

DECLARATION FORM



Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation Declaration Form

1. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: Suzanne Thomas

Date: September 30, 2025

2. This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA in Outdoor Education.

Signed: Suzanne Thomas

Date: September 30, 2025

3. This dissertation is the result of my own independent work / investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed (candidate): Suzanne Thomas

Date: September 30, 2025

4. I hereby give consent for my dissertation, if accepted, to be available for photocopying, inter-library loan, and for deposit in the University's digital repository.

Signed (Candidate): Suzanne Thomas

Date: September 30, 2025

Supervisor's Declaration.

I am satisfied that this work is the result of the student's own efforts.

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Abstract

Public school athletics programs in Canada rely almost entirely on unpaid volunteers. In the context of rising living costs and the increasing demands of modern life, this study examines what motivates individuals to dedicate substantial time to volunteer coaching and how schools can better recruit and retain them. This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of secondary school volunteer coaches in the public school district of North Vancouver, British Columbia. Using semi-structured interviews, it explores both the motivations that drive these volunteers and the challenges they encounter while sustaining athletic programs without financial compensation. Fifteen participants were interviewed, with coaching experience in the district ranging from three seasons to more than fifty seasons. Through qualitative data analysis, several key themes emerged: motivations for volunteering, the changing nature of coaching and its associated challenges, and issues of retention and sustainability. Findings indicate that volunteer coaches are primarily motivated by a love of sport and the rewarding relationships they form with student-athletes. Although time pressures and other stressors influence their experiences, the critical factor driving volunteers to step away is ineffective leadership support—particularly a lack of trust and respect. The study findings suggest that volunteers should be more highly valued and supported, with emphasis placed on trusting their judgment and expertise. Doing so is essential to sustaining school sport programs and ensuring positive experiences for both coaches and student-athletes.

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