



Play infused with science helps boost children's summer program

SPORTS, SWIMMING AND OTHER PHYSICAL play, art classes and a taste of something new – science experiments – were all part of the programming that Madison LaSaga brought to the 2021 summer program for children from the Mi'kmaq communities of Flat Bay East and West and St. Teresa in southwestern Newfoundland and Labrador.

Madison wanted to enrich the program by introducing the children, ages three to ten, to an early version of STEM, an acronym for the fields of science, technology, engineering and math. A believer in the concept that “it’s never too early to learn about STEM,” Madison, a member of the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation who is from Stephenville, was one of four national winners of the 2021 STEAM Horizon



FLAT BAY BAND INC.,
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Youth Mentorship Program



Madison LaSaga (third person on the right, white dress) with the Summer Staff she was in charge of supervising

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Cassandra Beanland, administration
at the Flat Bay Band office

Scholarship, in part for her initiatives within Girl Guides to broaden STEM opportunities for young girls.

“Flat Bay is a remote and rural area, and beyond school, there’s not a lot of other places where children here are exposed to these fields,” she says. “My goal was to introduce fun activities like science experiments to give them a head start in understanding what STEM careers are all about.”

Flat Bay Band Inc. was able to hire Madison to coordinate the children’s program, thanks to funding from the CPRA Youth Employment Experience program. The program supports employment opportunities that help young people develop skills in the parks and recreation sectors, while also helping organizations augment their programming.

“I love working with children and I worked with the community’s summer program last year. This year, I had more of a leadership role, designing programming and supervising 13 summer students who helped me guide the kids’ activities,” says Madison.

“I’ve had leadership roles before, but this taught me different kinds of responsibility, including for building bonds with children in your care and nurturing the relationships to leave a lasting positive impact of them.”

Madison recognizes the value of the experience in relation to her professional future, as she is looking at a career in

medicine, potentially pediatrics, and definitely wants to work in a rural or remote community.

Madison’s mentor was Cassandra Beanland, who works in administration at the Flat Bay Band office. She says it was rewarding to see the growth in Madison’s confidence and leadership skills over the summer as she guided her peers.

“Madison went above and beyond what we were expecting. In addition to the programming, she was also excellent at communicating with the parents about upcoming activities and any changes in plans.”

Giving parents plenty of information was important, says Cassandra, because the children’s program was at a new location this year, the recently completed children’s section of Calm Waters Mi’kmaq Park.

“My goal was to create a safe, fun and caring environment for the kids, and their thank-you cards and the artwork they gave to staff helped us feel we’d achieved that goal,” says Madison.

The summer program reached a new level of popularity in 2021, Cassandra says. “Quite a few children who had never been involved with the program before heard what their friends were doing and decided to join. This was the best summer ever for engagement with the children of our community.” 🍁