

## Anishinabek Employment service continuing to fill training gap

about 17 hours ago by [Doug Diaczuk](#)



1 / 4 From left to right: Chief librarian, John Pateman, AETS executive director, John DeGiacomo, Minister Patty Hajdu, Sharon Ostberg, president of the AETS Board, and Matthew Dupuis, chief of the Red Rock Indian Band, cut the ribbon to open the AETS centre at the Waverley Resource Library. (Photos by Doug Diaczuk - TbnnewsWatch.com).



THUNDER BAY - Bele Wigwas said as an Indigenous person, she has faced numerous barriers when it comes to pursuing her education and career goals. But after utilizing the Anishinabek Employment and Training Services she has been working as a personal support worker for the past three years.

"It gave me the confidence to take this step and now I plan to pursue nursing in 2020," she said. "They were able to support me in a holistic view. There was always someone with us 24/7 and it was really good. I feel like I wouldn't be able to do it just at Confederation College because of the barriers First Nation people face."

Anishinabek Employment and Training Services is looking to help even more Indigenous people pursue education and employment opportunities with the help of more than \$16 million in federal funding, a new training space in partnership with the Thunder Bay Public Library, and status under the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program.

"As an (ISET) agreement holder now, we are among 20 now in Ontario and we can work with different organizations, colleges, universities, training institutions, to help individuals move from being out of school and out of work to employment," said AETS executive director, John DeGiacomo.

AETS was established 20 years ago to assist Indigenous people in overcoming barriers when pursuing education and career opportunities through holistic programming and traditional

supports.

According to DeGiacomo, the service works with an average of 400 people a year and services nine communities in Northwestern Ontario.

"We've realized that certainly the Indigenous population is a growing population and that there are barriers, like any individual looking for employment, so we are here to reduce and minimize those barriers," DeGiacomo said.

On Tuesday, Minister of Employment, Workforce, Development, and Labour, Patty Hajdu, announced more than \$16.9 million in funding over a 10-year period through the First Nation Labour Market Strategy.

DeGiacomo said the funding will help with wage subsidies for employers and allow AETS plan for training in different sectors throughout the north.

"We know in the nine communities, there is forestry going on, mining going on, health sector area opportunities, the environment," he said. "We know there are a number of different occupations available, so we are there to help with the training gap to ensure that population in the region can help get employed and stay in the region."

"We are able to do things more and with funding that allows us to help in areas of education and employment."

Working with sectors in need of employment is something the entire region will benefit from. According to Red Rock Indian Band Chief, Matthew Dupuis, AETS is becoming a hub of human resource development for Indigenous communities.

"AETS has really expanded and started working in various partnerships to fix the human resources issues, the shortages in this area, especially in the skilled work force," he said.

A new AETS centre was also officially opened on Tuesday at the Waverley Resource Library. Dupuis said it is a significant step forward as it will allow more people to receive the training and skills necessary to enter the workforce.

"Thunder Bay becoming such a busy area and the amount of development, whether it's mining or energy transmission, highway construction, it's all happening right here in this area and everything is going to come through Thunder Bay," he said.

Wigwas said she continues to use AETS for support and without it she would not be where she is today.

"Some of the barriers I experienced is just a negative mindset or coming from residential schools and having that intergenerational trauma and not having the confidence or feeling like I fit in," she said. "AETS has really helped me through them and supported me."

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Doug Diaczuk is a reporter and award-winning author from Thunder Bay. He has a master's degree in English from Lakehead University  
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