Empowered by Ayalik

Fund honouring late teen helps youth through land trips

Pherson Otokiak of Cambridge Bay learned how to start a fire, swim in open learned to portage a canoe from one river to another, in Algonquin Park.

"I had never carried a heavy canoe before. It was a lot of work," said MacPherson Otokiak. "When we actually got in the water I was kind

of nervous. I used water."

When it was

"It was frustrating at first, because I'm not really good

MacPherson Otokiak participated in a 13-day Outward

Cambridge Bay. Eric died suddenly in Dec. 2014 of cardiac arrhythmia at age 19.

The fund now has over 300 donors. Five youth received grants in the first summer, and this year the fund sent twice as many on confidence and skill building trips.

"We believe, because of the experience with our own son, this is what will ultimately help them to achieve success," said David Pelly.

This summer, the grant allowed teens to go on a canoe trip on the North Arm of Great Slave Lake from Behchoko to

> Yellowknife, a 13-day seakayak expedition on the west coast of Vancouver Island, and a traditional skills wilderness camp in the Mackenzie Mountains.

"We fund participation in a program," said David Pelly, which might mean buying the youth hiking boots. But the Pellys are hoping to establish a relationship with a Northern airline to offset the cost of airfare, which eats up most of the

"Airfare is a huge expense," and the more remote the community the more expensive,

The Ayalik Fund is intended to benefit those who have limited access to travel, either financially or socially, and for youth who are shy and less likely to seek out these opportunities.

Pelly said 100 per cent up North."

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of the funding goes towards sending the children, as all the administrative work is done by himself.

"I feel everyday as if I am spending time with my son, who I miss terribly," he said.

The trips also help young people build community.

"I got to meet new people and learn new things," Mac-Pherson Otokiak said. "It was great to be away from home to see what else the world can bring."

On this trip the world brought her Hazel, a tent-mate and new friend from New

"Me and Hazel are both heavy sleepers and we were the hardest to wake up every morning. That was my favourite part because me and her were sort of the same but different."

The girls are keeping in touch despite the distance.

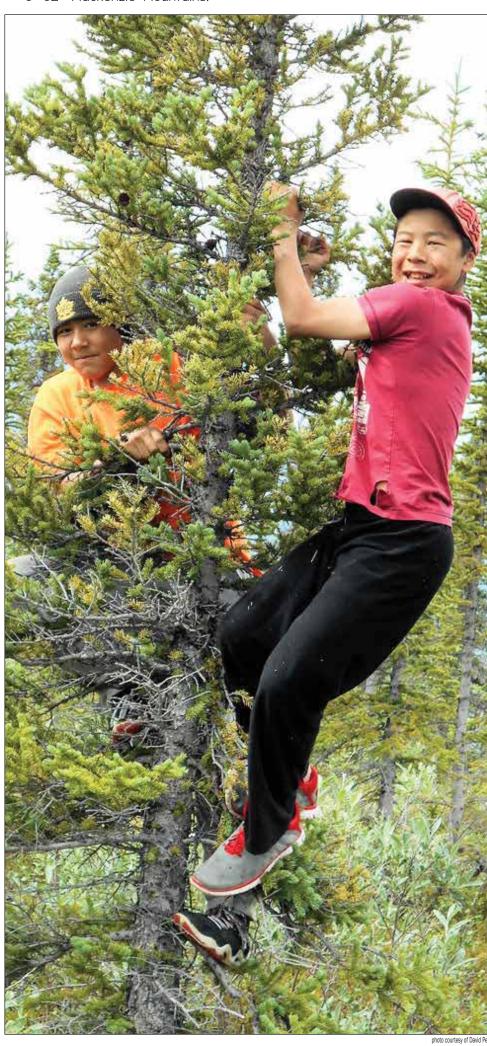
She sent a letter to the fund noting how happy she was to have met Hazel, and how exciting it was to grow stronger in nature.

"I learned that here are good days and bad days and you just have to look up and be a prouder person than who you were yesterday," she wrote.

After participating on the Algonquin Park trip, Cambridge Bay's Annie Aktologaknak Haongak, 15, also wrote a letter expressing her thanks for the experience.

"If it weren't for you Ayalik Fund, I wouldn't get to meet these wonderful people," wrote Haongak.

"This was a once-in-a lifetime opportunity for people 45-6 ° Ayalik Fund Palb56660 b) Δ6H1_16, 4DF1σ, 14L PA a 206, (LT6 159560), Δ66-6966 ΔCDCD66, DC-206 8-06 L6600 DPD%(56)[DC 19/56ND05](DC5d1)56[Q06 12975CD56N5DC DQ[5040 ⁵b⁵bΔ^c Mackenzie Mountains.



Ayalik Fund grantees Carter Ehaloak, left, and Roy Nanogak, both 13, of Cambridge Bay participated in an eight-day Northern Youth Leadership traditional skills wilderness camp in the Mackenzie Mountains.

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"Our ocean is too cold, so I

"This was

a once-in-

a-lifetime

opportunity."

Ānnie Aktologaknak

Haongak

don't bother doing anything in there. To be out there where the water is nice and warm, it was great."

navigate the river from a map and direct her 14-person group.

by Beth Brown Northern News Services Ikaluktutiak/Cambridge Bay

This summer, Erika Macwater and open a can with a knife. The 16-year-old also the back country of Ontario's

the paddle strokes they showed me and I got the hang of it right when we got in the

her turn to serve as leader for the day, she learned to

at maps."

Bound canoe trip thanks to the Ayalik Fund, a special grant for Inuit youth from Nunavut. She said it was the best trip she has ever been on.

David and Laurie Pelly started the fund in 2015 to commemorate their son Eric Ayalik Okalitana Pelly, whom they adopted as a toddler in

JONDALT Ontario's Algonquin Park.

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