



Annual Report



2023

A YEAR OF CHANGE

2023 brought a lot of change to Volunteer Strathcona - change in our leadership and staff, the focus of our work, and in our relationships with our community.

What didn't change was

**Our passion for volunteerism,
Our admiration for the
non-profits - charities - community leagues
sports organizations - block party organizers - parent councils
and all the other community organizations
who make Strathcona County a great place to be
and
our appreciation for the volunteers who build our community!**

Volunteer Strathcona gratefully acknowledges that we work on Treaty 6 Territory and the homeland of the Métis Nation of Alberta, North Saskatchewan River Territory.

Our gratitude to the Cree, Métis, Blackfoot and other Nations who have shared this land with us reminds us that we all have a responsibility to not only take care of this land but also to take care of one another and take steps toward reconciliation.

At Volunteer Strathcona, we think volunteering is one of the many ways we can all strive to live up to this responsibility by building community through connection to one another, and we are grateful for the opportunity to walk alongside others in this work.

SETTING OUR FOCUS

Volunteer Strathcona has constantly adapted to changes in the non-profit sector and in our community's needs over our 47 year history.

In 2023, we realized our current resources were spread too thin, with our work focusing on both volunteerism and non-profit capacity building. As a result, we were not having the impact our community was seeking from us.

We consulted with various stakeholders at a meeting we convened in May 2023 and in one-on-one discussions with many community organizations over the summer, to hear about what they were experiencing in their volunteer programs, what kinds of support they needed, and what they thought Volunteer Strathcona's role could be. We also looked at other resources available to non-profits in Strathcona County. The information we collected lead us to conclude that Volunteer Strathcona could most benefit our community by focusing on being a robust Volunteer Centre.

Our vision and mission were changed to reflect our focus on volunteerism:

Vision:

Our community strengthened through connection and volunteerism.

Mission:

Connecting people to their community by promoting, enhancing and growing volunteerism in Strathcona County.

Throughout the year, we continued to explore our role in Strathcona County and how we can best support volunteers and the community organizations who rely on volunteers for their events, projects, programs and service delivery.

Our work building relationships with our stakeholders in 2023 set us up well to further develop Volunteer Strathcona as a robust volunteer centre in 2024 and beyond.

CONNECTING COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTEERS

Community Connection Volunteering

These are the three words most often heard in our office - because that is the focus of our work.

We are passionate about helping community members connect to their community through volunteering at Strathcona County's community organizations.

We met with

31

community organizations

to find out as much as we could about their volunteer opportunities and to discuss what Volunteer Strathcona could do to help with their Volunteer Programs

and

81

community members

received referrals for volunteer opportunities after contacting our office directly.

... and we talked to 100s of other community members about volunteer opportunities at community events throughout the year!



We added a Volunteer Questionnaire on our website so community members can tell us about their interests & skills, what they are seeking in volunteering, and what time they have available to volunteer; our Volunteer Coordinator then contacts the community member to give them suggestions for community organizations to get in touch with.

CONNECTING WITH YOUTH

We love to see youth engaging with our community through volunteerism - not only is volunteering a great way for them to develop skills, resume build and network, but we also know that youth who volunteer are likely to keep volunteering throughout their lives.

As we talked to stakeholders in the community, we frequently heard about youth who wanted to volunteer but couldn't find opportunities that matched what they were seeking, and about organizations who wanted more youth volunteers but couldn't find them.

To explore this disconnect, we started a youth volunteer initiative with an aim of helping more youth become involved in volunteering.

We are very grateful to Strathcona County Next Gen for their mentorship, assistance and partnership, and look forward to continuing to work with them in 2024.



To engage with youth in our community:

- we attended the Back to School Bash in Ardrossan in August;
- we did presentations to the leadership classes at Sherwood Heights Junior High in September;
- we set up an information table at the Elk Island Public Schools Career and Post-Secondary Fair in November;
- we met with high school Principals and Teachers to explore how we can work together to encourage students to volunteer; and
- we launched a second Instagram account with a youth focus.

