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Annie Karpik and Alexandra Ungalaq from Iqaluit are participating through Northern Youth Abroad to gain work and life experience away from home. Alli Vail Photo
Parksville Qualicum Beach News

Way down south in Parksville

By Alli Vail - Parksville Qualicum Beach News

Published: July 17, 2008 7:00 PM

Pair from Nunavut in city to learn what it's like to be away from home

The ice just melted in Alexandra Ungalaq's home town of Igloolik, Nunavut.

But she wasn't there to see it. Ungalaq and Annie Karpik, from Pangnirtung, Nunavut, are in Parksville as

part of their involvement with Northern Youth Abroad.

The program is designed to offer northern residents a chance to learn new skills and develop their future career interest. It also prepares them for living away from home and coping with culture shock while they study away from home.

Being involved with Northern Youth Abroad can offer both women opportunities down the road. They can go to Africa and work there for an entire summer as part of a second year in the program.

Ungalaq, although she has visited Ontario and Saskatchewan, had never been to British Columbia before.

“Arriving in B.C. was very beautiful, all those mountains and lots of trees,” she said.

“We don’t have trees,” Karpik said, adding there are however, mountains around her village.

Karpik has visited the Island before — her father lives in Comox.

If Parksville seems small to some, it’s much larger than Karpik’s and Ungalaq’s communities, which both have roughly 1,300 and 1,700 inhabitants respectively.

There are no banks, and no restaurants.

Karpik’s home is a four hour plane ride from Iqaluit, the capital city of Nunavut.

Living in such remote communities has another challenge. Everything is very expensive. A jug of milk costs \$17 and a can of soda is \$4.50. When the supply boat comes it, the price drops to \$2 for awhile.

“It’s home,” Karpik said. “It’s nice. You can go hunting and boating throughout the whole year. When it gets really cold it’s kind of scary to go out.”

But the cost may be prohibitive for Karpik, who doesn’t know if she will move back to Ungalaq after she finishes a hair styling program in Iqaluit.

“It all depends,” Karpik said. “It depends on how fast the prices are going up.”

She said with everything being so expensive, she doesn’t know if she can live with it forever.

Ungalaq is planning to go into nursing.

The one thing Karpik and Ungalaq both never had any trouble with was finding work in their respective communities.

“It’s very easy to get a job,” Ungalaq said, noting most of the work is in grocery stores.

Here, Ungalaq is volunteering with the Regional District of Nanaimo summer camps, and Karpik is likely to do some volunteer work with the Society of Organized Services. They also have to do a scavenger hunt and collect things like the mayor’s autograph and mow an senior’s lawn.

But it’s not all work and no play. The pair has spent some time at the beach and joined a recreational beach volleyball league.

“I’ve never played volleyball before,” said Karpik. “It was fun.”

“I’d love to go bungee jumping,” Ungalaq said.

“I love it,” Karpik said of her visit here. “It’s the best experience you can get. It’s really helped me, with that going away from home kind of thing. I’ve never really left home.”

Karpik and Ungalaq have also gotten to know each other better. They met for the first time during orientation before leaving their province, and had only communicated online before that.

“Sometimes I cannot understand what [Alexandra] is saying, because of different accents,” Karpik said good naturedly.

The two are staying at the Schafi home during their visit.

“They’re very clean,” said Roz Schafi, noting usually the family has male home stay visitors. “It’s nice. My daughter really loves them.”

Schafi said there are lots of pluses for the family too, because it gets to learn about a different culture. Schafi herself was born in the North, although she did not grow up there.


She said she was interested to learn a bit about where she was born.

The general public will also get to hear about the North. Karpik and Ungalaq have to give two public presentations about northern culture and life before they head back to their homes Aug. 7.

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