

Two youth from NWT volunteering on Six Nations

By Donna Duric
Writer

Trees surprised them.

They had never been to a pow wow.

The time change, weather and even the people, its all different for two young women from the Northwest Territories.

The two young women are thrilled to be spending five weeks volunteering with Six Nations Parks and Recreation and the Six Nations Food Bank as part of a Northern youth abroad program.

Shania Desjarlais, 17, lives in Yellowknife and is of the Lutselk'e Dene nation.

Courtney Keevark, 16, is from the Inuvialuit community of Tuktoyaktuk.

The two are being immersed in a new community and new culture during the five-week trip to the furthest stretches of south-

ern Canada.

"We came down here to gain experience living in the south," said Keevark. "We're here for a trip called Youth Abroad. It's a non-profit organization that tries to better your future. It's like you're getting work experience, knowledge, speaking skills and stuff like that for your future."

She and Desjarlais are staying with locals Bud and Brooke Powless, who they can't say enough good things about.

Keevark said, "I didn't know what I wanted to do in the future which is exactly why I chose to go on this program. I'm hoping this program will help me figure out what I want to do in the future."

The two have been busy volunteering at Six Nations Parks and Recreation's summer sports camp, as-

sisting with youth ages 5 and 6 and working at the Six Nations Food Bank.

"It's amazing," Keevark said. "I don't want to go home. It's so beautiful here. There's so many things that I've experienced already that I haven't experienced before."

The animals, for one, are different, she said. She'd never seen a pig, cow or donkey.

She attended her first live car race at the Ohsweken Speedway. They went golfing and bowling for their first time, as well.

"I'm still going to be trying more stuff," said Keevark.

The two are going to experience the trip of a lifetime when they go to Canada's Wonderland for the first time as part of a end of summer camp trip Six Nations Parks and Recreation is planning.

"It's a big difference," said Desjarlais. The time change, the weather, the people - it's all different, she said. She said Yellowknife can get pretty hot in the summer, but the humidity in southern Ontario is different.

Keevark doesn't want to go home. "I want to stay, actually," she said, giggling. "Brooke and Bud are my new family," she says laughing.

Desjarlais said the experience is reinforcing her desire to leave Yellowknife to pursue higher education.

Life is much different for youth in the north. "What we do for fun - we have to make our own fun. Most people in the summer...we go out fishing, we hunt whales, and in the winter-time we go out camping with our skidoos. We have to make our own fun in these tiny communities but



Courtney Keevark, 16 and Shania Desjarlais, 17 are part of a Northern Youth abroad program. (Photo by Donna Duric)

when we come here it's so awesome we can just go to places. It's so fun."

The two are going to make some Inuit food, like caribou and Beluga whale, for the Powless family before they leave.

"I would like to thank Bud and Brooke Powless for choosing to host us," she said.

Desjarlais is grateful for Bud and Brooke Powless. "It's like a home away from home."