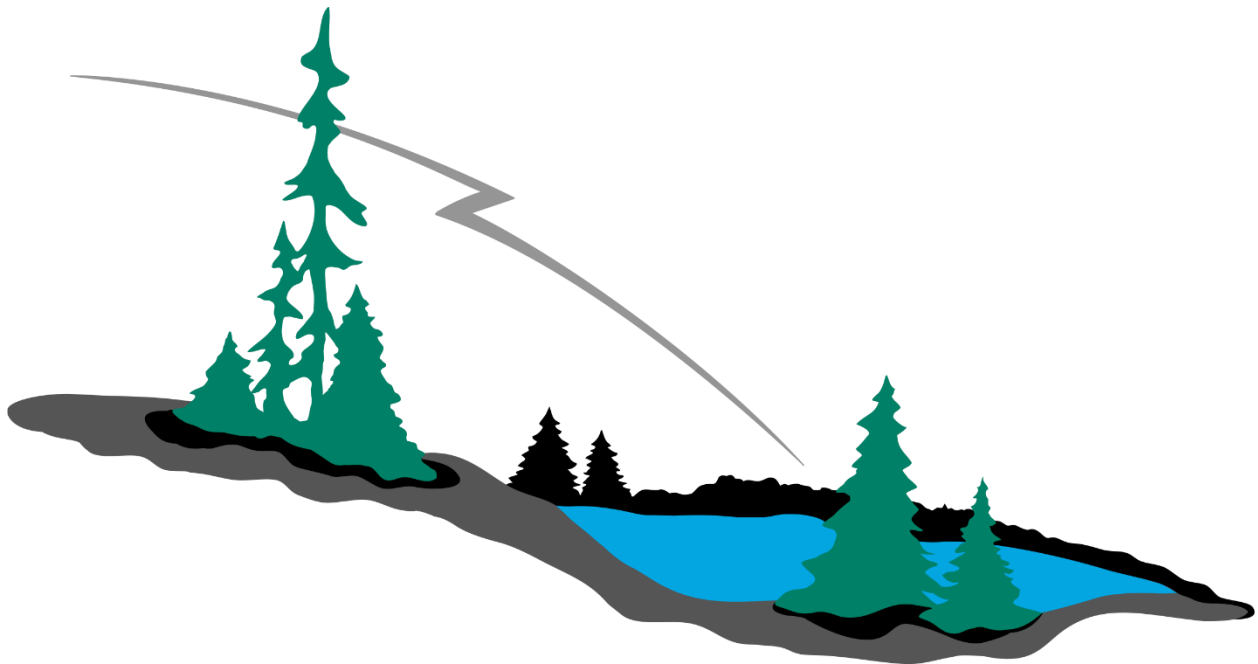




FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

CAMP OLSON YMCA

Sharing the Spirit of the Northwoods



Staff Welcome Packet

Welcome Letter

2023 Summer

We are so happy to welcome you to the Camp Olson YMCA Summer Camp team for our 69th summer! It is going to be the best summer yet. More than one thousand campers come to Camp Olson YMCA each summer and return home with thousands of stories. As a Camp Olson staff member, you will be a part of each of those stories—making camp unforgettable.

Every summer, staff like you change lives. But this year, that impact will be more profound than ever. Children crave these social and natural interactions more than they have in decades. You bring the energy and excitement to a program that will challenge campers to push themselves to try new things and expand the boundaries they thought they had. While role modeling and teaching the core values of honesty, caring, respect, responsibility, and equity, you will be shaping who that camper is for the rest of their life, how they treat their friends and family, how they see themselves, how they respond to challenges and so much more.

It is so much more than teaching campers, however. You will get to know each of your campers and form a bond that will stay with them long after they leave the Northwoods. By getting to know your campers, they will get to know themselves and their cabin mates. You will help them develop friendships that will last longer than one summer. Camp friends are forever, lifelong friends, and you will be a part of that, a part of each camper's life in a way that they may not understand until much later.

With all that being said, this work is demanding. This job, without question, will be one of the most challenging positions you will ever hold. Being a summer camp counselor is often a 24-hour-a-day experience that will take a lot of energy and emotion. You will need to be self-motivated, patient, and creative while maintaining a positive attitude. You will get out what you put into this job. When you pour your heart into it, others will share their heart with you. It will be a crazy summer filled with good times, laughter, and maybe some tears, as well as new friends. I can assure you that it will be one of the most satisfying experiences of your life.

Your journey starts here. Enjoy every moment you have as a Camp Olson staff member. Cherish each individual; you never know how they will touch your life. Together we will make this summer the best summer for campers and staff alike.

We look forward to meeting you, singing around a campfire with you, and sharing the Spirit of the Northwoods here at Camp Olson YMCA. Don't hesitate to reach out with any questions!

