
MEMORANDUM

COM-C 15-2021

Subject: Seniors Services LTC Homes Volunteer Update
Date: April 13, 2021
To: Public Health and Social Services Committee
From: Henri Koning, Director, and Heather Wilde, Volunteer Coordinator, Seniors Services

Each year Seniors Services provides a Volunteer Report that outlines the level of contribution provided by volunteers in the previous year. Unfortunately, in 2020 on-site volunteer services were suspended as part of the COVID-19 risk mitigation measures. Many of the volunteers who support Seniors Services are seniors themselves and in a high risk category for COVID-19. In 2021 Seniors Services will be reviewing the opportunity to safely re-introduce volunteers back into the homes. In lieu of the Volunteer Report, Heather Wilde, Volunteer Coordinator has provided an update to offer Committee with an overview of the role and experience of volunteers in 2020.

2020 Seniors Services Volunteer Update

2020 began as any other year, with opportunity and possibilities aplenty. Volunteer presence in Regional homes was bountiful, providing emotional, social, and physical support to residents. The first quarter of 2020 saw 9,439 hours of volunteer time invested into Niagara Region's long-term care homes by 500 dedicated volunteers.

March 2020 came in like a lion and dramatically altered the daily functions of long-term care. The onset of COVID-19 and the restrictions that came with it ended all volunteer programming in the blink of an eye. Given the average age of the Region's volunteer group, it was also evident that COVID-19 could have a negative impact on our volunteers' social, physical and mental health. Our dedicated volunteers continued to keep the residents and their health in mind, and accepted the pause in volunteering with hopes of returning in a few short weeks.

Staying Connected

As the days and weeks continued to fly by and the restrictions mounted, becoming creative in how volunteering could look in the homes became a new priority. Open

communication via phone and email was the first step taken to ensure volunteers remained an active part of each home. Keeping the residents informed of the day-to-day events in the homes through communication and newsletters brought continued dedication from the volunteers. It was clear that residents remained present in the minds and hearts of volunteers.



Volunteer & Staff Appreciation

Each year, April brings the volunteer appreciation event, typically held at The Americana Resort, where volunteers from all eight homes come together to celebrate their many years of service. Not wanting to miss the opportunity to thank them for their hard work and dedication, a letter of recognition was delivered to each volunteer. The volunteers were appreciative that at the beginning of a global pandemic, the homes took the time to recognize and appreciate their contributions, no matter how small in comparison to previous years.

Residents were not the only ones who felt the loss of volunteer presence in the homes. Staff, too, were missing the daily interactions with the volunteers who are an integral part of each home. Volunteers were quick to recognize that every day Niagara Region's front line staff put themselves at risk to provide the best resident care possible. Pairing up with various local family owned restaurants, our generous volunteers ensured that staff were also recognized for their hard work and dedication during these difficult times by providing funding for staff appreciation events.

Outside of COVID-19, many volunteer hours are spent running tuck shops and cafes. Volunteers saw a great opportunity to ensure residents were still able to access treats through travelling tuck shop carts in collaboration with recreation and redeployed staff. Volunteer funds were used to ensure residents had regular access to extra treats and supplies not typically available to them.



Technology

Throughout the pandemic, we recognized the opportunities that technology can provide. Using technology, volunteers were able to have meaningful virtual connections with residents via FaceTime, Zoom and Skype. Building upon this “new to volunteers” technology, several tech-savvy volunteers brought forward ideas on how to creatively engage residents in small group activities within the home. Volunteers provided pre-recorded videos where they were able to share things such as; current events, local news, inspirational stories, craft programs, as well as denominational and non-denominational spiritual content. These videos were uploaded to a secure link allowing recreation teams to stream the programs on in-home smart TVs. This gave volunteers, from the comfort and safety of their homes, the ability to provide meaningful social interaction to the residents. Volunteers continue to provide new and innovative virtual ideas to Program Managers and Volunteer Coordinators as the pandemic continues.

Community Support

Not only have the volunteers continued to support the homes during these times of uncertainty, it has been heartwarming to see the outpouring of community support from local restaurants and businesses to residents and front line workers.

Over the year, local businesses have donated meals, coffee, tea, treats, masks, ear savers and shields. Resident family members have provided Christmas gifts, gift cards and cash donations to be used toward resident and staff appreciations. The support from the volunteers and community, have helped boost resident and staff morale, and reminded the homes of the kindness and compassion that exist within our communities.

Holiday Season

The holiday season is a time that reminds us of those who are most important to us, and a time where we reflect upon the past year. Although 2020 has been difficult, it has brought to light the dedication, resilience, and compassion that our volunteers truly have for the residents and the homes, and the vibrant community support within the Niagara region. Volunteers ensured their presence was felt throughout the holiday season by financially funding treats, staff and resident appreciation gifts, ensuring the homes were decorated with poinsettia plants, and providing hand written Christmas notes and cards.

To end the year, with our volunteers still physically out of the homes, each home sent personalized holiday cheer cards or letters to every volunteer.

Although we remain in the midst of difficult times, and under normal circumstances our volunteers would be by our sides with a joke or a coffee to brighten our spirits, the support from the volunteers and community that Senior Services has received throughout 2020 remind us that we truly are in this together, but from a social distance.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Heather Wilde, Volunteer Coordinator