CONNECTING WITH OLDER ADULTS

Older adults have always been key volunteers in our community. While youth may be driven to volunteer by their career goals and their passion for issues like social justice and the environment, many older community members may instead be looking for ways to engage in community, socialize and share the skills they have built over their lifetimes.

As we continue to seek to engage with older adults around volunteerism, we have been appreciative of WE Seniors Strathcona for giving us opportunities to attend and speak at their events, such as the Seniors Week Fair in June, the BBQs they held throughout rural Strathcona County over the summer, and their Active Aging workshop in December.



SUPPORTING COMMUNITY EVENTS

Highland Gathering

The Highland Gathering is an annual outdoor event held in Sherwood Park, celebrating Scottish culture.

Volunteer Strathcona was pleased to support the event again; this year, we helped recruit some Sherwood Park Crusader players to help with setup for the event, and we organized a button-making activity in the Kids Zone.

We were particularly happy that to recruit some volunteers from Big Brothers Big Sisters of Strathcona County - the mentor-mentee pairs who came out enjoyed a fun day together, and it was a lovely way for the mentors to show their mentees what volunteering is all about!



Celebrating Multicultural Strathcona

It was our privilege to partner with the Arts and Cultural Society of Strathcona County, the Strathcona County Museum and Archives, Community Adult Learning and Literacy Society of Fort Saskatchewan & Strathcona County, and the Strathcona County Diversity Committee, for a series of events that explored and celebrated the multicultural diversity of Strathcona County.

Events included a gathering of Indigenous artists in June, an afternoon of discussion about multiculturalism with panelists and community members in September, and a celebration of the diversity of food in our community in October.

We were grateful to play a role in bringing these impactful events to our community, and for the opportunity to grow our own knowledge and perspectives about the importance of recognizing and celebrating our multicultural community.

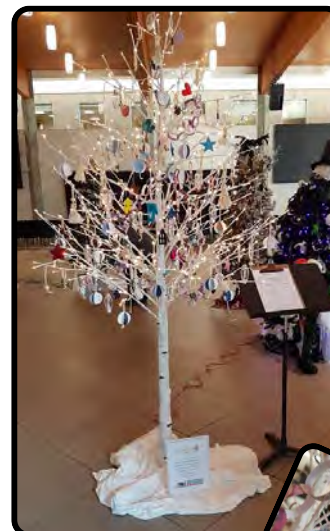


Winterfest

Volunteer Strathcona has always loved our community's 'festival of trees', which is now Winterfest put on by the Festival Place Cultural Arts Foundation.

This year, we donated a tree to their auction, with lovely decorations made for us by students in the Sherwood Heights Junior High leadership classes - they did a fantastic job of making our tree sparkle!

Winterfest gave us a table at the event, where we enjoyed engaging with community members to talk about winter volunteering in Strathcona County.



We would like to give a big Thank You to the Sherwood Heights Leadership classes for their time and effort in making the amazing decorations for our Winterfest tree!



SUPPORT COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Promoting Volunteer Opportunities

Sharing information about volunteer opportunities in Strathcona County is one of the ways we support our community organizations.

- We added a list of community organizations that regularly recruit volunteers to our website, with links to find out more information.
- Our monthly e-newsletter includes information about volunteer opportunities.
- In June 2023, we launched a Weekly Newsletter that highlights upcoming volunteer opportunities on behalf of community organizations.
- We made connections at each of the high schools in Strathcona County, so we can enlist them to share information about youth-friendly volunteer opportunities.
- Over the course of 2023, we worked at increasing our Social Media engagement (Facebook and Instagram), to ensure most of the content is focused on volunteerism in Strathcona County.
- We help community organizations to use Volunteer Connector - a free, easy to use online platform that connects volunteers with volunteer opportunities in Alberta - as a way of spreading their reach.
- We began attending Sherwood Park and Area Chamber of Commerce meetings on a regular basis to share information about how local businesses can become involved in volunteerism.
- We attended a variety of community events to talk to promote volunteer opportunities to community members.

We also offered enhanced assistance - with recruiting volunteers, drafting volunteer role descriptions, and building volunteer programs - to several community organizations who sought additional support.