Demi Kapler – Camp Director – demi@campolson.org

Margret Raasch – Assistant Camp Director – margret@campolson.org

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History & Mission

Our Mission is to share the Spirit of the Northwoods while preserving a paradise of beauty with youth, families, and their leaders through YMCA programs that build healthy mind, body, and spirit for all. We are guided by our core values of caring, honesty, respect, responsibility, and equity.

Camp Olson YMCA was founded in 1954 when Bella and E.O. Olson donated their land, previously used as a tree and poultry farm, to the YMCA. With their gift, they stated their wish “to preserve a paradise of forest beauty where youth and their leaders can find joy and inspiration in the years to come.” We accomplish this every summer by providing programs for youth and adults that develop life skills, cultivate leadership, and foster an ethic of land stewardship and environmental responsibility.

We acknowledge that Camp Olson YMCA is located on the traditional, ancestral, and contemporary lands taken from the Ojibwe people, recognized in the 1855 Treaty of Washington. We honor and respect those who were forcibly removed from and who are still connected to this land. We will work to protect and honor this place, educate our camp communities, and build relationships with all of the people that occupy this land, past and present.

Summer Camp Program Overview

Day Camp

Our day camp program is for campers ages 5-11 who want to experience awesome traditional Camp activities but do not want to stay overnight. Day Camp sessions are one week long, from Monday to Friday. Campers make the journey to each camp activity under the supervision of our cool camp counselors. Each day campers will be able to participate in a sample of both land and water activities.

Overnight Camp

Our overnight camp program is for campers ages 7-16, Sunday through Saturday. They enjoy many of the same activities as Day Camp, in a deeper and more meaningful way, and many additional programs like all-camp night activities, campouts, and more! Kids can choose traditional Overnight Camp (Pathfinder or Discovery) or a Specialty Camp (Horseback Riding, Sailing, Mountain Biking, or Fishing). Campers are assigned a cabin at the beginning of the session and will live with two counselors and fellow campers similar in age.

Leadership Development Programs

Our Leadership Development Program (LDP) includes our Counselor in Training program (CIT) and Leadership in Training program (LIT) for youth ages 13-17. Who want to enhance their proven leadership abilities, strengthen their character, challenge their comfort zones, and surround themselves with other teens. These sessions run two to four weeks in length and are focused on team building, building leadership skills, having intentional difficult conversations to facilitate personal growth, and participating in an off-site trip!

Family Camp

Our family camp programs run the final two weeks of summer, in which camp goes resort-style! Families are housed in their own cabins and are provided with three delicious meals per day and an action-packed week of activities. Staff provide daily games and events for kids of all ages, such as the regatta, eco-challenge, theme night & Carnival, beach skit, capture the flag, variety show, cookouts, nightly campfires, and more. Our morning Kid Clubs offer structured fun for children and free time for adults.

General Information

2022 Dates

Staff Training: June 4-10, 2023 *Some positions may require early arrival for additional training

Youth Camp Sessions: June 11-August 5, 2023

Family Camp Sessions: August 6-19, 2023

Address

Camp Olson YMCA
c/o Your Name (if receiving mail)
4160 Little Boy Rd NE
Longville, MN 56655

Weather

Summertime in Minnesota is just great! Fresh, sunny, and sometimes humid days are plentiful. So be prepared to be in the water, run free in the woods, and wear your raincoat because we never know when it is going to rain. Temperatures in June – August are between 22-30°C (70-85°F) on average; it can be as cold as 50°F (10°C) and as warm as 100°F (40°C).

Location

Camp Olson YMCA is located in north-central Minnesota, about 3.5 hours north of the Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport, or 2 hours west of Duluth.



Spirituality at Camp

At Camp Olson, we host campers and staff from most major religious faiths or no faith. Our purpose is not to change or instill any specific faith or belief upon campers or staff. Our goal is to make every person feel comfortable while still including the traditions of the YMCA. Grace is sung before each meal, and each morning (password) and evening (last word) provides thought and inspiration for our campers.

Daily Schedule

Most programs other than our leadership development programs are one week long. Overnight campers arrive on Sunday and depart on Saturday. Day Camp runs Monday through Friday.

This is an example of what a daily schedule might look like for traditional overnight campers. The times may vary, and your schedule might look different depending on your role at camp.

7:30 am	Rise & Shine	3:30 pm	Power-up (Snack Time)
7:45 am	Flag Raising	4:00 pm	Free-Choice Activities
8:00 am	Breakfast	5:45 pm	Flag Lowering
8:45 am	Camp Beautification	6:00 pm	Dinner
9:00 am	Cabin Activities	7:00 pm	Evening Game
12:15 pm	Lunch	8:00 pm	Trading Post (Snack Time)
1:00 pm	Afternoon Announcements	8:45 pm	Campfire
1:15 pm	Siesta	9:30 pm	Quiet Reflection
2:00 pm	Free-Choice Activities	10:00 pm	Lights Out

Facilities

Camp Olson YMCA is located on 1350 acres of beautiful woodlands, lakes, and camp facilities, including:

- 20 overnight, single-room cabins
- Two "Coops," staff dorm-style housing with two- and 4-bed rooms
*all housing has electricity, lighting, and fans
- Two Bathroom & Shower Facilities
- Health Lodge
- Large Dining Hall
- Art Center
- Horse Barn & Corral
- Staff Lounge with full kitchen, dining space, couches, personal storage lockers, T.V.s, and gaming systems
- Amphitheater
- Athletic Field with volleyball, gaga ball, tetherball, and more
- Nature Center
- Bike Shop
- Lakefront for swimming, paddle sports, and sailing
- Sauna
- Outbound Trips Center
- Miles of hiking and biking trails
- Five lakes
- Program areas for campfires, target sports, fishing, and more!

