

Eric Ayalik Pelly, age 16, at the end of a day of white-water kayaking in the Slave River, Fort Smith, NWT.

© Rita Antoniak



Ayalik Fund

Changing Lives, One Youth at a Time

When 13-year-old Eekeeluak Avalak, from Cambridge Bay, returned home after a 10-day backpacking adventure in the mountains, he wrote: “This trip was a life-changing experience for me” and asked if he could go back again next year, for a longer trek. Feedback like that is typical for the Nunavut youth who have an opportunity to experience a challenging adventure in the wilderness, thanks to the Ayalik Fund and its legion of donors and supporters (including First Air).

The Ayalik Fund has been operating for less than three years. In the first summer, 2015, Shania Angohiatok and Ian Kavanna joined an Outward Bound expedition in the Rocky Mountains. Since that time, a total of 35 youths have experienced a variety of outdoor challenges. They have climbed to the top of the Mackenzie Mountains, paddled on Great Slave Lake, hiked in the Rockies, explored Clayoquot Sound by sea-kayak and Algonquin Park by canoe, and sailed in a tall ship to the Atlantic Ocean. All made new friends with young Canadians from across the country, broadening their horizons and giving each one the feeling that they belong.

Three years ago, a young man from Cambridge Bay died in his sleep of sudden cardiac arrhythmia. Eric Ayalik Pelly was 19½, a high school graduate working in his first full-time job as a surveyor’s assistant. Despite many challenges growing up, he achieved success, was proud of who he was and where he’d come from. According to his

friends and family, this was in part because of a self-confidence derived from challenging outdoor experiences — he was an experienced barrenlands canoeist, a seasoned winter-camper, a whitewater kayaker, a sailor, and much more. Hoping to share those same opportunities with other youth from Nunavut, Eric’s adoptive parents established a charitable foundation, the Ayalik Fund, in his memory. More than 500 donors stepped up to make it happen, so Eric’s life could be an inspiration to other youths, his path to success an example.

Last March, Candace Hiqiniq and Sheridan Kamookak, both 14 from Gjoa Haven, travelled to Ottawa for an *Encounters with Canada* program focused on “Health and Medicine” because, as Sheridan explained: “My grandmother wants me to become a nurse.”

That same month, Chloe Kilaodluk (12) and Kyla Komatsuit (13), from Cambridge Bay joined Dene and Inuvialuit girls from the Northwest



Kyla Komatsuit, 13, proudly holds the large fish she caught through the ice during winter camp outside Yellowknife. © Courtesy of Ayalik Fund

Territories at a traditional-skills winter camp outside Yellowknife. They fished through the ice (with great success!), hunted ptarmigan, made traditional medicines, prepared caribou skins, learned beading, cross-country skied (with



If ever a picture was worth a thousand words, this is it. Two 13-year-old boys from Cambridge Bay, Carter Lear Ehloak (in the orange t-shirt) and Roy Goose Nanogak (with the red ball-cap), have climbed to a new height during summer camp in the Mackenzie Mountains, a week full of new discoveries, and building self-confidence.



Dylan Evetalegak, 14, from Cambridge Bay, learning to make a traditional drum during the Northern Youth Leadership winter camp near Ft. Simpson, NWT.



Erika MacPherson Otokiak (16), from Cambridge Bay says, “I found love and peace on this trip. On my solo night I learned that there are good days and bad days, and you just have to look up and be a prouder person than who you were yesterday.”

former Olympian Sharon Firth), and enjoyed traditional games, yoga, snowshoeing, and evenings of personal exploration through group discussion around the campfire. “I would love to come again,” said Chloe after the camp. Kyla added: “Another camp? Yes!”

Last July, 13-year-old Eric Amagonalok, from Cambridge Bay, participated in a canoe trip organized by Yellowknife-based Northern Youth Leadership (NYL). Together with a dozen boys from across NWT, Eric paddled 130 kilometres down the North Arm of Great Slave Lake, terminating in Yellowknife at midnight of their eighth day on the water.

When Crystal Mitchell-Ochoktoonook (14) arrived back home in Taloyoak from an NYL



Ethan Kaiyogana (18), from Cambridge Bay says, "After this trip, I feel motivated. I realized, if you want something in life, you have to work for it. I couldn't be more thankful to the Ayalik Fund." © Courtesy of Ayalik Fund (5)

camp in October, she wrote on Facebook: *Northern Youth Leadership was such a fun experience. I met new people [and] experienced a lot of new things. NYL taught us how to set snares, make dry fish, set up a teepee, sew mitts, make a fire with our surroundings, and work together. We also did chores, played hand games, told scary stories like oogalaboogala ... When it was Nunavut's turn to do our presentation, I wanted to talk another hour. NYL was so much fun that I wanted to stay out in the woods for another month.*

These young people would not have had such opportunities without the support of the Ayalik Fund. It is a powerful legacy for a fine young man. Eric is representative of many Inuit children in Canada who suffered as a result of what the dominant society historically inflicted upon First Nations and Inuit, and the collective failure even in the 21st century to understand, acknowledge, and accommodate. The Ayalik Fund strives to do something about that — one youth at a time.

The Ayalik Fund gives Inuit youth who would otherwise not have such opportunities a chance to build self-esteem and confidence, through challenging outdoor adventure, meeting other young Canadians and social-cultural exploration.

First Air is a proud sponsor of the Ayalik Fund.

You too can help. For more info, please visit: www.AyalikFund.ca 



A group of youth from across the North gathered at a winter camp outside Yellowknife, to learn from each other as they discuss shared northern issues. © Courtesy of Ayalik Fund




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