series every Tuesday - Sunday (12 PM and 2 PM) from now till August 25th



## Summer Season

AT THE BURNABY VILLAGE MUSEUM

Explore historical exhibits and live demonstrations all summer long! Weekly on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday until Mon, Sep 4 2023



## Willingdon

COMMUNITY FAIR AND MOVIE NIGHT

A community fair with booths, family-friendly activities and food trucks on August 30th from 5-10 PM



## Summer Cinema

Bring a blanket, chair, some movie snacks and enjoy a film at Civic Square on Friday evenings from August 4th to September 1st!



## Sounds Like Summer

Enjoy pop-up performances throughout the city from local musicians, every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday afternoon until September 1st



## Farmers' Market

Find locally grown conventional and organic produce at this market operated by Artisan Markets every Saturday from May to October!



# THE LEGACY

OF VOLUNTEER GRANDPARENTS WITH:

# VERONICA GROSSI

\*GOES FROM PAGE 5 - THE MIDDLE OF PAGE 11



2023 is a very special year for Volunteer Grandparents. This year, the non-profit organization founded by Marjorie Anderson celebrates its fiftieth anniversary. That is five decades of bridging and enriching generations, promoting the importance of intergenerational connections, and shaping a community that is more age-friendly. Volunteer Grandparents' fiftieth anniversary is a result of the hard work, passion, and love of many people over the years, from our founder to our program participants to our staff. Whether they know it or not, each person's golden touch has led us to this golden anniversary in 2023.

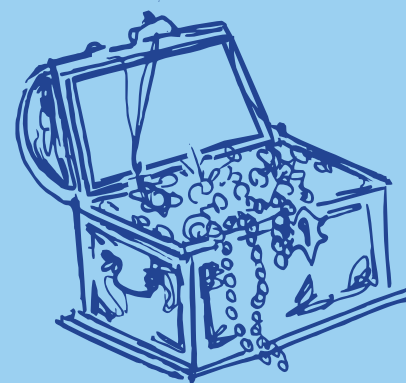
Today, the beating heart of Volunteer Grandparents is program manager Veronica Grossi. Veronica has been with the organization for seventeen years now, and in honor of Volunteer Grandparents' fiftieth anniversary, we spoke to her about her journey with the organization, the work she does, and the legacy of Volunteer Grandparents.

## The Origin Story...

It all began in 2006 when Veronica saw a job posting for Volunteer Grandparents on Charity Village. Having worked in a before and after school program and taught in Thailand for four years, the posting was a perfect blend of her love of seniors and her experience with youth and families. Veronica was hired by Dave Baspaly, Volunteer Grandparent's Executive Director, who has worked hard to bring stability to the organization. All in all, the stars really did align to lead Veronica to Volunteer

Grandparents, but that's not to say that it was all smooth sailing. When Veronica started at Volunteer Grandparents, there had been no one in her position for an extended period of time. As a result, there was a lot of self-learning involved. She had to master the ins and outs of her role and figure out how to fulfill her duties through lots of research and practice. Veronica spent a lot of time learning about the organization's history and policies, as well as how to screen volunteers properly. While dealing with these growing pains, Veronica's hope was to one day make a small difference in the lives of program participants. Needless to say, she has done much more than make a small difference. Over a decade and a half into her position and Veronica has skillfully led Volunteer Grandparents into a new era while making sure to keep its core safely intact. In doing so, she has made a positive, and large, impact on the lives of so many in the community.

# UNLOCKING THE TREASURE CHEST



After seventeen years as program manager of Volunteer Grandparents, Veronica holds the keys to a treasure trove of moments and memories that are very special to her. In our conversation, we unlocked that treasure chest and had a quick look at some of the jewels.