Free Equipment Loans for Events

Free equipment loans through our We Care We Share program were paused in 2022, and we were delighted to restart the program in May 2023.

We relocated the equipment to our office to make loans easier, and added some yard games to help community members planning block parties.



40

Community Groups borrowed equipment in 2023, for

54

Events - including

7

Block Parties!

Volunteer Manager Community of Practice

As we reached out to community organizations to learn about their volunteer programs, we met many Volunteer Managers across Strathcona County; we were impressed by their commitment to the impact their organizations make in our community, their gratitude to the volunteers they engaged with, and their desire to build strong volunteer programs that benefit all involved.

In October 2023, we invited Volunteer Managers to a discussion of best practices in volunteer recruitment and saw first-hand how we could all learn from one another.

These Volunteer Managers decided we should form a Community of Practice to meet quarterly to discuss topics that are integral to their work.

We look forward to working alongside this passionate group of individuals in 2024 as we all expand our knowledge about best practices in volunteer programs.



SUPPORTING COMMUNITY MEMBERS

We are privileged to be able to help connect Strathcona County residents who want to support one another in our community.



42

low-income seniors and people with disabilities were assisted by

48

volunteers who mowed their lawns and/or shoveled their sidewalks and driveways to help them continue to live in their own homes in 2023.

In addition to the important work of our LawnBuster and SnowBuster volunteers, others in our community volunteer through Volunteer Strathcona to help meet the needs of members of our community by:

- delivering Meals on Wheels meals throughout Strathcona County;
- delivering hampers from the Strathcona Food Bank and the We Can Food Basket Society for those who face barriers to picking up their hampers;
- assisting with errands like picking up medication, grocery shopping, yard work and dog walking when community members need an extra hand through our Community Supports program; and
- helping Volunteer Strathcona host income tax clinics for low income community members, in partnership with E4C's Make Tax Time Pay program and the Strathcona County Library.

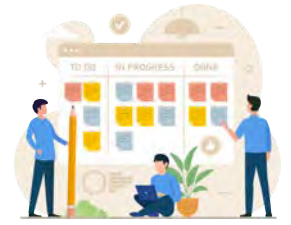
In 2023, we entered into a partnership with Strathcona County Family and Community Services to enlist their help with SnowBusters. Family and Community Services supported our work by talking to residents who requested assistance, to confirm eligibility and find out what other supports or services the residents might benefit from. Volunteer Strathcona continued to recruit and engage volunteers, and match them with the residents seeking support. We are grateful to Family and Community Services for supporting us and helping to ensure we can continue to support community members in this way, and we are pleased this partnership will expand in 2024 to include LawnBusters and Community Supports as well.



Home Hardware in Sherwood Park once again answered our call for help, and made sure our SnowBuster volunteers were outfitted with the tools they needed to help seniors and people with disabilities in our community.

A huge THANK YOU to Home Hardware and to all the Volunteers!

BOARD DEVELOPMENT



Board Members are key volunteers at non-profit organizations, and Volunteer Strathcona is no exception.

Our Governance Board guides our work, ensuring we have a clear Vision and Mission, values that reflect who we are as an organization, and a strategic plan that keeps us focused on what our stakeholders are seeking from us. We are very grateful for this committed group of volunteers!

In September 2023, our Board engaged in a Strategic Planning day, to refocus our work, redefine our Vision and Mission and begin building a strategic plan to guide us over the next two years. We want to thank the Alberta Community Support Network (a program of the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations) for their help with this work.

We were pleased to be asked to co-host a Board Development workshop in November 2023 with Strathcona County Family and Community Services and the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations. Representatives from over 20 organizations came together to learn about Board Governance, roles and responsibilities, and how to build healthy Boards. The November event was a kick off to more Board Development work in Strathcona County in 2024 that will continue to help Volunteer Strathcona and organizations throughout Strathcona County build strong, healthy Boards!

ACKNOWLEDGING OUR SUPPORTERS

We continue to be very grateful for the support of our funders:



**Enhanced Capacity Advancement Program
(funding to March 31, 2023)**



Casino Funds