

# **NeeKauNis 2.0 - Intentional, Inspiring and Inclusive**

A proposal for a new way forward for Camp

For the consideration by the Camp NeeKauNis Committee

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*with thanks to Diana Stephens and Katrina McQuail*

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I have struggled with the issues that Camp has been facing for years now, a weight I choose to bear because I love Camp. In time I have concluded that Camp's issues do not have a simple or short-term solution and that we have been brought to a crossroads by numerous changes within Camp's community, the larger Quaker community, and the world beyond.

The truth, as I see it, is that Camp NeeKauNis Committee has not been able to adequately govern Camp for at least a decade. Based on the state of our infrastructure, it might well be more. I'd like to immediately make clear that it is not a knock against those who have served in the past or are serving on Committee now. It's not about the volunteers who have continued to pour their time into Camp. It is about a lack of leadership, a failing governance model, a distinct air of entitlement within long-time attenders, and the fiercely-held idea that Camp can continue to exist as a perfectly-preserved artifact of a golden summer.

## **Symptoms of Decline**

### **Infrastructure**

Most of the simple cabins are in a condition that suggests to me that they need to be memorialized, decommissioned, and taken down. We need a replacement strategy for the kybos, which are now verging on dangerous and well into being unpleasant. The kitchen limps along each season, friendly only to those who know its idiosyncrasies. These matters, however, are not what's most discouraging about Camp's infrastructure. When I look at many of our cabins, I see an array of cheap materials that were installed with good intentions but in the end have resulted in something more difficult to maintain, less hospitable, and in no way representing the simplicity, intentionality and quality valued by Friends.

It's a theme that runs through Camp. The water system is arcane, and the sanitary systems are worse. It's been designed by amateurs with immediate cost and ease of integration with existing systems in mind, and that has led to a present-day infrastructure that is very difficult to maintain.

## **Program**

I have often wavered on whether our lack of enrollment is due to our program or inept promotion of those programs. I'm now confident it's a combination of the two. In short, Camp's program has been stagnant, following more-or-less the same template, providing more-or-less the same experience that Camp has always provided. While there are many positive aspects to our program, it has failed to evolve and attract a consistent stream of new campers, and our enrollment has continued to dwindle away.

Having been a part of other organizations that run youth programming, it's staggering to me how rarely the experience of the *campers* is a factor in Camp's major decisions. For me, the quality of the program for its participants is of paramount importance and should always be considered above all else. If Camp is not here to deliver programming, what is the point?

## **Community**

The infrastructure and program matters are major concerns, but what's deeply troubling is the sense of entitlement and self-interest that pervades the Camp community. In years past, the core of devoted volunteers that supported the Camp physically and through governance processes was sufficient to at least avoid visible decline, and the larger community of people that participated in Camp's programming was large enough to fill Camp's programs.

That core community has diminished, leaving a small group of incredibly invested people that have put a tremendous amount of their time into Camp. From that grows a sense of attachment to particular ideas or to physical objects and from that seems to stem the habit of undermining Camp's decision-making processes. *Perspective has been lost; rather than a place with a single stakeholder - the Camp community - it has become a place with numerous, individual stakeholders that are far too personally invested.*

## **A Proposal**

This is my proposal for a new direction for Camp. Let me be clear; I'm advocating starting from a blank slate, examining every aspect of Camp and defining a new "NeeKauNis Way". I'm talking about leaving as much baggage as possible behind, establishing a mission that will chart all of Camp's decisions in the future. This process would be a challenging one, perhaps occasionally painful, but at this point in time I feel it is absolutely necessary. My proposal rests on three fundamental ideas:

1. We need to redefine our mission as a Camp; turn focus away from serving Quakers directly and toward providing excellent alternative programming informed by Quaker values

2. Move toward a more professional organizational attitude as quickly as possible, pay staff to fill key roles and make decisions, provide volunteers with additional opportunities
3. Rethink the committee-based system for decision-making; instead, empower experienced individuals to make decisions and be accountable to a small, well-supported board of trustees

## **A New Mission**

This is critical, because it establishes a clear direction against which decisions can be held up. I don't know for certain what Camp's present mission is, but I think it's something like "serving Canadian Quakers". The fact that I've been serving on Camp Committee for 5+ years and don't really know Camp's mission is telling; we don't have a common point of reference to hold when we're looking at major decisions for Camp.

