



INTERNATIONAL FLAVOUR

Having trouble finding staff? If so, there are plenty of non-Canadians just waiting to hear from you!

By Brad Edelson

No longer are camps the setting of old movies. Uncle Jim isn't running the waterfront, Aunt Sally has long left the arts & crafts building, and Grandpa Bill is no longer shooting hoops on the basketball court. Canadian camps are staffed from people across Canada and, now, around the world.

As many camp professionals already know, finding staff solely from within Canada has become increasingly difficult over the past several years. There are several reasons for this, including teenagers beginning their preparation for acceptance to institutions of higher learning earlier than yesteryear, the traditional "camper to staff" progression slowing down, and the stepping stones of camper to counsellor-in-training to junior counsellor to senior counsellor being less prevalent than ever before.

As such, Canadian camps are beginning to think globally when it comes to staffing. Finding staff from countries around the world is now an option for every camp — and one that camps of all shapes and sizes are starting to take advantage of.

Although it is true that international staff still fill a very small percentage of camp personnel and that Canadian staff still outnumber foreign staff — sometimes as much as 75 to one at various camps — the impact of hiring international staff members at camp is felt ten-fold to their numbers.

Ask a parent what they want from their child's camp experience and you probably wouldn't get the same response twice. Camps are constantly challenged with the need to find different forums for fulfilling a parent's need for their child. With international staff, camps have found a way to lighten that load, to add a new educational component to camp by adding staff that come with different cultural offerings.

International staff also take their jobs very seriously as they have traveled a long way for this work experience and don't want it to end prematurely. They bring new camp program ideas, a fresh energy to camp and are extremely valuable when working with international campers. They can teach new skills that are sometimes tough to find in a Canadian staff member (e.g., archery, English-style horseback riding, kayaking etc.), and their age range from 18 to 30, with the bulk falling into the 21 to 25 bracket, allows for additional help with senior counsellor roles and mature, sensitive positions.

In addition, the international schooling system is often different from the Canadian system, as it typically allows many international staff to work in spring, fall and winter to help out during shoulder seasons. If nothing else they make camp exciting for staff and campers who are used to the same language, activities and approach to life.

Many non-Canadians have much to offer a camp environment. Language, education, geography and culture provide the backdrop to a child's understanding of the world outside their home. International staff at camp have often become the first breakthrough experience in a child's development of world understanding. While it's hardly a crash course on international politics, it is a foundation for a child's development to understanding life outside of this country's border.

Hiring international staff has also become a lot easier. In 2001, the Canadian government made a change to its work permit/visa programs for international travelers. Before 2001 all overseas travelers who wanted to work in child care would require a health screening at a Canadian consulate or embassy in their home country. The government found this to be affecting its labour pool of international workers and made an exception in 2001 by creating the "5254-Camp Counselor" work permit and developing a list of countries that have health systems that were up to par or developed enough to not need to make a special trip to get an additional health screening.

As camps begin to make their move into this new era of educational camping, international staff will play a vital role, a role perceived as providing the highest quality camp experience to the future of child education and development.

Why not provide this extra advantage into the development of your camp communities? Why not give them every opportunity to learn about other cultures, hands on at an early age? Camp administrations and international recruiting agencies are starting to see the clear correlation here and soon children and parents will as well.

So as Canada opens its doors to more international visits from across the pond and around the world, the camp industry does the same because if your camp doesn't have international staff flare yet, it very well may soon. **CC**

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