

# YES, YOU CAN AFFORD A SUMMER JOB AT CAMP

by David Bale

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“No, I can't work in a summer camp....I need to make some money for school.”

I can't tell you how many times camp directors hear that at university job fairs. There's no question about it, the harsh financial realities of tuition, books, housing, and pizza are compelling. We've all been there. But a summer job in a children's camp is much more than simply an unaffordable luxury for hard-working career-bound students. Before you judge a camp job by its dollars, consider the immeasurable rewards. Some of them are even necessities for your future beyond university.

Let's get the financial issue out of the way first. Sure, a job in the city will pay more than the average camp job, but consider how much you will spend by living in the city. One former camp counselor did just that. After calculating the most basic expenses of summer life in the city - food, rent, a reasonable amount of recreating, and the forgotten loonies frivolously thrown here and there - he found that his savings from a summer job in Toronto were not significantly greater than his take home pay from a previous summer at an overnight children's camp. There you have no expenses.

Summer camps offer a number of positions, the most common being the cabin counselor. As a counselor, you are the supervisor - “big sister or brother” - of a small group of campers. Typically, you live with the kids, accompany them to the various sports and creative activities, help lead them on canoe trips and other outings, supervise them at meals, and generally look out for their well-being. You are THE role model for these impressionable young people: motivating them, keeping harmony

among them, energizing them, teaching new skills to them, humoring them (and more often, *them* humoring *you*), and building self-confidence in them. You touch their lives; in a way, a bit of you rubs off on them.

This is just one of the non-monetary rewards. You will also become more resourceful. You will build your own self-confidence, not to mention leadership skills, communication skills, and your people skills in general. Existing communally day-in and day-out with the same couple hundred

people all inhabiting a small patch of land for the same purpose is quite an achievement in itself. Some of those people will give you a real lesson in tolerance. And some of them will become your most enduring friends.

The easy sell is the part about the environment. At camp, the occasional moose, beaver and Northern Lights are just part of the normal workplace ambience. For all the lip service paid to its preciousness, there is no better way to understand and appreciate nature than to work and play within it. This, together with human growth, is what camping is all about.

There's a scene in the film “City Slickers” where Billy Crystal and his urban

cowpoke buddies are laughing triumphantly, having just moved their cattle herd across a river. Compared with their robotic lives in the city, this - they were beaming - is a real meaningful life achievement. Farfetched as that moment is to most of the cinema audience, it strikes close to home for anyone who has ever worked in a children's summer camp. Not that cattle are typically raised in a summer camp, but confidence and self-esteem are. And as meaningful life achievements go, the satisfaction from helping a child conquer a fear or learn a new skill at camp is right up there with cattle driving. Either one will give you a summer that will stay with you the rest of your life, but camp smells a little better.