Serving Canadian Quakers is a nice notion, but there's simply not enough of them to feasibly support a facility the size of Camp. Forgetting the vagueness of "serving" Quakers, Monthly Meetings across the country have fewer and fewer young attenders, and when the physical distances are factored in it becomes even more unlikely that we'll fill our Camps with young Quakers. Looking forward, as the cost of travel continues to escalate, it's clear to me that we need to be providing programming that appeals to the larger community.

With this in mind, I suggest a new mission, subject to seasoning: *"To provide alternative, youth-focused summer camp programming informed by Quaker values."* I use the term alternative because I think that it encompasses the spirit of the Camp community; we're not trying to be a sports camp, for example, or trying to directly compete with a camp like Camp Arowhon. We're open to providing programming consistent with Quaker values, whether it be something related to community building, spiritual growth, skill building, or any idea that has merit.

Youth-focused, well, because I think that while our summer program is largely aimed at youth, we've never explicitly stated that this is our priority. Certainly my priority has always been programming for youth. While it's nice that Camp has been able to serve campers of all ages, and can probably continue to do so, serving youth is the most important aspect of what Camp does. They are the formative years, and the most likely time in which you might form a long-term bond with Camp. They are the years in which people are most likely to have free time in the summer. They are years that can be difficult and when Camp can truly be a life-changing experience. Youth are most able to take advantage of everything Camp's property has to offer, and to provide energy and creativity that Camp will always need to sustain it.

Some will object to this, I think, because it moves away from being explicitly a "Quaker Camp", which is arguably a fundamental change in focus. I would argue that this new mission will serve the larger Quaker community in a much better way, in the form of a vibrant and functional Quaker organization that reaches out into the larger community and introduces people to Quaker values.

## **Professionalism**

Camp has always prided itself on being run by volunteers, and rightly so. However, I think that the era of Camp being run entirely by volunteers has come to an end. It simply places too much burden on too few individuals who are dealing with Camp matters in their spare time. One only needs to look at the burdens we lay on the Resident Friend, or the state of our infrastructure, or the number of dysfunctional subcommittees who don't have clear clerkship because no one wishes to take on that responsibility.

I can speak on my role as PD Clerk - a role that can be as big as the holder chooses. When I took on the job, I was under the impression that my job would be to clerk meetings, take minutes and distribute them, plan for meetings and generally do the things a clerk would be expected to do. The actual role generally involves being the single point of contact for all matters physical, making judgments about buildings and structures, determining priorities for PD subcommittee and actually doing the work when it is essential and not being handled by someone else. It's a role that's much bigger than the spare time I can allot to it, that lacks definition, and that really requires someone to be physically much nearer to Camp than I am - ideally, living there over the summer months, at least.

My suggestion is the creation of paying positions that handle the day-to-day running of Camp. First, an executive director that works year-round on behalf of Camp - in the summer season, a physical presence, a resource for Camp staff, an ambassador for the Camp, and someone who generally handles much of the behind-the-scenes administration. This person should be independently qualified and should come from outside of the core Camp community, to provide fresh perspective. They would handle the on-site financial management: paying staff, keeping up-to-date books, being a resource for directors on budgetary concerns, paying bills, handling bursaries, handling donations and maintaining relationships with suppliers.

In the off-season, say October to April, this role changes to focus on planning and publicity for the next season. This staffperson would be responsible for keeping project planning moving along into concrete proposals, and coordinating among other staff and volunteers. It would involve budgeting and overseeing fundraising efforts. They would be responsible for hiring other staff and conducting reference and background checks on staff applicants. This position would be the conduit through which almost all Camp business would flow. It's a big job, and would be full-time throughout the year.

