KATIMAVIK:

Designing the Future for Youth

ABSTRACT

Executive Director Jean-Guy Bigeau explains the Katimavik philosophy and reports on the organization's future projects and partnerships. He describes the many significant advantages for Canadian men and women, as well as for the Canadian economy. Katimavik is Canada's leading national youth volunteer-service program.

JEAN-GUY BIGEAU
Jean-Guy Bigeau is Executive Director of Katimavik.

Since 1977, Katimavik has provided Canadian youth with the opportunity to challenge and further themselves through volunteer work in communities across Canada. The program has continuously evolved to respond to the needs of our young people, guiding them towards new and exciting experiences on their road to self-discovery.

For nine months, participants live in groups of 11 with francophones and anglophones originating from all regions of Canada, supervised by a Project Leader. In total, each group lives and works in three communities across Canada for three months at a time. The program incorporates five strategic learning programs: leadership, second language, cultural discovery, environmental protection and adoption of a healthy lifestyle.

Katimavik offers young Canadian men and women aged 17 to 21 the opportunity to acquire valuable personal and professional skills through "service learning," a socio-educational program based on volunteer work for community organizations, where participants make a significant contribution by sharing their talents and knowledge. In turn, the communities which host Katimavik projects benefit from the partcipants' contributions by improving the quantity and quality of services offered to the members of their community. Recent work projects include the restoration of a old mine into a historical site, assisting with public relations for a museum, contributing to the start-up of a polar bear conservancy, helping teachers in a classroom, building trails and organizing fundraising activities for a food bank.

In the past year, we have signed two major partnerships that will enhance Katimavik's mission: to foster the development of Canadian youth through volunteer service. The first is a work partnership agreement with Parks Canada for the 2004-2005 program year, which will see participants working in six national parks across Canada. The second is an agreement with Malaspina University-College in Nanaimo, British Columbia, to recognize the program for academic credit. Starting with the 2003-2004 program year, participants who complete Katimavik receive three credits from the school's Recreation Management department. This agreement is a major achievement for Katimavik, in that it represents the first post-secondary institution with which our organization has established an official partnership. We are working on putting in place similar partnerships with other universities across Canada, and we hope to have finalized several by the end of this year. Robert Giroux, former president of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), has recently joined the Katimavik Board of Directors and is lending his support on this initiative.

We are also working on a proposal to establish a National Youth Service Policy. It would solidify the partnership between Katimavik and the federal government, help to strengthen the capacity of the volunteer-based community organizations that we work with and would promote civic responsibility amongst our youth. National youth service embraces service learning, an essential component of the Katimavik program.

Katimavik is a positive and constructive experience for Canadian youth. Participants share their education and talents with community organizations, contributing to services that benefit the community and its members. In return, they further their skills through their volunteer work, interaction with the members of their host community, learning activities and group life. They gain an increased knowledge of themselves, their strengths and capabilities, and discover the many cultures that make up Canadian society.

As well as being a positive experience for youth, the program contributes to the Canadian economy. According to a study conducted by the firm Étude Économique Conseil in 2002, for every dollar invested in the Katimavik program $1.49 is returned to Canadian society. In the 2003-2004 program year, 517,318 hours of volunteer efforts by Katimavik participants were achieved in 75 host communities across Canada, in collaboration with over 470 community organizations, valued at $7,100,000. Many of the projects or services offered by the community organizations Katimavik partners with would not realized without the volunteer efforts made by Katimavik participants.