

C I T Y O F  
**PORT**  
COQUITLAM



# Seniors Phone Buddy Program Volunteer Information



## OUR VOLUNTEER PHILOSOPHY

Volunteers play an essential role in delivering high quality recreation and community programs and in doing so, help to create a healthy, vibrant, and caring community.

The City of Port Coquitlam strives to create meaningful volunteer opportunities that engage participants, foster leadership skills and build community connections.

## ADULT & WILSON SENIORS Seniors Phone Buddy

### PURPOSE:

To provide companionship and reduce social isolation of Wilson Seniors members who are forced to self-isolate during the COVID-19 epidemic.

### RESPONSIBILITIES & ACTIVITIES:

Volunteer duties will include:

- Calling Wilson Seniors membership holders to say hello and check in.
- Engaging in conversation and actively listening to seniors; inquiring about their current needs, activity levels, and physical and mental wellbeing.
- Referring participants facing difficulties to appropriate resources.
- Alerting Wilson Seniors staff about any immediate needs or concerns.
- Logging notes from conversations and submitting them to Wilson Seniors staff.

### SKILLS, EXPERIENCE & QUALIFICATIONS:

- Minimum of 19 years of age
- Some experience working with seniors an asset
- Fluent in written and spoken English (fluency in a additional languages is an asset)

### PERSONAL TRAITS / QUALITIES:

- Friendly, empathetic, patient and positive
- Enjoy talking to others over the phone
- Able to follow direction and to take initiative when appropriate

### REPORTS TO:

Recreation Program Coordinator, Seniors & Food Services

### TIME COMMITMENT:

- Up to two hours per week for a period of 6 weeks depending on number of buddies
- Approximately 20 minutes per call

**WORKING CONDITIONS:**

- Indoors or outdoors at in a private setting (e.g at home)
- Must have a home or cell phone, internet connection and access to e-mail

**BENEFITS:**

- Opportunity to improve written or verbal communication skills
- Opportunity to meet new people and make a positive difference
- Provide support for vulnerable seniors in our community
- Letter of reference after completion of commitment

**SCREENING REQUIRED:**

All Volunteer Opportunities Require the Completion of:

1. Completed Application Form
2. Intake Interview (over phone or video chat)
3. Criminal Record Search with Vulnerable Sector Check
4. Area-Specific Volunteer Orientation (virtual)

Additional screening measures may include:

5. Reference Checks

**OTHER DETAILS:**

- Minimum # of Volunteers desired: 6 (Phase 1), TBD (Phase 2)
- Maximum # of Volunteers desired: 6 (Phase 1), TBD (Phase 2)

**Last updated: June 16, 2020**

## Introduction

Thank you for being a part of the City of Port Coquitlam's Seniors Phone Buddy Program! We hope this will be a wonderful opportunity to stay connected with other people in your community and to help prevent social isolation amongst seniors.

This pilot program will be broken down into two phases:

**Phase 1:** Contacting Wilson Centre membership holders to check in and to gather information on their current needs and desires for community support and programming.

**Phase 2:** Connecting volunteers with Phone Buddies – seniors in our community desiring weekly check ins and conversation – to provide a social connection and help connect isolated seniors with resources.

Depending on your interest, you may help with one or both parts of this process. Below we will go over the communication guidelines that are important to both parts; from there we will focus on what to expect when assisting in Phase 1 of this program.

### Importance of Role

Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, seniors in our community are more at risk of isolation than ever before. As we enter Phase 2 of BC's Recovery Plan, and the general population resumes more aspects of their day-to-day lives (such as going to work, shopping in stores and eating in restaurants), those who are not able to do so may find themselves increasingly isolated.

Studies show that social isolation can have a number of negative effects, including depression, poor sleep quality, impaired executive function, accelerated cognitive decline, poor cardiovascular function and impaired immunity.

A simple phone call checking in and providing a social connection from within their community can go a long way towards fighting social isolation. Furthermore, by learning more about the resources and services needed by isolated seniors, we will be better able to advocate for and respond to these needs.

## Communication Guidelines

### Phone Plans, Fees and Charges

In participating in this volunteer opportunity, volunteers are expected to use their personal home or cell phone to call other seniors in our community. Please ensure that you are aware of the limits of your phone plan (such as weekly and monthly minutes available) and try to avoid going over these limits. The City of Port Coquitlam is unable to reimburse volunteers for any fees or charges incurred through their participation in the Seniors Phone Buddy program.

## Access to Confidential Information

In participating as a Seniors Phone Buddy volunteer, you will be provided with contact information for Wilson Centre membership holders, including first and last name(s) and phone number(s). As a City of Port Coquitlam volunteer, you are required to keep this information confidential. As outlined in the City's Volunteer Handbook (p. 5):

- If someone outside the City or your department questions you about confidential information, and you are unsure if you can share it with them, politely refer them to your supervisor.
- All media requests should be directed to your supervisor to be passed on to the City's Communications team.
- No volunteer is permitted to remove or copy any City records, reports or documents without prior approval.

