



Noah Heselton poses with Kailey, Colby and six-year-old Noah, the youngest player at the camp.

# STRENGTH OF SPIRIT

## The NorthStar Program

Watching a 2007 ESPN video on *YouTube*, a young lacrosse player from Ottawa, Noah Hoselton, couldn't believe his eyes and ears. The eight-minute video he was watching told the story of the impact of lacrosse on the Nunavut community of Kugluktuk, and how the introduction of the sport helped bring an end to a crippling series of teen suicides.

Teen suicide is a problem that affects northern communities to this day. The suicide rate in Nunavut for Inuit males, aged 15 to 24, is near a startling 28 times the Canadian average.

In 2007, the community of Kugluktuk, Nunavut, reeled from the social ramifications of three youth suicides occurring in the short span of five months. But then, a miracle of sorts occurred. Teacher Russ Sheppard, from Saskatchewan, introduced the sport of lacrosse to local youth. In return for teaching lacrosse, Sheppard asked only for greater effort in school. His students responded and the suicide rate dropped dramatically while graduation rates went up. The story was so amazing that American sports network ESPN ran a documentary about the Kugluktuk experience.

"I couldn't believe what I was seeing," says Noah. "Lacrosse was actually saving lives — giving hope to people who thought they had run out of hope." Suddenly, the idea came to him. If lacrosse helped the teens of Kugluktuk, wouldn't it make sense to introduce lacrosse to every Inuit community? "I knew that I had to do something. I had to at least try to help."

Noah showed the video to his father, wondering if in fact they could attempt to have

a lacrosse camp in Iqaluit. Like all those who see the video, his father Robert immediately understood the significance of that vision and the pair mapped a plan.

The idea took flight after a conversation with long-time family friend Kirt Ejesiak of Iqaluit. Kirt, too, was amazed by the video. He immediately threw his support behind the program.

"If kids are healthy and active and their brains are challenged positively, then that's

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Lacrosse star, Jeff Zywicki, talks to the campers.

good to keep them away from things that aren't beneficial to their lifestyle," says Ejesiak.

Noah then approached ProStar Lacrosse. ProStar holds lacrosse skills training camps in Ontario and is operated by lacrosse professionals Jeff Zywicki, and brothers, Jason and Luke Wiles. They thought the idea was fantastic.



NorthStar launched its first camp in Iqaluit.

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"We saw the importance of the idea right away," says Jason Wiles. "We began with the idea that healthy bodies and healthy minds make for healthy spirits. We felt that this could be something important — a way that we could give back to the sport that helped us grow in our own lives."

And so the NorthStar program to introduce lacrosse to other Inuit teens was born to test Noah's hypothesis: does sport truly inspire and can it give hope to those who think hope is beyond their reach?

A teenager stepping forward to use the sport he loves to help teens he has never met? At first, the obstacles seemed all too formidable. But, as is often the case, truly good ideas motivate and inspire. NorthStar seemed to be one of those ideas. It became a beacon of purpose.



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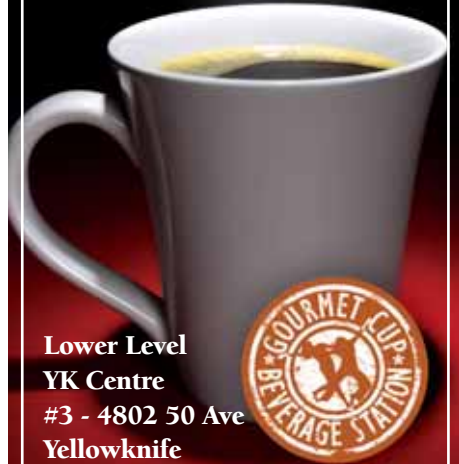
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*The Bear is Back*

Cutting his lunch break short, Ryan hops the boards to get out and play more lacrosse.



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Instructor, Caleb Wiles shows Grant how to hold his stick when throwing the ball.



