



# Literacy at Camp

by Allan Haley

**A**t any good camp the leaders can learn as much as the youth. That was certainly true this past summer when Scouts Canada, working with Ontario's Lieutenant Governor, His Honour James Bartleman, the YMCA and other literacy groups sent young leaders to five remote First Nations reserves in Northern Ontario to deliver Literacy based summer day camps.

His Honour, James Bartleman is Ontario's first Aboriginal Lieutenant Governor; he is proud of his Native heritage. He is also proud of his ability to make so much of his life after he started out with so little. He feels that the secret to overcoming poverty in his situation was literacy. Learning to read and write gave him the confidence to pursue a career in the Foreign Service, publish several books and landed him the position of Lieutenant Governor. For these reasons, he feels that Literacy is so important for First Nations youth.

What is Literacy anyway? Is it just as simple as knowing how to read? Or is there more to it? Literacy can be the catalyst for something more; the ability to read can give confidence and open entire worlds to young people from any community.

## The Role Literacy Plays in Scouting

When it came time to develop the program for the literacy camps, we simply looked at our own Scouting programs. Think about the role literacy plays in your Scouting program; from reading clues in a scavenger hunt, to badge requirements in the Cub handbook, to writing an environmental report for the Chief Scout's Award.

In 2003, His Honour Mr. Bartleman started a program in Ontario, collecting children's books to help fill library shelves at schools on First Nations reserves. His public enthusiasm and persuasion helped him send over 800,000 books to schools all



**Learning to read opens the door to many adventures.**

Photographer: Allan Haley

over the north. When he decided to expand his literacy initiative to include summer camps, he came to Scouts Canada and the YMCA to execute his plan.

We hired 25 young leaders from southern Ontario and 40 young leaders from each of the five participating communities. These young leaders helped over 360 youth recognize the literacy skills that they already had and helped them build on those skills over three weeks. The program included some outright literary activities, with journal writing and reading time, but we also had many fun activities that had literacy hidden under the surface. The "Adventure Race" held in Round Lake required the youth to read and decipher clues at each location in order to find the next challenge.

Imagine having 50 kids in your Scout troop but 100 want to join because of the program delivery. In many of the camps, although there were 65 kids registered, once the word spread, upwards of 100 came everyday because of the great attitude of the counsellors and the excellent program.

## A Learning Experience for Everyone

The Southern Counsellors also learned a great deal from their expe-

riences and had their eyes opened to an entirely different way of life. Imagine coming from a suburb of Toronto to spend a summer in a community of about 800 residents. Southern Counsellors were treated to an education in many things; from baseball (played every night at the ball field in each community), to native history (including treaty agreements and residential schools) and religion (which plays more of a role than anyone expected).

By the end of the summer, most of the youth were asking about next year's camps. The Lieutenant Governor is excited by the success of the camps in 2005 and is working on expanding the program for the summer of 2006. For information on the Ontario Lieutenant Governor's Literacy Summer Camps contact Philip Fernandez from Frontier College at 1 800 555-6523, ext. 316 or e-mail: pfernandez@frontiercollege.com. X

- Allan Haley is a Council Field Executive with the Northern Ontario Council and worked closely with the Literacy Camps.

Linking to Strategic Directions #3 and #6.