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Veltmans Host Lacrosse Clinic in Attawapiskat:

This past summer our family took two weeks to travel and deliver lacrosse equipment and instruction to a remote First Nations Community called Attawapiskat. This community is near James Bay and it is only accessible by plane in the summer and ice road in the winter. Many people supported us in this endeavor. This support allowed us to give a positive experience to the youth of Attawapiskat and in turn we came to understand a little bit about the Cree people and some of the challenges they face.

This journey began in January when we decided we wanted to do something special to celebrate Jim's retirement from playing lacrosse. We posted an advertisement on a Northern newsletter website. We received many responses; several of them came from Attawapiskat. We started communication with a member of the band council, Andrew Koostachin. A short advertisement was shown at Jim's last game to extend an opportunity to others to contribute to this cause as well as to Right to Play. \$12,000.00 was raised at that game. Right to Play was sent a cheque for \$7200.00 and the rest was allocated towards Attawapiskat. We have some funds remaining (which includes our personal donation) that will be used for another lacrosse related charity.

We left Stouffville on August 11th and drove eight and a half hours, spread over three days to Timmins. On August 14th we flew out of Timmins airport on a Dash 8. The plane landed in three other communities before arriving in Attawapiskat. In Moosonee, the runway was still tarmac, but in the following communities they were gravel. When we arrived in Attawapiskat we walked across the gravel runway through a chain link fence and kind of waited on a curb while our bags were checked for alcohol. Attawapiskat is an alcohol banned community. There were a few pick up trucks parked in front of us meeting the other passengers who arrived.

We waited for less than ten minutes when a smiling woman came walking confidently toward us. It was Kellee Preece, a former Phys. Ed. teacher who worked in Attawapiskat for two years. She flew up to the community a day before us to help us with our camp. A few minutes later, Jenny Koostachin, Andrew's wife, arrived with a pick up truck to transport us and our luggage to the Kataquapit Inn. The kids enjoyed the ride in the back of the truck. Andrew, our contact, was away while we were there. We knew ahead of time that he had a prior commitment to join his relatives for a camping trip to his traditional hunting grounds.

We were prepared for what we saw in the community because we had seen pictures. The houses are all aluminum siding, some in better shape than others; but no lawns or gardens or trees. The Kataquapit Inn was equally pragmatic but we had an extremely pleasant stay there anyway. The rooms were simply furnished, but the beds were clean and the meals were appreciated very much. Joseph Kataquapit, the owner of the inn, very kindly donated our stay and our meals.

That evening we went to the arena to prepare for the camp the following day. The northern police service flew the equipment up to the community for us and stored it at their department until our arrival. We were overwhelmed by the amount of equipment that was delivered. We had purchased 100 sticks from DeBeer's for a greatly discounted price plus Christine Kurt had organized donations from other sources, including Sanderson Sports. We had duffle bags of helmets, jerseys, arm guards, mesh kits and much more. We spent the evening with the four of us plus Kellee and a couple of teenage boys, retying sticks to make pockets.

We ran three sessions each day for three different age groups: 6-10 year olds, 11-14 year olds, and 15 year olds and up. During the camp, Jim taught the fundamentals of lacrosse and played games with them. Many of the kids were extremely shy when they first arrived but were very quickly smiling, laughing and having a good time once they were on the floor with a lacrosse stick in their hand. The teenage boys were especially eager and keen to start at their session start time. Many of the teenagers had the opportunity to travel to Southern Ontario the previous year with Kellee Preece. They visited the Six Nations reserve and attended a Toronto Rock game. On the last day, one of the older boys brought the traditional big drum from the community and four people drummed and sang together.

The camp lasted three days. We didn't have the same kids every day, but in the end 50 youth of Attawapiskat had sticks in their hands to keep. We also donated a set of soft lacrosse sticks and an instructional DVD to the gym for both schools to use during Phys. Ed. In addition, we gave a set of regular sticks to the arena so they can host lacrosse nights for the youth. We also left helmets and gloves to be distributed by someone from the community who knows the needs of the children better than us.

At the end of the camp, we still had 40 lacrosse sticks left over. We decided that Attawapiskat was saturated with lacrosse sticks. We requested the Police to deliver the remaining sticks to another community up north. (Moosonee or Kaschechewan) The police readily agreed to do this.

Although we did not get the number of youth that was originally projected, we still did have a positive experience with fifty of the youth from Attawapiskat. We want to thank the many people who contributed to this worthwhile cause. Many people gave hours of their time and others gave generous donations. A very special thanks to:

Air Creebec (discounted our flights)

Blue Collar Lax (donated Marc Mesh kits and repair kit for sticks)

Christine Kurt (collected all extra equipment plus organized shipping to Cochrane)

Joe Dawson and Monique Randall (drove a van load of equipment to Cochrane)

DeBeer Lacrosse (sold us the lacrosse sticks at an incredible discount)

DOVE Campaign (donated set of soft lacrosse sticks and balls)

Joseph Kataquapit (donated our accommodation and meals while we were in Attawapiskat)

Larry and Scott Komer (donated goalie equipment and money)

Andrew Koostachin (our contact person as member of the band council in Attawapiskat)

David Koostachin (opened the arena to us and helped us with many logistics in the community)

Steve McCarthy (donated lacrosse ball, helmets, extra sticks and assorted equipment)

Austin Owens (donated equipment)

NAPS Police Service (flew equipment from Cochrane to Attawapiskat and kept it safe until we arrived)

Kellee Preece (our guide and mentor in Attawapiskat who helped us with the camp)

The Roadies (donated \$ 3200.00 earned from T-Shirt sales at Jim's last game)

Rob and Tyler Roche (donated equipment)

Sanderson Sports (donated gloves, arm guards and other equipment)

The Toronto Rock (raised funds at Jim's last game by selling jerseys at a silent auction, collecting donations from fans and supporting Jim's initiatives)

Sara and Kris Veltman (accompanied Mom and Dad on another one of their adventures and helped with the running of the camp)

And to the many fans of the Toronto Rock who made donations at Jim's last game, we sincerely thank you,

Jim and Teresa Veltman