During the summer months, say May-September, there should also be a full-time maintenance person that works on major projects, guides volunteer workers, works with other staff to identify needs, looks at the safety of Camp facilities, and so on. This person should be skilled in a wide variety of trades to meet Camp's varied needs, but open to researching best practices when necessary. This person may even be called upon to aid with program, should they be able to help in some way.

There are a variety of other roles at Camp that should be paid positions. Head cooks should be paid for their experience and work in mentoring kitchen staff. Lifeguards are already paid. There

should be a number of paying staff positions for other staff members including kitchen and program staff. Camp has a big challenge in keeping community members involved during their later high school years and through post-secondary years since most need to earn money during the summer; Camp should provide more opportunities to stay involved by offering paid positions.

Getting paid is just one aspect of professionalism that Camp needs to embrace. Professionalism is a demeanour largely lacking from Camp: the idea that staff is there to do a job, to deliver great programming, and that that is their number one priority. The expectations for staff at NeeKauNis have always been very low, to the point where staff often comes to Camp to hang out, and while they may fulfill expectations, they often do not carry the expectation of giving of themselves. By that I mean taking the extra steps to make the program great, showing leadership, challenging themselves, supporting other staff members in an active way, and taking time to engage with campers rather than spending unallocated time with other staff or by themselves. It's something that needs to grow from within Camp and starts with the organization.

Another aspect of professionalism is safety. We have been so lucky to avoid major incidents in terms of accidents or incidents between staff and campers. Basic policies like background checks and safety training are essential in an organization that works with youth, both for the protection of the youth and the staff. It does not need to be overbearing, but due diligence and the recognition that staff could be put in difficult situations should lead Camp to provide tools to deal with those situations properly.

Not all staff roles need to be paying, but all staff roles need to have a measure of reciprocity. Whether or not you are paid as staff, you will be challenged and will be provided with important experience that will help you beyond Camp. That goes as far as providing staff with free training, acting as a reference, or anything within Camp's power to provide rewards and to attract the best staff.

## **New Governance**

This aspect goes hand-in-hand with a new era of professionalism. Committees are as Quaker as taking about The Light, but they have their limitations. These limitations have been recognized in other Quaker organizations and they have modified their processes to see that proper governance happens without losing the Spirit of the process. The limitations of Camp NeeKauNis Committee, as it exists today, are obvious. The idea is nice - subcommittees do the work, bring recommendations to CNC, CNC makes decisions from there - but it doesn't happen. This process is also abstract from the actual running of Camp, since CNC meets in May, January and October, far removed from our core season, leaving key on-season decisions to Directors, or to the Resident Friend, or whoever is around to chime in. Big decisions take a long time to make, by virtue of infrequency of CNC meetings and the lack of a clear sense of direction. I could go on, but I think the strongest indication the CNC is not up to the task of

governing Camp is the result - financial unsustainability, long-term infrastructure decline and dropping enrollment over an extended period of time.

Again, I do not wish to suggest that this is a failing on the part of any individual working within Camp's organization, but a failing of the organization as a whole to recognize the true nature of the situation and to adapt accordingly. This is an effort to do that.

As suggested above, the day-to-day running of Camp would be handled by a paid staff that are very clearly empowered to make decisions within a defined scope. Ultimately, that staff would be accountable to a small oversight committee made up of carefully selected members. This oversight committee would be responsible for strategic planning, hiring core staff, policy making, budgeting and generally making big decisions about where Camp is heading. I would suggest that this oversight committee have a clerk, along with members that have significant experience in each of the areas of financial management, physical development and youth work. This oversight committee may be considered Trustees for Camp. They would not be paid, but all of their costs including travel would be covered. Trusteeship would be a 3-year commitment.