## Meeting Marjorie

To begin with, Veronica has been lucky enough to interact with Marjorie, the organization's founder. A couple of years into her position, one of the Volunteer Grandparents summer students was doing some research about Marjorie and tracked her down on the island. Veronica took a road trip to visit her and found that Marjorie had no idea that Volunteer Grandparents still existed. She was surprised to hear that the work she started all those years ago was continuing to make a positive difference. Around the same time she was planning to visit Marjorie, Veronica received an email from a man living in Hawaii. He was wondering if the organization had any information about the volunteer grandparent he was matched with when he was a child, telling Veronica that his volunteer grandparent was a source of stability at a



time when his family life wavered on unsteady ground. He was hoping to show his children some pictures of this volunteer grandparent and wanted to know if Veronica had any. When she brought this up with Marjorie, she knew exactly what Veronica was referring to. She pulled out an album in her living room and showed Veronica a picture of the volunteer grandparent in question, allowing her to take a picture and send it to the man who had emailed her. This moment is so indicative of the personal connection that Marjorie had to Volunteer Grandparents and its program participants, a connection that Veronica maintains to this day. A few years later, Marjorie spoke at the Volunteer Grandparents' fortieth anniversary annual general meeting. These interactions with Marjorie, at both the annual general meeting and in her home on the island, were true, full circle experiences for Veronica, allowing her to personally connect with the organization's founder and feel further rooted in the philosophy and history of Volunteer Grandparents.



Many of Veronica's precious memories from her time at Volunteer Grandparents share a common theme - longevity. When a family match flourishes and endures, it is very inspiring to her. For instance, consider the relationship between Radhika and her Volunteer Grandparent, Maureen. They were matched when Radhika was only three or four years old, but they are still connected today in Radhika's adult years.

Veronica brings up a time she received pictures in the mail from a participant she had never met. They were wedding photos, featuring not only the participant, but their volunteer grandparent supporting them in the background. This picture was a powerful symbol of not only the positive work that Volunteer Grandparents does, but the longevity of that work. These were participants that Veronica had never met or heard of because there are matches that have been going on for so long. This is just one of many stories. Over fifty years, there have been a countless number of relationships that have grown far beyond their initial match, transcending the organization and its programming to become life-long bonds and family. Veronica says that seeing the youth grow up, go to university, get a full time job, and still have their volunteer grandparents supporting them is the most rewarding part of her job. At the same time, she explains that finding appropriate matches for volunteers and families so that they one day achieve that longevity can be challenging. It takes Veronica lots of time to find a great match for participants because matching takes lots of planning and consideration. She has to think about what each party is looking for, from the senior to the family to the child, while keeping factors like proximity, communication style, and personality in mind.

# *The Power of Belief and Positivity*



Veronica's relationship to the Volunteer Grandparents' mission and vision, while always strong and dedicated, has ebbed and flowed with the times. Upon joining the organization, Veronica was more connected to the senior side of things and would approach things from that end of the spectrum. She was passionate about fighting social isolation, keeping seniors connected and socially involved, and enabling seniors to share their wisdom. However, after becoming a parent, her perspective changed. Bearing witness to the relationship between her daughter and her natural grandparents allowed Veronica to recognize the importance of the grandparent-grandchild relationship. She came to understand how meaningful grandparents can be in a child's life and vice versa. Veronica always appreciates it when her daughter's grandparents take her on outings and do activities with her because it is such a relief to know that her child has another person to connect with. The grandparents offer a different perspective on the world and that life experience can help the youth grow and learn about the world, which helps to build their self-confidence. Veronica believes that children can never be showered with too much love, because feeding them with affection and positive energy, and being good role models for them is the best thing for a child. All of these ideas expressed by Veronica say so much about why the organization is successful. By believing so strongly in the mission of Volunteer Grandparents, Veronica gives it the power to flourish. Oftentimes, with a smaller organization like this one, positive belief can be half the battle won and that is a department where Veronica does more than succeed, she thrives.

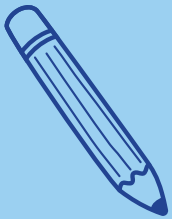
Speaking about what her position entails, Veronica expresses her gratitude for the flexibility of the role and the fact that things are never mundane at Volunteer Grandparents. There are always new challenges and she never does the same thing twice. There is a little bit of marketing, the meeting of program participants, some event planning, and so much more. Over her fifteen years with Volunteer Grandparents, Veronica has learned the importance of open communication. She explains that it is really important for parents and volunteers to feel comfortable addressing issues when they come up, and in situations where they are unable to, she is always ready to step in and act as a liaison between the parties. Veronica believes that open communication is the sturdy foundation of every relationship, and if you are good at communicating, you can work through anything!