The Iqaluit Knights: The Nepean Knights donated equipment, sticks, nets and jerseys to the camp.



Running the gauntlet: the kids try to stick handle around the instructors who try to knock the ball away.

Noah approached the Nepean Knights Minor Lacrosse Association with the idea to run a used-equipment drive during their spring registration. Not only did the Knights step forward to help, they gave Noah nets, jerseys, sticks and support.

"It was amazing," Noah says. "Whenever we needed something or reached an obstacle, someone came forward to help. It was so humbling. People care. They really do."

When northern air carrier, First Air, stepped up with travel and cargo support for NorthStar, the dream became truly tangible. "When First Air came forward and committed to get us and our equipment to Iqaluit, I knew that the camp was really going to happen. It

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# The NorthStar Program

**IQUALUIT LACROSSE CAMP**

## Thank you for all your support!

The NorthStar Program would like to extend their heartfelt thanks to all those who supported the Iqaluit Lacrosse Camp which was held in August, 2010.

It was an exciting camp. The children played well and loved the sport. We hope to see them all there again next year.

### A Special thanks to:

- First Air
- Nepean Knights
- above&beyond magazine
- Uqsiq Communications
- Beat Studios
- Royal Canadian Legion
- Frobisher Inn
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Nate and Io compete for a loose ball while working with instructor and Team Canada sniper, Jeff Zywicki.

“When First Air came forward ... I knew that the camp was really going to happen. It was real! It didn’t matter if we had the camp outside or indoors, with First Air helping, I knew that the camp was going to be real.”

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Yet, with nearly everything lined up and just two weeks to go, NorthStar still had not found a venue in Iqaluit.

“And that’s where the community stepped up,” said Noah. “The City of Iqaluit allowed us to use the AWG Arena which had been under construction all summer. Iqaluit’s Royal Canadian Legion covered the facility cost and the Frobisher Inn provided rooms. We were the first to use the arena. I was amazed how the community embraced our program. Then, at the last moment, the National Lacrosse

League’s Washington Stealth provided another load of sticks! It was incredible!”

Iqaluit became the NorthStar testing ground. On August 23, balls were spilled across the floor, sticks handed out and the lacrosse program opened to 25 of Iqaluit’s children aged six to 15 years old.

“I couldn’t believe it. The smiles were huge!” he says. “I didn’t think it would affect me so much. The kids were great!” Even the professional instructors were moved by the children’s enthusiasm and how quickly they took to the game.

“They didn’t want to stop playing,” says Jeff Zywicki, considered by many to be one of



Noah working with the younger kids on passing.

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It began with a vision, but it took a team to pull the NorthStar Program all together. Jeff Zywicki, Noah Hoselton, brothers Luke and Caleb Wiles extend a special thanks to Kirt Ejesiak and his family — Naja, Kirt's partner Madeleine, Noah, Jayko and Kirt who organized the Iqaluit side of the camp.

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camp to end. Each child was given a stick and ball to take home. Hugging the instructors, the kids begged them to come back again next year.

"It was important to go," says Noah. "But, the funny thing is that I think it was as important for me — meeting the kids, experiencing Iqaluit — and my own growth as it was for the kids. We need to return and take lacrosse to more Inuit communities. More than ever, I believe that lacrosse can help kids be strong — to build a strength of spirit. I don't know how to thank everyone that helped. I still can't believe it happened," Noah remarks.

"There's an expression in lacrosse that says 'lax for life.' It means that you'll love lacrosse for your entire life. But, now I think it has a special meaning. If what we did can help save one person, it really does mean 'lax for life'. And, that makes me proud."

*Noah Hoselton is a 16-year-old lacrosse player in the Nepean Knights system. He plays for the Slovak National Men's Lacrosse team and in Manchester, England, in July 2010 became the youngest player in history to score at the FIL World Championships. For more information on the NorthStar program, please visit [prostarlacrosse.com/northstar](http://prostarlacrosse.com/northstar).*