Volunteers who disclose confidential information may be immediately dismissed from the volunteer program.

## Maintaining Your Own Privacy

In order to protect your own privacy, volunteers are encouraged to hide your name and phone number from Caller ID when making calls as part of the Seniors Phone Buddy program.

To do so, **dial \*67** before the phone number for your outgoing call. This will temporarily block your Caller ID, causing the call to come up as "Unknown Caller" or "Private" on the receiver's end, and hiding your phone number.

In addition, volunteers are discouraged from sharing personal contact information with the Wilson Seniors membership holders that they connect with, including their phone number, e-mail address or street address. Protecting your personal contact information will help to ensure that others will not reach out to you on your own time or outside of the length or boundaries of the Seniors Phone Buddy program.

If you do choose to share your contact information, it should be on the foundation that you have an existing social relationship with the person you are speaking to, and wish to remain in contact outside of the parameters of the Seniors Phone Buddy program.

If a Wilson Seniors membership holder asks for your contact information in case they need someone to talk to or in case of a personal emergency, you may let them know that you are not permitted to share this information as a volunteer, and provide them with contact information for the Program Supervisor and any relevant resources.

## Leaving Messages

If you are unable to reach a Wilson Seniors membership holder, you may want to leave them a message. In order to protect your confidential contact information and time, we recommend that you do not provide your contact information or ask them to call you back. Instead:

- Introduce yourself
- Let them know that you were calling to check in with them.
- Let them know when you plan to try them again.

This way, if the person is screening their calls, they may be more likely to answer the phone when they see this caller ID come up again.

## Self Care

Your physical and mental wellbeing is of utmost importance in this program.

- If you yourself are not well, you will not be able to support the person you are talking to, to the best of your ability. Please don't see these call outs as a job or a chore. Set yourself and others up for success by first making sure you are well, and that you are enjoying the process and opportunity to connect.
- If a call affects you negatively, know that you can stop for the day. You can also reach out to staff to discuss your experience or ask for guidance with any questions you may have. At any time, you can remove yourself from the call out team.
- There is no specific time frame for your calls. Some calls will take 1 minute, while others may take 20 minutes or longer. As long as the call works for both the call receiver and yourself, both are good.
- If you are speaking to someone and you are finding it challenging to end your call, it is okay to give them a time limit. For example:
  - “Okay Mary, it has been wonderful speaking with you, but I do need to make a couple more calls. I can speak for a few more minutes, so before I let you go, is there anything else I can help you with?”
  - In situations like this, the person may be someone who has limited social contact and would be a great candidate for a phone buddy. Please indicate this on the spreadsheet.
- Know your limitations. If one phone call is enough for the day, then know that that is okay, and that there are no have to's.
- If someone you are speaking to is inappropriate or disrespectful towards you, it is okay to interrupt and inform the caller that you are ending the call. Notify the Program Supervisor of the situation as soon as possible.

## Emergencies and Safety

If there is a health or safety concern during a call, Volunteers must notify City staff immediately so that appropriate measures can be taken to ensure the safety of everyone involved. As a Seniors Phone Buddy, you are not expected to manage the emergency unless it requires a time sensitive call to 911. In situations where staff will be notified of a situation, please include as much relevant, detailed information as you can.

You should contact the Program Supervisor as soon as possible if you have any of the following concerns:

- The person is not eating
- The person does not have access to essential medication
- The person is experiencing ongoing physical, psychological or financial abuse
- The person is being neglected by a caregiver

You should contact 9-1-1 immediately if you have any of the following concerns:

- The person is at risk of immediate physical harm
- The person is going to physically harm themselves or someone else

For more information about elder abuse, including signs to look out for, visit the [Government of Canada's Elder Abuse Awareness page](#).

## Communication Tips

Please consider the tips below when making phone calls:

### Smile

We know from experience how emotion translates through the phone lines - our voice and our tone during phone conversations is important. Smile as you would in a face-to-face conversation while responding to questions and conveying necessary information to help set a friendly and positive tone.

### Mirror the other person's Language and Tone

Mirroring another person's language and tone can help create a connection. If a person is quiet, excited, or subdued, reflecting this tone in an honest manner shows that you are listening and are trying to meet them where they are at.

### Listen and Acknowledge

Listening is the most important support we can provide. Staying present and providing empathy and understanding can have a significant positive impact.

In face to face conversations, we can often gauge if another person is listening to us based on eye contact and body language, such as looking at us and nodding along. This can be more difficult to know when speaking to someone over the phone.