# Celebrating Fifty Years!

To Veronica, Volunteer Grandparents' milestone fiftieth anniversary is almost unbelievable. Reflecting on the organization's newfound status as a quinquagenarian makes her think of the growth and change that the non-profit has both witnessed and been subject to. When Volunteer Grandparents first began, it was just the Family Match Program. Then, in the late 1990s, the School Grandparents Program was born, and just recently, in the 2020s, the Letters to Seniors Program was created. Veronica says that the organization has successfully kept up with the times, allowing itself to adapt and change while keeping the original program intact, which is a testament to the importance of the Family Match Program to the community.



## A Light in the Darkness: The Letters to Seniors Program

In its fifty years of service, Volunteer Grandparents had never seen anything like the COVID-19 pandemic. Veronica says that there were so many unknowns at the time, especially because seniors were more susceptible to COVID. As a result, she decided to err on the side of caution and put all programming on hold. However, as the pandemic stretched into the summer, Veronica began to think about how Volunteer Grandparents could continue creating meaningful intergenerational connections in a safe way. When asked how she would sum up the legacy of Volunteer Grandparents in three words, Veronica referred back to the mission, saying 'bridging', 'enriching', and 'generations'. In the same way, at a time when the pandemic had cast its murky shadow over everything and everyone, Veronica turned back to the mission and did her best to continue bridging and enriching generations. That summer, Volunteer Grandparents had Radhika Patel, a Family Match Participant, as their summer student. Together, both Radhika and Veronica came up with two options. One was to invest energy into the School Grandparent Program by getting the school grandparents online and virtually connected to classrooms. The second option was to create a program centered around a pen pal type of relationship. Ultimately, the duo decided to go with the second option because they believed a pen pal program could reach more people and would eliminate any challenges with technology. Radhika did

a lot of the leg work to initiate the Letters to Seniors program, including an environmental scan, connecting with programs that were similar, and developing the guidelines and policies. Soon, the first phase of the program had been initiated and Volunteer Grandparents started to collect kind letters from the community and send them to several care home partners. All of the long term care facilities were on complete lockdown and their residents were very isolated, so the hope was that sending these care packages of cards, letters, and drawings would uplift the seniors and make a positive difference in their day to day lives. Veronica describes how one of the care homes would display the cards for the seniors to look at while eating lunch. Once the first phase was running smoothly, Veronica initiated the second phase, which involved the creation of pen pal relationships between seniors and youth. To Veronica, the Letters to Seniors Program felt like something that was always waiting to happen. She had spent a lot of time wondering how to incorporate the more isolated, frail senior into Volunteer Grandparents' programming in a meaningful way, and the Letters to Seniors Program emerged as the perfect way to do so. Veronica says it is inspiring to see the longevity of the pen pal connections that have been formed by this program. Some of the pen pal relationships that began in 2020 continue to this day! She mentions that although it is not a big time commitment as letters are usually exchanged once a month, it is still significant to see the kind of mentorship that happens through letter writing. By initiating the Letters to Seniors Program, Veronica has expanded the reach of Volunteer Grandparents, making the bridging and enriching of generations more accessible than ever before.

## The Next Fifty Years...



Milestone moments like this are wonderful opportunities to reflect, take stock, and celebrate the spectacular memories that have been made along the way. At the same time, they are also a chance to look towards the future, and hopefully, the next fifty years of Volunteer Grandparents. Veronica hopes that the future brings more stability in the funding stream and more core funding for Volunteer Grandparents. She thinks that the organization would definitely benefit from having at least one full time position, if not a whole team of employees, because it would allow them to build capacity so much faster, thereby enabling the organization to do so much more for the community. Speaking about the nature of funding, Veronica says that funding is always a challenge for non-profits due to its cyclical nature. When you are looking for grants and writing funding applications, with the hope of securing more resources to support the programming, it takes away from your time to manage the actual programming. Veronica makes sure to appreciate the province of British Columbia for giving Volunteer Grandparents' the gaming grant, which she applies for every year and has come to be a helpful and generally consistent source of funding.