Staff Life

Accommodations

Program and Support staff are housed in our staff cabins. We offer dorm-style rooms equipped with 2 or 4 twin beds or communal living in our Timberframe cabins with 8-12 bunk-style twin beds. Counseling staff will stay in our camper cabins with 6-10 campers equipped with extra-long twin bunk beds. All cabins have a dresser or space for personal storage, electricity, fans, clotheslines, private changing space, and communal outdoor fire pits.

Most bathrooms at camp are set up as either communal bath/shower houses or single-occupancy bathrooms. Bathrooms have electricity, hot water, and outlets for hair dryers, electric toothbrushes, etc. Both campers and staff use most bathrooms, and there are very few bathrooms at camp that are staff-only. In addition to bathrooms, there are outhouses in some areas of camp.

Meals

Our food service manager takes great pride in serving well-balanced, nutritious, and filling meals three times per day. Meals are served buffet-style. Meals at camp vary each day. Below are some typical offerings:

- Breakfast: Cereal, Pancakes and Sausage, Biscuits and Gravy, Breakfast Pizza
- Lunch: Burgers, Chicken Patties, Corn Dogs, Tacos
- Dinner: Pasta Bar, Pulled Pork Sandwiches, Burrito Bowls

* Specialty diets, including vegetarian, gluten-free, and many others, can be accommodated. Please ensure you notify us of any dietary restrictions or food allergies!

You will also have access to a staff fridge and a full kitchen. All staff may store small amounts of food in the staff lounge, and sealed, non-refrigerated items in cabins. We share our environment with small animals, so all food must be sealed.

Laundry

Camp Olson YMCA does not have staff laundry facilities. There is a laundromat 5 minutes from camp in Longville! They are quarter machines, so make sure you have some spare change when doing laundry.

Cell Phones

Cell phone coverage can vary greatly depending on your provider. Verizon has the best coverage in this area. Sprint, AT&T., T-Mobile, and others tend to have very spotty coverage.

If you bring cell phones to camp, please use them only during your time off or days off. We do not allow campers to bring their phones, so we ask that you do not use yours in front of them. When they need to be used for work (taking camp photos, calling your supervisor, etc.), that is fine, but they should not be used in other ways unless you're on break.

Internet

Wifi internet is available in a few areas around camp, including the Program Office, Health Lodge, Staff Lounge, and Dining Hall. For the most part, wifi does not reach cabins. Staff computers are also available for use in the staff lounge.

Visitors

All guests must have pre-approval from the Camp Director or Assistant Camp Director. Visitors attending during an active camp session may be required to pass a background check (\$2 fee) if they will be in contact with children.

Transportation & Vehicles

Staff are welcome to bring their personal vehicles to camp or utilize the coach bus to get to/from camp at no charge (with 2 weeks' notice). The coach bus accommodates pickup (Sunday) or drop off (Saturday) in Rochester, Owatonna, Edina, St. Cloud, and Brainerd.

For local travel, if you do not have a car, most staff are friendly enough to help you if you need to go somewhere during your time off. Personal vehicles must be parked in staff parking lots (limited space available) and may not be driven through camp without prior permission. Any damage to your car while at Camp is not Camp Olson's responsibility.

Dress Code

You will receive one staff t-shirt and will be asked to wear it on check-in day (Sunday) and check-out day (Saturday). Prior year staff shirts are also permissible to wear on this day.

You are asked to dress as active/professional the rest of the week. Clothing with messages should be apolitical and appropriate for children and/or parents, i.e., no alcohol, drugs, etc. Staff are to maintain good personal hygiene.

Staff are to wear functional and appropriate clothing, footwear, and swimwear. This means shoes that you could run in for an emergency and swimsuits that are conducive to actually swimming and playing in the water. If you have questions about a specific item, feel free to ask!

Tobacco, Drugs, Alcohol, Firearms & Pornography

Your two most important roles at camp are keeping campers safe and being a positive role model. As such, the use or possession of alcohol, THC products, illicit substances, firearms, pornography, or related paraphernalia are not permitted on the camp grounds during the entire camp season, including time-off on camp property. ANY VIOLATION is cause for immediate dismissal. Legal use of tobacco products and vaping devices by staff is limited to time-off periods and only to occur in the designated areas in the staff parking area. Any staff member who returns to camp and appears to be intoxicated or under the influence and, therefore, possibly unable to perform their duties must notify their supervisor and request alternative sleeping arrangements and unpaid time off. Failure to do so may result in dismissal.

