



411 Seniors Centre Society
Information and Referral Services:

Volunteer Feedback Report



Purpose

The purpose of this report is to enhance Information & Referral (I&R) services and strategize ways to better support 411 I&R volunteers during the most disruptive time. The senior volunteers are the pillars of the 411 Senior Centre Society and play an integral role in supporting communities in the Lower Mainland. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way the

government, non-profit, and corporate sectors deliver services to the public. This rapid shift has impacted many senior-based agencies, leaving the staff and volunteers to carry the extra burden. To make meaningful changes to I&R operations it is imperative to listen to volunteers’ experiences and get their feedback on ways 411 can better support I&R volunteers.

in-depth, one-on-one interview via Zoom or phone with each volunteer. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, participants provided verbal assent for the virtual interview. All interviews were recorded with permission from

the participants for data analysis. The data and results are anonymous to protect the participants’ identity and only the primary researcher can access the interview recordings, which will be deleted once the report is finalized.

Design and Approach

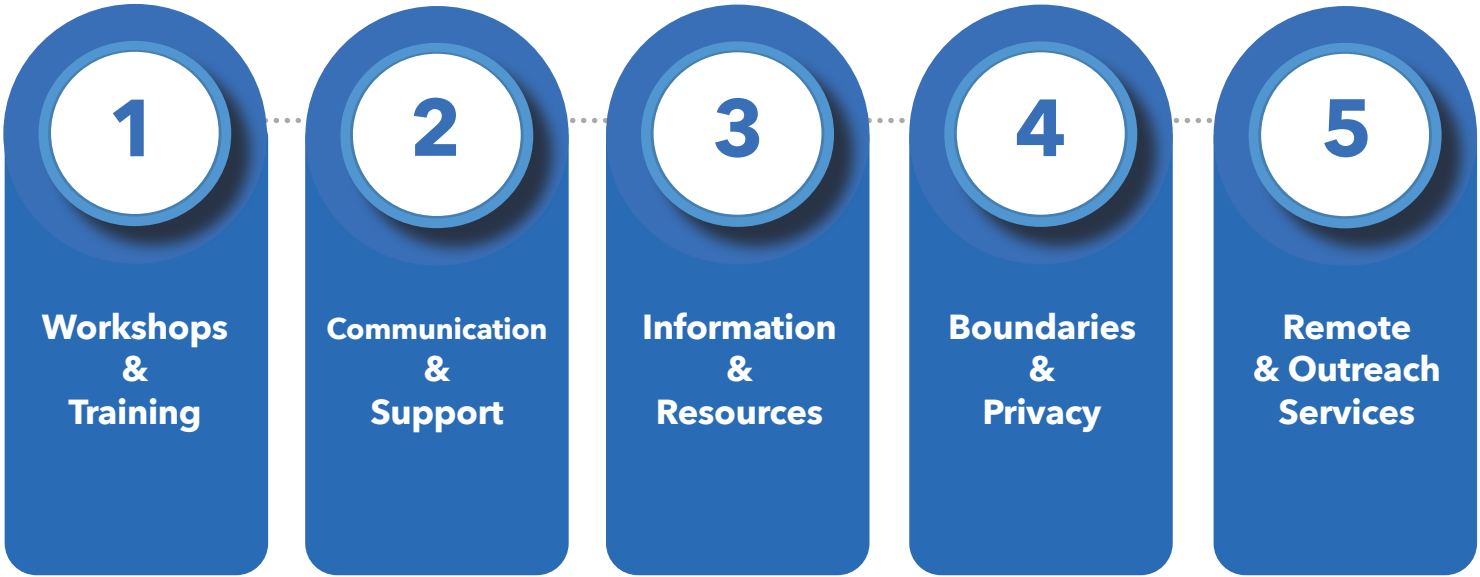
The qualitative research method was used for this I&R volunteer feedback report, which consisted of virtual one-on-one interviews and in-person group meetings. Before interviewing the I&R volunteers, an in-person group meeting with the current and former Seniors Services Coordinator took place to discuss I&R volunteer program operations, brainstorm ideas for interview questions, and understand 411 Seniors future directions for the I&R services program.

During the participant recruitment process, six active volunteers were working remotely, due to the increase in the COVID-19 Omicron variant. One of the active volunteers did not respond, so instead, five active I&R volunteers and one non-active volunteer were interviewed.