# Rewarding, Challenging, Stable



When asked to sum up her experience with Volunteer Grandparents in three words, Veronica gives it a lot of thought before laying out the words ‘rewarding’, ‘challenging’, and ‘stable’. Zeroing in on the word ‘stability’ in particular, Veronica brought a lot of steadiness to Volunteer Grandparents at a time when it was facing lots of instability and cutbacks. The organization had had a number of program coordinators before her but none had lasted very long. Veronica says that you need a sense of consistency in the programming, especially because program coordinators go to meet the families and volunteers to develop relationships. While older program coordinators had taken notes, reading notes was never the same as meeting someone and establishing a rapport. Now, turning back to all three words, at first glance, these words seem so different from one another. But that is the truth and beauty of Volunteer Grandparents. The non-profit organization has been around for five decades and is so entrenched in the complex world of human connection and emotion. Naturally, there will be inclines, declines, and plateaus with everything from securing funding, making matches, and of course, global pandemics. However, at the end of the day, the positive intent of the organization, which Veronica has powered, nurtured, and advanced over the last seventeen years, ensures that the cream will always rise to the top.



## Family Match Program

Family Match Program...

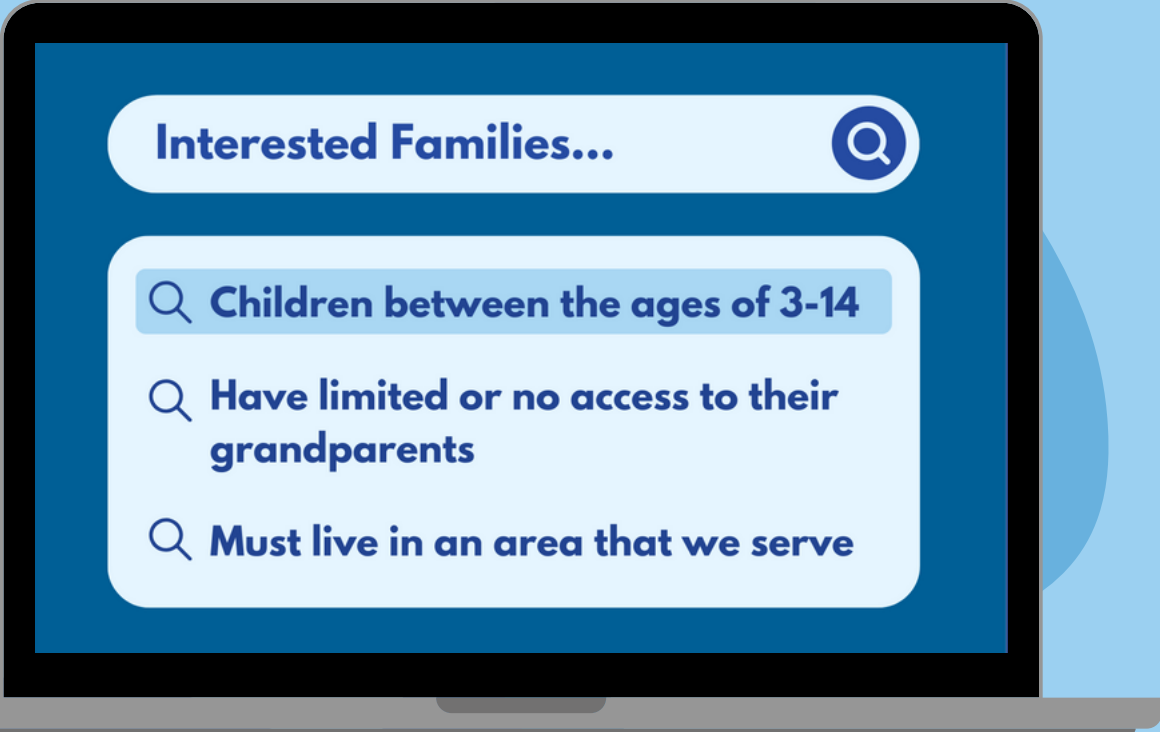


🔍 Interested Families?

🔍 Interested Grandparents?

🔍 More information!





**~ HELP US TO BUILD POSITIVE  
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GENERATIONS! ~**