For example, the Trustees would be responsible for greenlighting major building projects, selecting an executive director and setting annual budgets. The executive director would be empowered to do things like setting the summer schedule, discretionary spending within the budget, and selecting staff for the upcoming season.

It is always a challenge to manage authority in an organization that aims to be non-hierarchical. However, it's very difficult to have accountability without some level of authority, but how the authority is wielded makes a huge difference. A clearly defined set of expectations also helps a great deal. Ultimately it comes down to personalities, so in many ways selecting staff is the most important process of all, as it always has been.

## **How to Make it Happen**

Let me break this out a little further, and actually expand a little about how this would happen. First, a financial reality check. It's obvious that limited revenue has taken its toll on Camp in the last ten years and beyond. I think that we're fooling ourselves if we think that Camp can be sustainably run on an annual budget of \$35,000-\$40,000. Additionally, when you factor in paying staff and actually maintaining and improving Camp facilities, we're talking about a number well into the \$100,000-\$200,000 range.

We're in a position where we must invest in people, infrastructure and program. We need to have a business strategy that recoups this investment over a reasonable pay-off period. We haven't made a significant investment in anything new for many years, one of the reasons I think we're experiencing long-term decline.

From a practical point of view, hiring personnel is the first step. This will give us the human resources to move forward quickly, something we lack now. We'll need to fully review and

renew our programs, based on wide consultation with the NKN Community and research of other successful summer camps that offer similar programming. Once we've established the needs of our renewed programming, then we can invest in buildings, equipment, training and anything else pursuant to delivering this new programming.

As a starting point, let's ballpark the cost of hiring an executive director. Salary will need to be competitive in order to attract the best candidates, though the flexibility Camp can offer will be an asset to many candidates. A basic slate of health benefits for full-time staff is a must. I suggest that an hourly rate of \$20-\$25/hour would be reasonable, with 35-hour work-week averaged over the year. I estimate that cost will be around \$50,000/year. Similarly, a seasonal maintenance director would cost \$10,000-\$15,000 per season.

Investment in infrastructure and programming is more difficult to estimate. I can suggest that a baseline cost for maintaining Camp as it exists now is somewhere in the \$20,000/year range, and I can easily envision major projects each year costing at least \$10,000 and more likely \$20,000-\$30,000/year. These could include things like waterfront overhaul, new cabins, a new kitchen, and so on.

A rough breakout of the would-be annual budget (Appendix 1) suggests to me the following things; one, we're going to need to far more diligent about earning revenue through the core season of July and August. Experience and common sense suggest that July and August are the pivotal months for summer camp programming. The second thing is that we'll need to charge more; not significantly more, but something approaching the \$100/camper day mark. This is still significantly below the cost of many other summer camps, but would be feasible provided there were enough camper-days in the course of the summer. Additionally, due to the investment in staff and equipment and organizational emphasis on program, the quality of the programming delivered to the camper would be drastically improved.

How do we preserve the spirit of Camp's program, while significantly improving the overall quality of the programming? There's not a simple answer, of course. I think that summer camp provides an opportunity to be entirely in the present for a short but intense period of time, and that this leads to important new friendships, moments of pure excitement and joy, the pleasure of shared experience, and the opening of doors not previously considered. Spirit is carried by people, not by a place, and I think as long as we carry on being a community that values inclusion, humour, quiet spaces, spontaneity and fun, Camp will continue to be the place we all want it to be while evolving to meet the needs of campers.

To summarize my proposal in a concrete way, here's a breakdown of the steps I think we should undertake:

1. Set about defining a new mission for Camp that explicitly defines what Camp is aiming to do.
2. Hire an executive director to take over some essential Camp functions and decision making, and to facilitate and expedite the subsequent steps.

3. Transition away from Committee as the central decision-making body; empower the Executive Director and form a Board of Trustees.
4. Design a new slate of programming, pursuant to our new mission, with the goal of attracting new campers from the greater community.
5. Invest in equipment and infrastructure that help us deliver programming.
6. Continue to be open to changes to the organization to adapt to a continually changing situation.

