

## **Neria Aylward (HSPS) - Iqaluit, Canada, Summer 2016**

This summer, generously supported by the B M Rowe Trust Fund, I travelled to Iqaluit, Canada, to undertake research for my final year dissertation. My dissertation in social anthropology examines the impact of international animal rights activism on the Inuit seal hunt of Canada. In my trip to Iqaluit – the capital of Nunavut, Canada’s youngest and predominantly Inuit territory – I had the great opportunity to meet and interview a number of Inuit women from all walks of life. From the youngest, who were my age, to the oldest, a grandmother and community leader, each woman I interviewed was committed to improving the lives of all Inuit in Canada.

For many Canadians, Nunavut feels impossibly distant. I am from Toronto, in what people from Iqaluit would call “southern” Canada. The flight from Ottawa to Iqaluit is three hours long, straight North. Nunavut is also Canada’s largest province or territory in terms of area, and has a population density of 0 people per square kilometer. There are no roads connecting Nunavut to southern Canada, and there are no further roads connecting Nunavut’s 25 communities, as the distances between them are simply immense. Food and other supplies have to be flown in, meaning that food prices can be quadruple those in the rest of Canada. Flights, which are operated by a single airline, can easily add up to over a thousand pounds round-trip. While Nunavut comprises one-fifth of Canada’s landmass, therefore, many southern Canadians never make the trip.

It was the early summer and Iqaluit was experiencing the annual period of twenty-four-hour sunlight, so there was a distinctive celebratory feel in the air. I had the great privilege to volunteer with Alianait Arts Festival, a festival drawing artists of all types from all over the circumpolar world. Throat singers from all over Nunavut came together to collaborate, and a charter plane from Greenland brought a number of Greenlandic Inuit artists to Iqaluit. I also got to participate in both Canada Day and Nunavut Day celebrations, the latter featuring an annual seal-skinning competition. Immersing myself, if only for a few weeks, in all that Iqaluit had to offer was a truly incomparable experience. It enriched not only my research, but also was extremely formative for me on a personal level. I look forward to going back!