

SHAD experience beat expectations for N.B. student

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Education

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Katie Giberson, front right, of Arthurette said she loved everything about her SHAD experience this summer, including exploring the Avalon Peninsula of Newfoundland and Labrador. Giberson also enjoyed making friends with other students from across the country.
Submitted

Being challenged to think outside the box, and even outside a multi-sided icosahedron, was all part of a Katie Giberson's jam-packed experience in the SHAD program over the summer.

Giberson, who will enter Grade 11 at Tobique Valley High School in Plaster Rock in September, spent a month at the campus of Memorial University in St. John's, N.L., as part of an intensive program for outstanding students.

SHAD's mission is to empower exceptional youth to make the world a better place. It focuses on STEAM or science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics at several university campuses across the country. After applying and being accepted, Giberson said she chose the

Newfoundland location in part because she had never visited the province before and she was hoping the temperatures might be a little cooler there than in other parts of Canada. They were not, but that did not stop her from enjoying every minute of the experience.

“I could have easily stayed another month,” she said. “I loved everything about it.”

The daughter of Darren and Allyson Giberson travelled to St. John’s on July 1 and was one of three New Brunswickers among the 56 students there. As her mother and older sister Emma have participated in SHAD, Giberson knew a little of what to expect.

Each day was busy from early in the morning until 11 p.m., she said.

“Every day we got up and had morning lectures on a variety of things from engineering to medicine to how the Earth rotates: everything was different,” Giberson explained. “We had lunch and then we had our seminars...on circuit boards, robotics, anatomy, gardens and TED Talks.”

A recreation period was followed by time for group work. Giberson said the students were split into houses that each developed a product and business plan in keeping with the theme, “how to help Canadian citizens (become more resilient) against natural disasters”.

“We had to come up with an idea, build a prototype and have a fully-functioning business plan,” Giberson said.

Her group designed a product called Eco-safe, a multi-sided icosahedron filled with medical and life-sustaining supplies that could be dropped into communities affected by forest fires or floods. The shape of the container ensured the supplies would arrive undamaged.

“It took a lot of work. Inside, we had medicine and food and water, blankets and I think a tent as well.”

Giberson said many of her SHAD peers were accomplished students who spoke multiple languages or played several musical instruments. Others were entrepreneurs, said Giberson, noting one had developed his own app to connect youth with jobs.

“They were all amazing people,” Giberson said. “It was really hard saying goodbye.”

In addition to their academic pursuits, the SHAD students also travelled on the weekends, visiting locations throughout the Avalon Peninsula and enjoying a four-day trip to Fogo Island.

Giberson observed more than half of her program’s participants were from Ontario while only a handful was from the maritime provinces. Giberson said she thinks SHAD should be promoted more in New Brunswick schools because it presents a unique opportunity for enrichment.

The application process is long and demanding but students who are accepted will find it rewarding, said Giberson.

“It’s definitely worth it. You make connections that you will have forever.”

With a demanding schedule of six courses including two online options when she returns to school in the fall, Giberson said she thinks the intensity of SHAD will help her to be a better time manager.

“I think it’s really going to help me,” she said. “It opened me up to a variety of new things and got me out of my comfort zone, like with public speaking and interacting with other people.”

Her positive experience in Newfoundland and Labrador will lead Giberson to try and become a SHAD leader at some point in the future. Her additional plans include studying science with the goal of eventually going into medicine.

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