Communication & Social Media

We discourage staff contact with campers outside of camp via social media networks, telephone, email, snail mail, or other forms of communication. If staff or campers wish to communicate outside of camp, we ask that it be done through official camp channels – please mail or email communication to Camp Olson, and if appropriate, the communication will be reviewed and forwarded to the appropriate person. We want to maintain privacy and safety for our staff and campers alike.

Staff Benefits

Paychecks

Weekly pay rates are based on working six days per week. This rate is divided by six to determine a daily rate for staff when hired, and staff are paid for each day they work. Payroll is processed every 2 weeks, on Fridays. Pay stubs are available upon request. All staff must enroll for direct deposit, so please ensure you know your bank's routing # and account #. Exceptions are only allowed for international staff members. *If you work a minimum of 6 weeks (not including staff training), you will receive a \$20/week bonus, paid out on your final check.

Time Off

All* staff receive one 24-hour period off from noon on Saturday through noon on Sunday. Each staff will also receive one evening off each week, from 5:30 pm to midnight. Counseling staff will be given at least an additional 90 minutes off for one afternoon. Any additional time-off requests should be made to the Camp Director or Assistant Camp Director with at least 2 weeks' notice.

**Staff members may be assigned to work one weekend during their contract as a stayover counselor. Staff are reimbursed for this extra time, and efforts are made to give them additional breaks during this time.*

Per every 5 weeks you work, you will earn one sick day (up to 2, which can be used for an illness, injury, or mental health day). Unused sick time will be paid out at the end of the summer. Time off needed for an illness, injury, or emergency should be communicated to their supervisor as promptly as possible.

Referrals

Refer a new staff member to work at Camp Olson, and when both yours and their contract are fulfilled, you'll receive a \$100 bonus at the end of the summer.

Camp Store

Our camp store, known as the Trading Post, sells snacks, beverages, ice cream, clothing, and souvenirs. Staff receive a 25% discount on Trading Post purchases. Staff accounts may be pre-paid or charged to your account. Trading post balances will be deducted from your final paycheck.

Professional Development

Every role at camp will challenge staff members to grow as professionals and leaders. Time management, interpersonal skills, communication, public speaking, innovation, project management, group leadership, conflict resolution, inclusion, work ethic, and SO MUCH MORE! Skills developed at camp will benefit summer staff for the rest of their lives.

We put months of work into planning each summer's staff training, designed to teach you everything you need to know to succeed in your role. The most important part of orientation is creating a sense of community and teamwork within the staff team. You'll also learn youth development strategies, facilitation skills, and leadership techniques. Plus, you'll learn all the hands-on skills needed to lead a cabin and facilitate camp activities, along with the policies and procedures we use to keep everyone safe. Even when orientation is over and your campers arrive, you'll have veteran staff by your side to help with anything that comes up. Each staff member will

also be assigned to a specialty training in either Sailing, Horseback Riding, Mountain Biking, Wilderness First Aid, or Lifeguarding during staff training.

Mental Health Support

Working at Camp Olson YMCA is a lot of fun AND can be stressful for staff. Seasonal staff have access to Dear Scout, which offers confidential camp-focused mental health counseling during the summer to benefit staff who need additional professional support. Additionally, supervisors can make schedule accommodations for staff to connect with mental health providers throughout the summer if you wish to continue with your own provider.

Certifications Pay Boost

Camp Olson YMCA recruits staff with a wide range of skills and experiences. Camp Olson YMCA may provide you with Lifeguard, Wilderness First Aid, and CPR certifications at no cost to you. If you are coming to us already certified, you are eligible for a bonus. If you have a certification or training not shown on our pay scales, which you believe is an added value to your specific role, inform your supervisor during the hiring process, and they will let you know if it is eligible for a boost in your summer pay.

Pro Deals

As a camp professional, you can access special promotions for various outdoor gear and clothing. Check out [this link](#) to see how you can sign up for 40% off Chacos. And if you want access to hundreds more companies (like Mountain Hardware, Outdoor Research, K2, Pelican, Smartwool, Keen, Goal Zero, Oakley, etc.), visit [ExpertVoice's link](#) to sign up using the following affiliation: Outdoor Activities and Camp Employees. You may be asked to show proof of employment, like a copy of your contract or pay stub to gain these perks.

Internships & School Credit

Whether you are looking to grow personally or develop marketable skills for the corporate or professional world, work at Camp Olson will prepare you for almost anything! The internship program is available to each employee for personal experience or college credit. If you plan to use your time at camp to gain course credit, we strongly recommend that you speak with your advisor to determine the necessary steps to apply for credit at your particular institution. We will work with you and your school to ensure the right forms are filled out, but as every school is different, we rely on you to guide the process.

