

International Staff

Adding a new flare to Canadian Camps

By Brad Edelson

No longer are camps of the movie style. Uncle Jim isn't running the waterfront, Aunt Sally has long left the arts & crafts building, Grandpa Bill is no longer shooting hoops on the basketball court and oh how we miss Grandma Sue's cooking. Canadian camps are staffed from people across Canada and, now, around the world.

Camp life in Canada has taken an educational spin and parents expect nothing less. Camp offers a place to learn, make friends and partake in unique experiences that can't be found in school, the backyard or at the local park.

Camp directors may not readily admit it, but it has long become the truth that staffing camps solely from within Canada has become increasingly difficult over the past several years. Younger and younger children begin the preparation for acceptance to institutions of higher learning, and in the past camps enjoyed a "camper to staff" progression. The stepping stones of camper to counsellor-in-training (CIT) to junior counsellor to senior counsellor is less prevalent than yesteryear. While some parents might complain about how their child may not get to have the same camp experience that they once had, camp directors have actually said the opposite. They've found a new means to offer a more diverse and frankly more advanced camping experience.

Camps from across Canada 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. Now, let's be clear, international staff fills a very small percentage of camp personnel and there is no doubt that Canadian staff still outnumber foreign staff; sometimes as much as 50-1 at

various camps, however, 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. Camp directors are constantly challenged with the need to find different forums for fulfilling a parent's need for their child. With international staff, camp directors 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.

In 2001, the Canadian government made a change to its work permit/visa programs for international travelers. Before 2001 all overseas travelers that 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 a additional health screening.

Any non-Canadian will have much to offer to a camp environment. Language, education, geography and culture provide the backdrop to a child's understanding of the world outside their home. So many children are raised in suburban neighborhoods in cookie cutter homes, with a lack of knowledge of the rest of the world. International staff at camp have often become the first breakthrough experience in a child's development of world understanding. While it's hardly CBC world



political news their learning, it's a foundation for a child's development to understanding life outside of this country's border.

While most camps do not have international staff and the ones that do are limited in numbers in many cases, their presence in Canadian camping is still felt. 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 camping experience to the future of Canadian child education and development. Why not provide this extra advantage into the development of our children? Why not give them every opportunity to learn about other cultures, hands on at an early age? Camp directors and international recruiting agencies 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 it won't be long until you very well may be sending your child to a camp with something new to offer an international flare.



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