While the other person is speaking, you can use small verbal acknowledgements to let them know you are still listening, such as “yes”, “uh huh”, or “oh”. Convey empathy and let them feel that they have been heard by acknowledging that their feelings are valid, with statements such as “I can see that this is very difficult for you” or “that would frustrate me too.”

Don't be afraid to ask clarifying questions, such as “how did you feel about that?” or “what was that experience like for you?”

## Avoid Making Judgements

Try to remain non-judgemental. Our community is made up of people from many different backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, cultures and religious beliefs. Try to avoid making assumptions or judgements about a person based on these things.

## Dealing with Negativity

If a person is in a negative state of mind, they likely have a reason for it. Sometimes, talking to someone about it will be enough to release some of their frustration.

If people are focused on the negative and are talking about all the terrible things going on in the news, try to find some silver linings and introduce feel good stories and topics that help adjust their thoughts to a more positive outlook.

If you find that someone is always talking specifically about COVID-19, make the suggestion to ration their news intake on the COVID situation to one hour a day. Listening to COVID information 24/7 can cause fear, anxiety and stress.

If you believe that someone may be experiencing a mental health problem, it is important to be calm and patient as a disability can prevent a person from thinking clearly, concentrating or remembering. Keep in mind that mental health is a broad classification for many disorders that can range in severity, and that it is not our job to make diagnoses. Pass your concerns on to the Program Supervisor.

# Phase 1

## Connecting with Wilson Seniors

In Phase 1 of the Phone Buddy program, volunteers will be reaching out to Wilson Seniors membership holders to check in on them, gain a better understanding of their current needs, and to see if they are interested in being a part of the Phone Buddy initiative.



Upon signing up to volunteer in this role, you will receive a contact list of Wilson Seniors membership holders. Some may have already received a call from Wilson Seniors staff or Customer Services attendants to check in during the first few weeks of facility closure. For others, this may be the first contact they have had from a Wilson Seniors community member since Phase 1 of BC's COVID-19 response began.

You will be given an Excel spreadsheet or a printed document to track who you are able to connect with, and their responses to the questions you are able to ask them.

If you are not already familiar with the person you are calling, start by introducing yourself, and identifying that you are a member of the Wilson Centre Seniors Advisory Association. If they have not heard of the Association, explain the role.

Explain why you are reaching out, and see if they have a few minutes for you to check in. From there, you may ask some of the questions featured in the spreadsheet to learn more about their current situation.

## Gathering Information

While we are looking to learn more about the issues currently facing our seniors here in Port Coquitlam, the first priority of this program is to make connections and initiate conversation. The questions provided on the spreadsheet are not a checklist, and it is not necessary to ask all of them. If you are able to find out about a person's interests, then let that guide the conversation towards something they are passionate about. This will allow for identification of things you have in common, and produce a natural flowing conversation as opposed to just "filling in the blanks".

Allowing someone to talk about things they like will also help to build trust and connection. Take time to explore which way the conversation naturally wants to go. Remember to try to ask open ended questions when applicable as opposed to questions with yes or no answers.

If the person you are speaking with is hesitant to open up or engage in discussion, ask them if there is a better time to call, or see if they are even interested in receiving future calls. If they say that now is not a good time to talk, ask when they would like another call. If they say they don't want to talk then make sure you indicate the response on the spreadsheet.

## Taking Notes

Where possible, please try to take notes throughout your phone call. Indicate the answer to Yes or No with a "Yes" or "No". Answer any short-answer questions (such as "What are you missing most?") with key words rather than full sentences (e.g. "socialization", "fitness class"), as this will make it easier for staff to find patterns and identify trends. If you do not get around to asking a question, or the person you are speaking to unable to answer, leave the answer field blank.

## Sample Script

- Hello \_\_\_\_\_. This is \_\_\_\_\_ with the Wilson Advisory Board. We are calling to say "Hi" and to check in to see how you're doing through all of this. How are things going?
- We also want to make sure that you have everything you need.
- Have you had a chance to visit with your family? Stay connected to friends?
  - (Yes): That's so good that you have someone supporting you. So you have been able to get the groceries and medicine you need?)
  - (No): Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Have you been able to get the groceries and medicine you need?
    - (No: Oh no. What types of things do you need? Have you tried the free delivery options that some groceries and pharmacies have?)
- We are trying to get a better understanding of how the City can be supporting seniors during this time. What are some of the things you are missing most?
  - Thank you for sharing. I will pass this information on to our Wilson Seniors staff.
- Do you use a computer / have computer access?
  - (Yes): Oh good, we could pass along some links for some activities that you might find fun. Would you like someone to e-mail you some links to online activities and resources?
  - (Yes, but I'm not good with the computer): We have some senior friendly resources that can show you step by step how to set up: Facebook, Zoom, Email, Facetime, Online library books etc. Would you like someone to e-mail you some resources?
  - (No) Is there a good way pass along information to you?
- Are you already receiving the What's Up Wilson seniors publication and email updates from the City?
  - (Yes): Perfect. We will try to make sure that any important updates, including new programs or opportunities, get included in the What's Up Wilson newsletter.
  - (No): Would you like to add your email address to the database to receive What's Up Wilson?
- Would you be interested or available for someone to call once a week a check in and have some conversation?
  - (Yes): Ok. We're just gathering interest right now, but I will put make a note that you're interested, and someone should be in touch in the next few weeks once we are able to get this started.
  - (No): Ok, no problem.
- Thank you very much for your time today. If you change your mind on anything we talked about today, you can always connect with Chris Eastman, the Program Coordinator for Wilson Seniors. You can reach him at 604 927 7981. You have a good day and take care.