Packing List

It is best to travel with only what you can carry yourself. You may have to move cabins weekly, and it can be tough to carry too many bags! Think twice about bringing valuables; though, if you bring them, we suggest storing them in a locked vehicle or a locker in the staff lounge (please bring your own lock).

View our Staff Packing List [HERE](#).

Exploring

Camp Olson YMCA is in a great location for a Camp, surrounded by fresh air and nature! The town of Longville has a population of about 170 people but grows into the thousands during the summer months as families, and outdoor enthusiasts visit summer cabins and resorts in the area.

Longville is equipped with a small grocery store, convenience store, gas station, post office, laundromat, bank, ice cream shop, coffee shop, bar, and a few restaurants. There are several larger surrounding towns (Walker, Bemidji, Crosby, Brainerd, Baxter, Grand Rapids) within 30 minutes to an hour that boast larger stores (like Walmart and Target), a greater variety of restaurants, movie theaters, bowling allies, mini golf, etc. Common day off activities include traveling to a larger town for store runs and dinner with a recreational activity like mini golf or lounging on a beach. Art fairs, concerts, and festivals are often common in the summertime. If you are looking for even MORE variety and big city vibes, Minneapolis is about a 3-hour drive, and Duluth is a 2-hour drive.

Arrival Checklist

Before arriving, it's best to have all the paperwork completed and your ducks in a row. But just in case, below is the list of paperwork and hiring steps we'll have to complete before Staff Training officially kicks off! Login to your CampInTouch staff account to see what you're missing for forms!

- Completed Staff Application
- Staff Photo
- Signed Employment Contract
- Health History
- Background Check Authorization
- W-4 (all employees)
- I-9 (new employees)
- Direct Deposit Information
- Current Certifications (i.e., CPR, First Aid, Lifeguard)
- Drug Testing Policy
- Driver Questionnaire (for employees 18 or older with a valid U.S. driver's license)
- Commitment to Consent
- Social Media & Communication Policy

Our Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice

Camp Olson YMCA is committed to advancing equity, inclusion, and diversity within our camp community and promoting access and opportunities for all.

We strive to ensure that everyone, regardless of ability, age, cultural background, ethnicity, faith, gender, gender expression, gender identity, ideology, income, national origin, race, or sexual orientation, feels welcomed, affirmed, supported and has the opportunity to reach their full potential with dignity and respect.

Our diverse camper community should grow to reflect our larger community's demographics. Campers and staff can look forward to interacting and living within this diverse and supportive environment. We recognize that access to and success in our programs require intentional work to cultivate respect, eliminate systemic barriers, and address injustice head-on. We believe that words must be followed by progress, action, and accountability. We recognize that our efforts will be ongoing and evolving as we continue to grow, learn, collaborate, and press for an equitable future.

Gender Inclusion

We provide safe, affirming spaces for all campers and staff, including those that identify as LGBTQ+. It is important for us to support all in our community regardless of their sexual orientation, gender expression, or gender identity. We recognize that our community includes gender identities that do not fit neatly into binary (girl/boy) gender categories, and we strive to create inclusive spaces for all campers and staff. Staff and campers may choose to share their pronouns with the camp community.

Our full LGBTQ+ & Gender Inclusion Policy can be found [here](#).

Safe Place for All

YMCA Camp Olson welcomes all participants. Our goal is to promote kindness, good manners, and consideration for all people in the camp community. Camp Olson seeks to create an environment that is free from discrimination and devoid of violence, intimidation, or harassment based on race, creed, color, national origin, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, or disability. We strive to be a place that embraces and celebrates diversity in all aspects of humanity.

All participants are expected to respect other people, including campers, family members, guests, and Camp Olson employees. Participants must be responsible for themselves and their own actions. It is not acceptable in our community to mock, bully, harass, intimidate, or attempt to exclude people. Participants and guests are expected to practice respect, cooperation, and compromise within camp. For the protection of every participant, we reserve the right to deny or cancel the enrollment of any participant who cannot behave appropriately within the camp community.

Our full Policy Against Violence, Harassment, and Assault [here](#).

Common Camp Jargon

These are just some of the most common or staff-specific words and phrases you will hear. A full camp dictionary is posted in our Staff Google Classroom.

AC: Assistant Counselor, Counselor, who is 17 years old.

A.D.: Assistant Director

Anch*: The Anchorage Inn, a restaurant in Longville.

Bell: The "Bell" is our emergency signal when it is heard ringing non-stop. When it is rung just a few times, that indicates it is time for a meal or to announce a game.

Bug Juice: Fruit-flavored juice served at mealtimes – it's not actually made of bugs!

CampMinder or CampInTouch: Online account to access all things camper related such as health forms, transportation, photos, camper emails, etc.

Castle: Bathroom and shower location near the Craftshop underneath the Health Lodge. Also used as a storm shelter during severe weather.

