A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

As a young person, I always took great satisfaction from getting involved. Whether it was singing in my high school choir, preparing a slideshow for graduation, working as a summer camp counselor, or volunteering at the local pool, I found the benefits of 'keeping busy' to be many. Not only does time fly when you're having fun, but extracurriculars help keep you focused during a stage in life when it can be easy to lose your way. These activities gave me a sense of direction and purpose, and more often than not led to solid, meaningful friendships.

Yet despite all of these endeavours, to this day there is nothing I have enjoyed more than participating in exchange programs (or hosting visitors from other countries). My experience with this sort of thing began at the age of 13 when I volunteered to have a young girl from Japan stay with my family for a period of five days. We had such a wonderful time that we all cried when she had to leave! A year later, I traveled to France with a group from my grade nine class where we were billeted for three weeks; this time, the students we stayed with returned to Canada, making it a true 'exchange.' For many years after that, my parents doled out stamp after stamp for letters sent overseas, and I always came home from school with great anticipation, hoping to hear from either Ayako or Sophie. Our correspondence provided me not just with news about my friends' personal lives and families, but with insight into other cultures and different ways of seeing the world.

Then, while away at university, I applied to the federal government's Official Languages Summer Bursary Program. I was accepted and spent five weeks in beautiful Chicoutimi, Quebec. This program offers both classroom instruction and the chance to live with a local family in your other official language, which in my case is French. I can't tell you how much I learned about my own country in those 35 days (and how much I still crave my host mother's home cooking!). Much like the young people who participate in the *Katimavik* and *Encounters with Canada* programs described in this issue, I met students my age from all ten provinces – from British Columbia to Newfoundland. I think we all came away from the experience feeling a real connection with each other, and with the spectacular natural environment in Quebec as well.

Youth engagement is a very important process and an even more important tool. It will help us to encourage the next generation to take responsibility and pride in the future of our country. Through involvement in social, political and economic activity, young Canadians will not only get to know Canada better, but themselves also. This is vital to the development of active and caring citizens. Each of the authors published in this issue is contributing in some way to youth engagement. I would like to thank them for their interest and congratulate them on a job well done.

Allison Anderson