

Senior's volunteer contribution spans several decades

By Evelyn Pham

For many, volunteering is about giving back, helping others and providing a much-needed service. Just ask Kathleen Devlin.

Having a volunteer history that spans almost more than four decades, this octogenarian knows a thing or two about volunteering, how important it is to community and the positive outcomes that it has for both the volunteer and recipient.

She credits her love of volunteering to her mother who encouraged her to volunteer as a child. It's no surprise that she began volunteering as a teenager, and continued to do so well into her golden years.

It was through the local Legion of Mary in her home country of Ireland that Devlin began volunteering.

"At the legion you did lots of things in the neighbourhood. One of them was visiting the patients at the hospital," Devlin recounted recently, adding that she loved volunteering at the hospital simply because she enjoyed spending time with the patients and helping out there.

After immigrating to Canada in 1964 with her husband, Devlin continued to volunteer.

"I tell you, it was an amazing thing when we moved here," she said. "We moved into an apartment near the General Hospital downtown and they happened to have a Legion of Mary here just like the one in Ireland." She joined the legion and continued her volunteer work in the same capacity as she had in Ireland.

She started at the General Hospital, then moved to the Grey Nuns

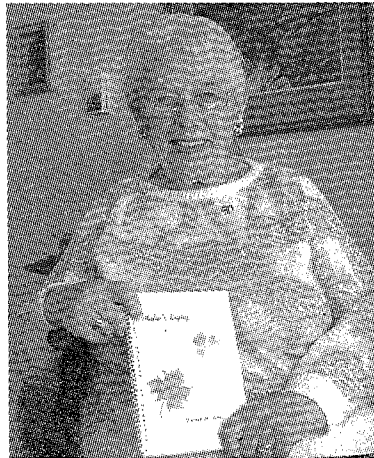


Photo by Evelyn Pham

Kathleen Devlin proudly displays her book of poetry entitled Mother's Legacy – referring to her mother's lessons on giving back and helping others.

when it opened. At both the hospitals, she did a variety of duties – everything from working the switchboard to pastoral care.

Although already volunteering at the hospital, Devlin signed up for another volunteer opportunity. This time she brought her husband along and they both began volunteering at Meals on Wheels.

Asked why she volunteered for Meals on Wheels, Devlin simply replied, "I heard the call. They needed volunteers."

Though it was sometimes difficult, with slippery roads and bad weather, they continued to deliver meals for 10 years.

The sheer satisfaction of helping others was all that Devlin needed,

especially as a newcomer to Canada. Being surrounded by others and having a sense of purpose helped her combat feelings of homesickness.

Good friend and former neighbour Jolene Leps believes volunteering has been an important part of Devlin's life because she was surrounded by people she cared for.

"Volunteering was one of the ways she coped with being so far from her family," Leps explained. "Helping others brought her joy. With no family here, she found ways to use her energy and creativity."

Even though Devlin is no longer able to formally volunteer, she still leads an active life by visiting friends at the General Hospital and taking part in hobbies like swimming. When it comes to volunteering, Devlin has nothing but positive words.

"There really is nothing better than helping people," she said with a smile. "My mother always said that there are givers and receivers in life. She said, 'Kathleen, always be a giver.' And that's what I've done."

Evelyn Pham is a communications coordinator for Volunteer Edmonton. For more information or suggestions for story ideas please contact her at epham@volunteeredmonton.com or by calling 780-732-6655.

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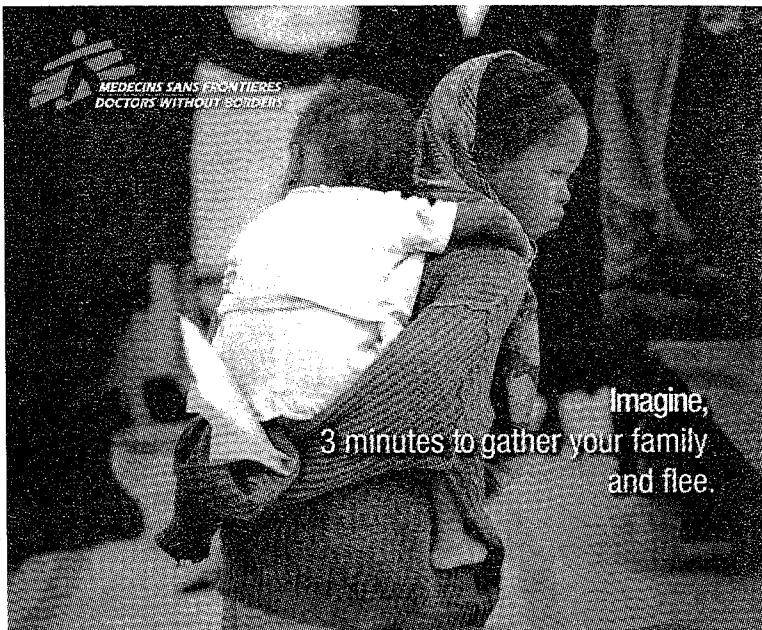
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