CC: Counselor Coordinator; they are the direct supervisors to our counseling staff.

CD: Camp Director.

Day Camper: Our campers who do not sleep overnight at camp, ages 5-11.

Discovery: Our typical camper group, ages 10-15, who participate in ALL activities in the morning.

Dining Hall: Where all meals are served.

First Word/Password: A word or phrase that a staff member who is assigned comes up with for staff and campers to think about throughout their day, said after flag raising before breakfast.

Free-Time: Afternoon time for our older campers to select their choice of afternoon activities. Pathfinders will continue to participate in scheduled fun activities with their counselors.

Frosty's*: Ice cream shop in Longville.

Health Lodge: Where campers and staff can go to receive medical treatment for an injury or illness (AKA Health Center or Nursing Station).

Last Word: Similar to First Word/Password, a word or phrase that an assigned staff member makes up and says during campfire for staff and campers to think about as they wind down for the night.

Leech*: Leech Lake beach staff occasionally go here on weekends when the weather is nice.

LDP: Leadership Development Program, including the LIT and CIT programs.

LDP Coordinator: Direct supervisor to trip leaders.

O-Ro: Orientation Rotation, a Sunday evening activity to introduce all campers to learn about the rules and activities of each program area at camp.

One Stop*: Gas station located in Longville. They also have a sub and pizza shop, Caribou Coffee station, and bait and tackle.

Overnight: A campout experience on one of Camp Olson's lakes. Campers will hike and paddle to a nearby campsite, set up a tent to sleep in, and cook dinner and breakfast over a campfire.

(White) Palace: Bathroom and shower location near the Dining Hall. Also used as a storm shelter during severe weather.

P & T*: Praise and Thanks; staff throughout the week write compliments to each other and place them in a bucket located in the Program Office – at the end of the week, the compliments are read during Staff Circle.

Pathfinder: Our younger camper group, typically ages 8-9. These campers participate in ALL camp activities but do not get free-choice activities in the afternoon.

P.D.: Program Director; direct supervisor to program area directors.

Power Up: A time when campers come to the trading post (camp store) to purchase snacks and drinks, done in between the first and second half of free time.

Shurds: Private lakes, trails, and campsites across the main highway that are used for campouts and trail rides.

Siesta: Quiet time or rest hour in the cabin after lunch, before activity time.

Spirit of the Northwoods: Phrase we commonly use to describe the positive feeling camp brings you and is used in our mission statement.

SOS Coordinator: Stayover and support coordinator who assists the nurses and supervises campers and staff on weekends.

Staff Circle*: An all-staff weekly meeting done at 12:00 pm on Sundays and right after the bus leaves on Saturdays.

Stayover: A camper at camp for more than one week and spends the weekend at camp.

Tabakas*: Local grocery store located in Longville across the street from the OneStop.

Trading Post: Camp store for souvenirs, clothes, and snacks (you don't actually trade). This is also the location to meet at in case of an emergency (when the bell rings non-stop).

International Staff

Travel

Before you Depart

- Copy important documents: passport, visa, form DS-2019, picture I.D., and any other important documents. Take and keep copies with you, separate from your original documents. Also, leave additional copies at home with your emergency contact.
- We recommend you bring pocket money in USD and exchange currency at the airport before you depart for the U.S., as it is extremely difficult to find a currency exchange office near camp.
- Double-check the rules for checked baggage and carry-on items for your airline. It is best to travel with only what you can carry yourself. Keep in mind plans you might have to travel to the U.S. after your summer camp experience. Would it be easier to travel with a suitcase or a large backpack?

Pre-departure Checklist

When you travel to the U.S., don't forget to take the following paperwork with you:

- Passport with J-1 Visa
- Form Ds-2019
- Important documents sent with form DS-2019
- ID cards and/or Driver's license
- Insurance information
- Placement notice or confirmation from site (such as your contract)

Insurance

As a J-1 Visa participant, you are required to have health insurance. If you were hired through a sponsor agency (IENA, CampAmerica, CampUSA, etc.), your program fee should cover this expense and coverage. If you were a direct hire and applied through one of the above agencies AFTER being placed, you may need to obtain your own insurance. Please contact your sponsor agency for more details and see if you are already covered. Insurance will cover sickness and accidents for the duration of the program as specified by the DS-2019. Any illness or condition that begins before your arrival in the U.S., dental care, routine eye care, and pregnancy is not covered by the insurance. For more information about this, please contact your country recruiter.

Clearing Immigration and Customs

All J-1 Exchange Visitors complete a white form I-94 before arriving in the United States. In most cases, you will receive form I-94 from flight attendants en route to the United States. (Canadians should ask for the form at the border if traveling by car.)

Please print your name on all forms in block letters exactly as it appears in your passport. Ensure that you write your birth date in the U.S. date format of month, day, and year. For example, August 19, 1980, would be written as 08/19/1980. You may have problems applying for your Social Security Number if you do not.

