

YOUR CHILD'S TAMAKWA CAREER

In your child's book of life, what will the Tamakwa chapter be like?

WHAT TO EXPECT... OR NOT EXPECT

Parents have great dreams for their kids.... naturally. Our particular generation of parents typically have had some form of camp experience at some point in life and dream of their child savouring the same life memory. So it is not unusual for a first time camp parent to call with more than just the coming summer in mind. They hope for the beginning of a beautiful relationship between their child and a camp of their child's future, the place where he/she will hopefully take to immediately, thrive every summer, grow, blossom, and develop skills, bonds, and friendships that will last a lifetime. Well, that dream could have come right from the pages of our brochure because that truly sums up the ideal Tamakwa summer camp experience.

Tamakwa absolutely believes in that ideal and we try to foster that reality for every child that crosses our path. The reason we're addressing it here, however, is to give an honest look at what a family can expect if you wish to look ahead, beyond just this one summer. Parents have asked us, "Will this be the camp for my child's future?" "If we sign up our child this summer, is there an assurance that he or she will be able to continue right on up to a staff position?" We feel it is only fair to present some of the opportunities as well as the realities that lie ahead as they progress through their years at Tamakwa.

A fact of our life is the historically small size of Tamakwa, which is a mixed blessing. One of our strengths is the intimacy of a close-knit community. At the same time, that fact limits the number of campers (and staff) we can accommodate at any given time. As your child comes up the ranks, this fact will come into play.

2, 4, OR 8-WEEK SESSION. THE NUMBER OF WEEKS IS AT YOUR DISCRETION

The first opportunity is our two-week option for our youngest campers (grades 1 to 3). It has become a popular first time choice to get a camper's feet wet. After that first year, the minimum session is four weeks. We treat each 4-week session as its own full entity -- with a beginning, middle, and end -- so that any length of stay promises a very full intensity packed Tamakwa experience.

As a parent of a 4-week camper, you may come to a point of wishing to extend your child's enrollment to 8 weeks. Here is where the reality of Tamakwa's small intimate size can sometimes become a hurdle. Returning campers will always have the opportunity to have their space protected from year to year, but in this age of full enrollment and waiting lists, it has not always been possible to grant every request to either switch from one session to the other, or to upgrade from 4 weeks to 8 weeks. It has been a simple matter of arithmetic; there haven't always been the numbers of beds available to accommodate the demand.

AS OUR SONG GOES, "YOU KNOW YOU'LL NEVER WANNA, WANNA LEAVE TAMAKWA"

On the one hand, the culture of Tamakwa is to embrace the camp family, foster a sense of loyalty, and make kids love it so much that they leave wanting more. On the other hand, it appears hypocritical when we sometimes lack the physical space for 4-week campers to enroll for a full 8 weeks. In those instances, we have had no choice but to put loyal returning campers on the waiting list for a full 8-week stay. It happens; not always, but it does happen. When it does happen, whenever spaces do become available, priority is given to the oldest campers and we work our way down the age scale. We always try our best to work it out and whether someone has to patiently sit on the waiting list for a while, we've been pretty lucky in recent years at finally being able to accommodate them by the time summer rolls around. But this honestly cannot always be guaranteed. The good news is: at some point or another, any camper who so desires, will get to attend Tamakwa for a full 8-week summer, barring of course any extenuating circumstances.

THE C.I.T. YEAR (AGE 16)

"If my child comes up the ranks as a camper, is he/she guaranteed a space in the CIT (Counselor In Training) Program?" We wish that was the case, but once again, Tamakwa's size is a limiting factor. As you can read in the "CIT" section of our Green Book, we will always desire Tamakwa campers to have the opportunity to complete their camper years with a CIT summer. Again, because of the finite size of the CIT program, we sometimes get more applicants than space allows. When that happens, we have to go through a selection process using a multitude of criteria. We will always look favourably upon campers who have been loyal, tenured, spirited, kind, and good with children, energetic, and wanting to give back what camp has given to them. Nevertheless, because an important role of our CITs & Junior Counselors is to assist teaching activity skills, a camper's activity

skill levels play an increasingly important part in his/her overall profile as a CIT candidate. We start instilling this importance among our campers as early as two summers BEFORE they turn 16, in order to prepare them for the impending reality and give them time to achieve high level skill awards.

We wish we could automatically accept every camper turning 16 into our CIT program, but some years are more competitive than others and demand of us to draw some very fine – and often painful – lines. It's one of the facts of our small camp's life.

STAFFHOOD AND BEYOND

What makes Tamakwa a desirable camp to so many parents is our adherence to high standards, particularly the set of expectations we set for staff performance. Age 17 is a crossroad for many Tamakwans, because they arrive at that phase with hopes and expectations to continue at camp, yet at this point the rules have been changed a bit. No longer can they assume a place will be theirs. The decision is no longer up to their parents, based on their prerogative to send their child to camp; the decision is now up to the camp based on who best can rise to the task of caring for **other people's children**. Tamakwa still maintains its place in what has always been a precious relationship with Tamakwans: i.e. their childhood home away from home; the source of a greater "family" affiliation; and the place that nurtured their loyalty, growth, and development. But...at this point in a camper's life, Tamakwa also takes on an **additional** role in that precious relationship.... the role of **employer**. In that role, the camp must be true to its set of high standards.

There is a formal evaluation of each staff applicant's performance as camper and CIT. There is also a specific set of prerequisites – including lifeguard certification -- and an interview. Although Tamakwa campers who have come up the system comprise the most desirable pool of candidates, not every Tamakwan will automatically deserve a staff position. Criteria such as enthusiasm, teamwork, attitude, initiative, and responsibility play a big part in our assessment. And, again, what makes an applicant all the more **marketable** in an increasingly competitive Tamakwa job market is activity skill levels, the concrete objective skills that enable him/her to teach children. That makes them more marketable at Tamakwa, at any other camp, and at any other job in the field of youth recreation.

Parents of Tamakwa job applicants sometimes ask us, "Isn't it enough that our child has been a loyal, dedicated Tamakwan, who is caring and kind and good with children?" Our answer: All that absolutely **IS** important and we will always prefer that person in general as a future staff member, but honestly.... no, that alone is not enough. Did they make the best of their time at camp? Did they use their time constructively and have the makings of a positive role model for others? Did they behave in a mature responsible way, or did they show negative attitude traits with their peers or leaders? Did they take initiative or did they constantly have to be told what to do?

In other words, we give high marks to someone who has come up the ranks making the essential transition from camper mentality to staff mentality: i.e. the understanding that camp is not just a great place to attend and have fun in the summer, but that it is now a **job**, a place of **employment**, where the reason for being there is first and foremost **CHILDCARE**.

Our years of experience tell us that not everyone arrives at this readiness at the same time in life. Like any other aspect of development, it's everyone at his/her own pace. Therefore, it is not uncommon for many graduating campers to pursue other summer endeavours, only to return as Tamakwa staff – and in many cases our **best** staff -- in later years.

It is never too late to come back to Tamakwa. Some of our most cherished administrators were campers once-upon-a-time, for whom the campfire in their hearts burned for a long time, only to lead them back later in life to give a new generation of Tamakwa campers the time of their lives.