To capture the emerging themes from the I&R volunteer program, 411’s community-based researcher Hannah Shin conducted a semi-structured,

Discussion

Based on the interviews with the I&R volunteers, 411 categorized their feedback into five sections:





I&R Volunteer Feedback

1 | Workshops and Training

Based on the feedback we received, volunteers would like for 411 to facilitate workshops and training on various topics to stay up-to-date and provide accurate information to clients. This would allow for volunteers to:

- Enhance their existing skills to better serve their clients
- Ensure that the information they are providing is accurate and consistent

The volunteers expressed that they wanted a better understanding of the following topics:

- BC Housing
- Temporary housing for evicted clients
- Provincial disability services
- Health care subsidies (e.g., hearing aids, dental, medication)

- Other social assistance benefits (e.g., GIS, OAS, SAFER, CERB)

The following recommendations from the I&R volunteers are:

- Train sessions on filling out various application forms, using common as well as more unique scenarios that volunteers have encountered over the years to guide learning
- Conduct workshops on understanding various health and social issues that are impacting the community members and how to mitigate these issues
- Learn how to set boundaries with self, clients, and staff
- Workshops and training sessions always depend on volunteer availability. It would be useful to have a volunteer/coordinator survey on the frequency of workshops and training sessions.

2 | Communication and Support

The I&R volunteers are often working alone and do not interact much with other volunteers, especially with I&R volunteers. From the I&R volunteer feedback received, there is a lack of

internal communications between the I&R volunteers. The communications between the volunteers and the Seniors Services Coordinator are great, but there is room for improvement.

The following recommendations from the I&R volunteers are:

- Create a space for I&R volunteers to get together and share ideas, similar to the Community of Practice for the Navigation and Peer Support Program (NPS)
- Carry out a group debriefing session with the Seniors Services Coordinator on related I&R services topics
- Receive a weekly update email from

the Seniors Services Coordinator. This would ensure that I&R volunteers are up-to-date on I&R-related information. When there are no new updates, receiving an email stating that would help volunteers feel connected and informed.

- Send appreciation emails to all volunteers periodically or host a volunteer appreciation day
- Identify frequency of all meetings based on the volunteers' preferences

3 | Information and Resources

Currently, the I&R resources are not centralized, which can make it challenging for volunteers to have up-to-date information and resources. As well, volunteers would like to share their I&R resources with other volunteers, which would allow for knowledge exchange and staying engaged. All volunteers have expressed their concerns about providing accurate and consistent information and resources to their clients.

The following recommendations from the I&R volunteers are:

- Provide the ability to remotely access 411's I&R folders and files
- Create an online space for volunteers to share and pool their

I&R-related resources (e.g., cloud storage)

- Provide filled-out templates for all applications/forms for reference
- Have one I&R volunteer see the same clients for follow-up appointments
- Improve the client intake form:
 - One intake form for each client
 - Additional space for notes, special issues, and circumstances
 - Additional space for next course of action
 - Option for an email address
- Create a tracking system on clients and provide access to this system to streamline I&R services
 - For example, multiple volunteers

could be working on a case for one client and it would be helpful to know how they've been helped to that point, and what the next course of action should be

- Instruct all I&R volunteers to fill out the I&R summary report for

follow-up appointments so the next volunteers can see what has been done previously

- Instruct all I&R volunteers to inform clients to bring the summary reports when they come back for their follow-up appointment

4 | Boundaries and Privacy

Based on the feedback received from the I&R volunteers, some felt confused about their roles as an I&R volunteer and it was evident that volunteers often go above and beyond their position and scope to help clients. Also, volunteers have expressed the utmost importance of protecting the clients' confidentiality and privacy.

The following recommendations from the I&R volunteers are:

- Define clearly the volunteer's roles and responsibilities, as this would help volunteers set boundaries
- Volunteers and staff should protect and respect client's confidentiality and privacy by discussing I&R-related topics behind closed doors, as some clients may not feel comfortable discussing their issues in an open area



5 | Remote and Outreach Services

There are many challenges to providing I&R services remotely to clients. As mentioned in section 3, accessing 411's I&R resources and knowledge exchange came up repeatedly as this would help volunteers feel confident and engaged, especially when working remotely. Currently, there is one volunteer that offers I&R Outreach Services and there are no formal guidelines or safety protocols in place. The volunteer is using their best practice and judgement on personal and client safety.

There are many challenges to working remotely:

- Lack of access to printer, scanner, and various application forms
- Difficulty filtering information using Google

- Lack of in-person support from the Seniors Services Coordinator, especially when immediate assistance is required
- Connecting with a client with cognitive impairment or language barriers

The following recommendations from the I&R volunteers are:

- Designate a staff member or designated volunteer to drop off application forms, pick up forms that require scanning, mail out forms, etc.
- Provide remote access to 411's I&R folder / files
- Have the Seniors Services Coordinator work with the I&R Outreach volunteer to create guidelines and safety protocols.



**Our Volunteers
are the pillars of the 411
Seniors Centre Society**

**411
SENIORS
CENTRE
SOCIETY**