When you pass through immigration, present your passport, form DS-2019, form I-94, and customs declaration card. You may also be asked for a copy of your job confirmation form, training plan, camp placement notice, onward flight ticket, and return flight ticket, so keep these documents handy. Be prepared to tell the immigration inspector why you are coming to the United States, where you are going, what you will be doing, and other information about your program.

You will be admitted to the United States as a J-1 Exchange Visitor. Make sure that J-1 is written on your form I-94 before you leave immigration.

After immigration, you will claim your luggage and pass through customs. If you will make a connecting flight, re-check your luggage after exiting customs. When making flight arrangements, ensure you have plenty of time to go through customs at the first port of entry into the U.S. You may need up to 2 hours to reclaim your luggage and reenter through screening for your connecting flight.

Getting to Camp

Camp Olson YMCA staff will pick you up from the airport and bring you to camp. Please be sure to have your flight arrive to the Minneapolis-St.Paul Airport (MSP). Please communicate with Camp Olson staff (likely the same person who interviewed you) to arrange your travel date/time. We try to coordinate travel and pickup for all international staff on the same day. Be sure to notify Camp Olson YMCA staff as soon as you know your flight information so we can arrange your pickup and keep record of your flight info to keep track of any delays or itinerary changes.

Departing Camp

When the last session is over, you will be responsible for a thorough clean-up before departure. Many other staff will depart the same day as you, traveling toward the airport. We ask that you work to arrange your own travel or carpool back to the airport, but will be happy to assist if needed. Please keep Camp Olson YMCA staff informed about your travel plans so we can plan accordingly to get you to your destination on time.

Money Tips

- Having a major credit card such as a VISA or MasterCard is a good thing to have in case of an emergency. Keep a separate record of the account number and expiration date if the card is lost or stolen.
- If you do not have a credit card, a bank card/debit card can be valuable. However, limit withdrawals as service fees are high, especially for international transactions. Wise cards are a popular option for international staff and allows you to receive your paychecks by direct deposit.
- In the USA, sales tax is added to the retail price of most items and services. Sales tax vary from state to state and city to city. The general M.N. sales tax is 6.875%. Clothing and groceries are not taxed in M.N.

- ❑ Tipping is expected, particularly in the service industry, such as restaurants, hotels, cafes, bars, taxis, salons, etc. In restaurants, tipping ranges between 15–20% of the total bill. Tipping is not included in your bill and can be added by credit/debit card or cash.
- ❑ Your income will also be taxed. As an Exchange Visitor on a J-1 Visa, you are considered a “non-resident alien” for tax purposes. Depending on how long you work and how much money you make, you may be eligible for a refund of much of the taxes you pay. Be sure to file a tax return to get this money back! Camp Olson will send you information to file your taxes in January of the year after you worked.
- ❑ At the start of your employment, you will be asked to fill out a W-4 for tax purposes. You will also be asked to complete additional paperwork to apply for a Social Security Number. Camp staff will transport you to a Social Security office within your first two weeks. For more info, visit this [link](#).

American Culture

Culture-Shock

Once in the U.S., participants face an adjustment period called “culture shock.” Moving to the U.S. can be a very stressful experience. Everything is unfamiliar, from weather, landscape, and language to food, fashion, values, and customs.

The degree of “shock” depends on such factors as length of study abroad, flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, degree of difference between home and host culture, prior experience abroad, and their expectations. Culture shock is a normal part of work abroad programs.

Everyone goes through three similar stages when adapting to a new culture. Some of us can go through the process quicker and with less stress, while others go through these stages and find it difficult to adjust.

Symptoms of culture shock can include: homesickness; depression; feeling lost and out of place; frustration; irritability; sleep problems; headache and stomach ache; and fatigue.

Tips for dealing with culture shock:

- Ask questions and communicate with our supervisor and peers.
- Stay in regular contact with your friends and family from home.
- Bring familiar items from home with you.
- Eat a balanced diet of new foods but choose familiar foods as well, exercise, stay hydrated, and get the right amount of sleep.
- Educate yourself on American cultural differences, so you know what to expect.
- Remember that different isn’t necessarily bad, and the unfamiliar can become familiar.

Many people experience culture shock when coming to the United States. Differences in food, environment, etiquette and social customs can be challenging to adjust to. But, dealing with culture shock is possible. In time, you can find your place in a new environment.

American Characteristics

The United States is a large country with people from many different backgrounds. There are many variations among the people of the U.S. due to regional, ethnic, religious, and economic differences.

No matter what we tell you about the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of people in the United States, you will find a part of our population that does not fit the description. These are some characteristics that are fairly common for many Americans:

Informality: People dress very casually, call superiors by their first names, and eat just about anywhere. This is related to Americans' idea of equality. If we are all social equals, we can be informal in any situation.

Direct & Indirect: In some parts of the country, U.S. citizens can seem overly blunt when answering questions or giving advice. Though, they can be indirect when communicating information that may cause another person to feel uncomfortable (often referred to as "Minnesota Nice").