## Encourage Self-Care

While our options are more limited than usual, there are still a variety of things that we can do to help ourselves stay physically, mentally and emotionally healthy. If someone is not doing well, consider asking these questions and exploring potential resources to help them get their health on the right track.

1. Are you getting any fresh air or physical exercise?
2. Are you taking time to relax?
3. Have you reached out to any friends or family members?
4. Are you eating healthy?
5. Are you getting enough sleep?

Resources for these and other support systems are covered in the next section.

## Submitting Call Records

Once you have called everyone on your call list, please pass on your Excel spreadsheet (or physical notes) to the Program Supervisor, Chris Eastman. Staff will consolidate the results, pass on information about community needs to the Recreation Management team, and review the interest in ongoing Phone Buddy connections for a potential Phase 2.

## After Phase 1

At the end of your participation in Phase 1 of the Seniors Phone Buddy program or at the end of the program, volunteers will receive a letter confirming the end of their participation and thanking them for their participation in the program. Staff will be analyzing the information gathered regarding community needs and passing these on to the Recreation Management team.

From there, we are hoping to begin Phase 2 of the Phone Buddy program, where we will start ongoing communications with seniors in need of a social connection. Staff will follow up with more information about this program once to see if you are interested in being a part of this Phase once further details are determined.

Continued phone communication with Wilson Seniors membership holders beyond the participation in the Seniors Phone Buddy program is not an expectation of the program, and any communication beyond the scope of the Seniors Phone Buddy program will not be considered as volunteer hours, nor will further communications be considered under the supervision of the Port Coquitlam Recreation Department or covered by the City of Port Coquitlam's Liability Insurance policies.

## BC211 and Additional Resources

As a Phone Buddy, your role is to listen and provide a social connection. However, it is possible that the people you will speak to are in need of other essential services. It is important to know about the resources available in the community, so that we might help connect seniors with the help that they need.

## BC 211

BC211 is currently coordinating the following services for isolated seniors across the Lower Mainland as part of their Safe Seniors, Strong Communities program:

- Grocery shopping and delivery
- Meal preparation and delivery
- Prescription pickup and delivery

Seniors in need of these resources can fill out a registration form at [BC211.ca](https://bc211.ca). If you are speaking with someone who does not have access to the internet or is not comfortable filling out an online form, and you are comfortable giving them a hand, you may assist them by filling out the form on their behalf.

## Fitness Videos

While our Recreation facilities are currently closed, the City of Port Coquitlam has posted a number of fitness videos on our website to help people of all ability levels stay active at home. This includes a dozen videos taught by Wilson Seniors fitness leaders designed for adults 50+, such as chair fitness, yoga, and Latin-inspired dance. These are available for free at [www.portcoquitlam.ca/recreation](http://www.portcoquitlam.ca/recreation).

## Terry Fox Library

Fraser Valley Regional Library is now offering an FVRL Express service that allows residents to order books, DVDs and other material for pick-up at Terry Fox Library. Visit [www.fvrl.bc.ca/fvrlexpress](http://www.fvrl.bc.ca/fvrlexpress) for more information.

## COVID-19 Information

There is much information floating around about COVID-19, and not all of it is accurate. For the most accurate and up-to-date information about COVID-19, volunteers are encouraged to check out and refer others to these resources:

- [British Columbia Centre for Disease Control](https://www.bccdc.ca) – for BC-wide information, including information about testing, self-isolating, and the BC Recovery Plan
- [City of Port Coquitlam COVID-19 Page](#) – for the latest information about services and updates here in Port Coquitlam

## Questions and Support

**For resources, concerns and questions about senior safety/wellness, please contact:**

Chris Eastman

Recreation Program Coordinator, Adult & Food Services

[eastmanc@portcoquitlam.ca](mailto:eastmanc@portcoquitlam.ca)

604 927 7981

**For questions about the volunteer program, please contact:**

Rob Loxterkamp

Recreation Program Assistant, Volunteer Services

[loxterkampr@portcoquitlam.ca](mailto:loxterkampr@portcoquitlam.ca)

604 928 7953