



Group trip to Dalhousie Agricultural College, Bible Hill

Youth helps Bible Hill summer camp accommodate children with disabilities

IN THE SUMMER OF 2023, HALEY SMITH

was able to add a new position to her summer camp staff: a day camp inclusion support leader.

The inclusion of this new role meant that children with diverse needs, who typically wouldn't attend camp, had the opportunity to make friends and have fun with kids their age.



BIBLE HILL,
NOVA SCOTIA

Canada

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Group trip to Discovery Centre Halifax

“For children with disabilities, this opened a whole new door,” says Smith, the Village of Bible Hill’s Parks and Recreation Director. “We were able to accommodate up to 10 children with complex needs this summer – two of whom would have never come to camp if we didn’t have this support available which is amazing.”

Smith was able to create this summer position thanks to funding from the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association’s Youth Employment Experience (YEE) program. This program, funded by the Government of Canada, is designed to build skills and remove barriers to employment for youth. The program further builds capacity in the parks and recreation sector by providing mentorship support to each youth throughout their work experience.

After a series of interviews, Smith knew she wanted to hire Olivia – a Mount Saint Vincent University student in the school’s child and youth program.

“Olivia was definitely the most qualified for the role,” says Smith, adding that Olivia had previous experience working with children with Down syndrome, Autism and other neurodivergent conditions. “It was a great asset that Olivia had worked with young and energetic kids, and she was prepared for the role.”

Olivia says she wanted to apply for the job because she wanted to help children in the community have a fun day camp experience – particularly kids who wouldn’t otherwise have the opportunity.

“I wanted to create a positive and supportive environment for campers - regardless of their abilities – and give them the opportunity to feel welcomed, valued and accepted by

fellow campers and staff,” says Olivia, who plans to be an elementary school teacher when she graduates.

Olivia adds that she was able to help campers with various abilities take part in recreational activities, and where necessary, make accommodations for them in order to enhance their participation and success at camp.

“It was a great opportunity, as I was able to support a positive camp experience for campers by helping them from friendships, build confidence, and participate in camp activities,” Olivia says.

Smith adds that Olivia had great interactions with the children, and the campers loved to be around her. But she also saw amazing growth and changes in Olivia throughout the summer.

“When I first hired Olivia, she was really quiet and a little timid,” Smith says. “But throughout the summer she broke out of that, and she grew quite a bit. I think when she’s done her degree, having this experience will help her a lot in her teaching career.”

Smith says it was the first time the village was able to offer programming to children with behavioural needs and those who need extra support, and Olivia’s position was a “small stepping stone” in ensuring that camp be available to and inclusive of children with varying abilities.

“In previous years, we had kids who weren’t able to remain engaged in camp because we didn’t have the resources to help them,” she says. “While this wasn’t a position where we could take every single child with a disability, it was still a starting point to get more children involved in recreation activities.” 🍁