Privacy and Personal Space: A strong respect for personal property and expectation of being asked before using others' personal belongings. Americans have a strong sense of privacy and believe everyone is entitled to that. They do not like to be asked about their age, weight, or salary. Conversations about personal family matters, political opinions, or religion are reserved for later stages of friendship.

Touching: While it may be common for some friends to hug upon greeting, touching or handholding is often seen as a sign of sexual attraction.

Time: Time is considered a thing that can be saved, spent, or budgeted. Being late is considered rude, and timeliness is expected. Consistent tardiness could lead to being fired from employment.

Assertive: Those who take initiative are admired. Don't wait to be introduced or for people to speak to you first if you want to meet others. If you don't make the first move, the assumption may be you want to be left alone.

Gender Roles: There are no separate jobs for men and women. Men do house cleaning, and so do women. Women construct buildings, and so do men. You should expect to do jobs you might not be asked to do at home.

Friendly: A high value is placed on a warm, informal, open, and positive attitude towards people. Highly dependent relationships with other people tend not to be established. Friends respect another's independence and give personal space to "be yourself."

You can learn more about elements of American Culture and Culture Shock [here](#).

Adjusting to Camp Life

During the first weeks, you may have lots of questions about what to do (language barriers, too much information, general worries). Don't worry, you can always reach your mentor, or any coworker, they'll be happy to help.

The first week of camp is staff training and you will be overloaded with information. During this week and throughout summer, things will be fast paced at times and you may experience peer pressure to stay up late or be extra social. Don't be afraid to say no, rest, and have personal boundaries.

There are some camp traditions, such as songs, games, and skits that will be confusing at first. Do your best to fake it until you make it – campers will notice you're not interested, and they will respond the same way.

Problem Resolution

At some point during your stay, a problem may occur. Problems create opportunities for learning experiences. Be prepared to be challenged and mentally stretched while in the United States. One of the most challenging issues you will face is defining just what the real problem is, not the symptom of the problem. If you are having a problem, you may find that Camp Olson has already established a standard operating procedure for dealing with the problem. Ask us for help. If your problem is with your supervisor, ask for some uninterrupted time to discuss your concerns. If you feel uncomfortable speaking with your supervisor, go to any other supervisor (Assistant Camp Director, Camp Director, Executive Director, or your mentor) to discuss your issue. Again, ensure you have clearly identified the problem before beginning the discussion. Stick to facts and specific behavior. Do not let personalities and emotional reactions cloud your judgment. Remember that you will be experiencing life in a different culture where the assumptions about what is common or normal could be very different from those you grew up with.

If possible, solve your problems with the help of your supervisor or your peers. If you need YMCA staff assistance, ask immediately. Do not simply leave the site of activity. Leaving before contacting the YMCA could jeopardize your visa status and future visa approval to enter the United States.

Be aware of local, state, and national laws. States strictly enforce laws prohibiting the purchase or consumption of alcohol by individuals under the age of 21. Sexual relations with a minor (anyone under the age of 18) are illegal even though that person may be willing. The use of marijuana and/or other narcotics is against the law. Stealing/theft is also a crime, so be sure you do not take anything that is not yours unless you have paid for it or received permission from the owner. If you break the law, you could be put in jail. There is little that the YMCA can do in these cases. You may also jeopardize an opportunity to return to the U.S. REMEMBER, the International YMCA expects you to obey the law.

What NOT to do

You can expect to have a terrific experience in the U.S., but every so often, a participant finds themselves in serious trouble. We do not want you to be one of these participants, so we hope you will carefully read the following information. Please note that any problems relating to the topics below may result in immediate dismissal from Camp Olson YMCA.

Stealing and Shoplifting

Stealing is taking anything that does not belong to you or taking something without paying for it. If something does not belong to you, do not take it for yourself or someone else. You may be arrested for theft. Some examples of stealing include:

- Taking an item from a store, canteen, or shop without paying.
- Not collecting money from another person or friend for an item if you work as a cashier.
- Taking from someone else anything that does not belong to you.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment occurs when somebody says or does something sexually related that you don't want them to say or do, regardless of who it is. We will discuss sexual harassment during staff training, but for example:

- Talking about sexual experiences or asking about yours.

- Telling sexual jokes, stories, or making comments.
- Continually asking someone for a date and not accepting an answer of “no.”
- Touching someone, threatening someone, or forcing someone to have sex in exchange for a job, raise, retain a job, get a better grade, or special treatment, or escape physical violence.

Sexual Relationships and Sexual Consent

In the U.S. the legal age of consent is 18 in most states, regardless of whether or not the other person agrees to have a sexual relationship. Consent means that at the time of the act, there are actual words or physical conduct indicating freely given agreement to have sexual intercourse or sexual contact. If you commit any type of sexual assault, you may be arrested. You may NEVER enter a romantic or platonic relationship with a camper.