## **Camp, Ten Years On**

### **Infrastructure & Physical Resources**

In ten years' time, I see major changes in how Camp looks. Many of the existing simple cabins are gone, replaced with well-built, thoughtfully designed, low maintenance and accessible cabins that are suitable for a wide range of programming. The kitchen has been completely replaced, and there is a phased plan in place for replacing Nelson-Hall in the coming decade. Kybos have been replaced with centralized toilet and shower facilities. The waterfront has received a great deal of work, and has become a major focus in our programming. It's got a wide array of boats, shady and sunny places to sit, a nice sandy beach and a new boathouse.

We have built a simple summer residence on Camp property for housing core staff. It's small, simple, comfortable and serves as welcoming gate for the Camp. It's not designed to be a permanent home, but nice place to live during the warm months. It's got a small kitchen, a washroom, and a comfortable meeting space.

Some or all of the finished cabins remain, based on the condition of their underpinnings. They have received significant renovations where required. They to have been renovated with program in mind and have adapted to meet the needs of the campers and staff that use the Camp.

Behind the scenes, the water and sanitary systems have been simplified through careful planning and with current and future regulations in mind.

### **Program**

This is the most difficult aspect to imagine. I see participants from a much wider circle, brought together by common interests. Camp program continues to include traditional summer camp activities like boating, swimming and outdoor games, but with a specific focuses like relevant skill building, social or environmental issues or leadership training. Staff bring experience in a wide variety of skills with the intention of sharing them with interested participants. Many of our staff roles are filled by people who have started out as campers and worked their way up through Camp's various roles.

Quaker elements remain, though perhaps more subtly. Meeting is held once per week, and participants have been prepared with some history and have had a chance to ask questions about it. Mornings are typically reserved for a workshop, be it learning basic plumbing skills, learning to sail, a discussion group or a turn preparing lunch. Afternoons are self-directed and usually revolve around a trip to the beach, and resources are made available for participants to plan activities or work on projects. Evenings involve some community-wide programming, an activity as simple as a soccer game or a dance or movie night.

## **Community**

The NeeKauNis community is now much larger. The Camp no longer relies on a small number of individuals to support it, but a larger, less invested group that helps when it can. This effort is coordinated by the NeeKauNis Staff, and the NeeKauNis Trustees continue to make changes in the organization in order to evolve over time.

Much thought and effort has been put into making Camp a more inviting and inclusive community for newcomers, and it shows.

## Appendix 1 – A Rough Budget

The numbers used within have been estimated for the purposes of imagining what a sustainable Camp NeeKauNis annual budget might look like. This is not a budget I'm proposing for next season, only something to give us an idea of where we need to be moving toward.

<b>Expenses</b>			<b>Revenue</b>	Camper Days	\$/Day
Personnel	Executive Director	<b>\$50,000.00</b>	Camper Fees	1650 (55 days x 30 campers)	\$100.00
	Maintenance Director	<b>\$11,200.00</b>	Targeted Donations		
	Lifeguards	<b>\$10,800.00</b> 3 paid	Trust Requests		
	Trustee Travel Costs	<b>\$1,000.00</b>			
	Cooks	<b>\$5,400.00</b>			
	Kitchen Staff	<b>\$7,200.00</b> 2 paid			
	Program Staff	<b>\$9,600.00</b> 4 paid			
Physical	Building Upkeep	<b>\$20,000.00</b>			
	Major Projects	<b>\$20,000.00</b>			
	Property Tax	<b>\$3,000.00</b>			
	Insurance	<b>\$3,000.00</b>			
Program	Program Materials	<b>\$10,000.00</b>			
Publicity	Website	<b>\$5,000.00</b>			
	Printed Materials	<b>\$5,000.00</b>			
	Outreach	<b>\$5,000.00</b>			
Food		<b>\$16,500.00</b>		\$10/ camper- day	
Totals		<b>\$182,700.00</b>			<b>\$185,000.00</b>