

Experience North 2023 Blog Post – Aurora Ly – Kapuskasing

Canada is a place I've called home my entire life, but there is so much I have yet to experience. As someone who was born and raised in the busy suburban city of Brampton, Ontario, I had no idea what remote and rural life was like in Canada. This summer has brought me the most north I have ever been in Ontario. Prior to this experience, the farthest I had gone was Tobermory!

Applying to *Experience North* and living in Kapuskasing this summer really widened my perspective on Ontario and Canada as a whole. As a new graduate, who majored in Political Science, it was a very informative experience getting to see the policies I studied in school, in action. There is nothing like immersing yourself in an environment that is completely different from what you know.

This summer, my project provided me with insight on the types of businesses that thrive in the Northern regions of Ontario. Although tedious at times, it was rewarding to know my work was being used to contribute to the economic development of the North. Moreover, it was very eye-opening for me to see the contrast in types of businesses that thrive in northern versus southern Ontario. I got the opportunity to develop my skills in Microsoft Excel and learn about different resources to carry out my project.

The most enriching part of my experience was immersing in the North with my fellow *Experience North* intern, roommate, and now good friend Abby. Having someone who grew up in the North to show me around and teach me about Northern 'culture' taught me the most about the communities. This summer, Abby and I did a lot of exploring of the community we were in as well as surrounding communities.

We did our best to connect with the people in the community and got acquainted with the dynamics of small-town living. On the weekends, we often visited Abby's cottage to spend time with her family and swim in the lake! One of the pleasant surprises I found this summer was the diversity that exists in the Northern regions of Ontario. As a result of policies promoting population growth and attraction, new immigrant families are often finding homes in the Northern regions of Ontario. It was a great experience getting to know each of their stories about how they got to where they are. It was also great to hear their perspectives about Canada and the North.

Working with a think-tank like Northern Policy Institute (NPI) was nothing short of fulfilling. Getting a deeper understanding of NPI's work in developing the Northern regions of Ontario was incredibly rewarding. As someone who aspires to pursue a career in policy work, when I first saw this job posting in my school's career center, I thought it was the perfect opportunity for me to get out of my 'city life' bubble. I have never considered a career in rural and remote policymaking but after this experience with NPI, I am more motivated than ever to bring attention to the parts of Ontario that are often overlooked. Living in Kapuskasing allowed me to analyze the challenges that come with living in remote communities. This time with NPI and *Experience North* will remain with me forever and I will definitely take all that I have learned in this program with me on my journey.

The staff and my fellow *Experience North* interns were a big part of why I had an overall positive experience this summer. Charles, Martin, Bryanne, and the rest of the team are incredibly supportive of one another and provided the best employment experience I have ever had the pleasure of being a part of. Everyone at NPI is incredibly knowledgeable on a plethora of areas that affect the Northern regions of Ontario. Allowing me to expand my own knowledge immensely. Furthermore, moving so far away from home seemed like a daunting task and I had some concerns for a young girl like me. NPI made my transition extremely smooth and supported me through any challenges that came my way this summer. I am going to miss the supportive and friendly environment at NPI. Although, I hope there will be opportunities to cross paths with NPI again in the future!

In all, this summer taught me more than I could have imagined when I first applied for this internship. On a personal level, I have grown immensely beyond my knowledge of policy in the North. Going from living in a large city to a town of 8000 people inevitably presented challenges but there are hidden treasures in a small town that I found after spending a summer in "Kap". I am going to miss the walking-distances and friendly manners of some of the people in the North.

I am incredibly grateful to have been able to move to Kap and experience living in a small town. This internship has kickstarted my career in policy and I would strongly recommend anyone to apply who is not afraid to have a change in environment and gain new, insightful experiences with an incredible organization like NPI.