

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

AETS unveils student-built elevator lift at Park Ave. location.

Thunder Bay, ON, Wednesday, July 15, 2026 – Anishinabek Employment and Training Services' (AETS) new elevator lift is officially in service at its Park Ave. location. The lift, which was unveiled at a ribbon cutting ceremony this morning, eliminates an accessibility barrier for those who may use a mobility device or have other accessibility challenges.

Says John DeGiacomo, Executive Director at AETS; *"We have several clients who require accessible entrances but were coming up against a barrier when visiting us. We're so pleased to be able to offer an accessible way to enter the building while also creating an opportunity for apprenticeship students to get hands-on experience. Projects like this show what can happen when training and community needs come together."*

The lift was built in part by the participants of AETS's 2025 Construction Craft Worker & Cement Finisher Pre Apprenticeship Training Program through LiUNA. The program provides participants with foundational skills, safety training, and practical experience in the construction trades, helping prepare them for careers in the industry while connecting them with apprenticeship opportunities.

"This project gave us the chance to apply what we've been learning in a real-world setting," says Sheldon Nobis, a student in the Pre-Apprenticeship Training Program. *"It's rewarding to know that something we helped build will make a difference for people in the community."*

The lift was also made possible with financial support from the Government of Canada's Enabling Accessibility Fund, enhancing accessibility, removing barriers, and fostering inclusivity for Indigenous persons with disabilities living and working in Thunder Bay.

Says The Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Jobs and Families, and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario; *"We are breaking down barriers so that everyone has a real and fair chance at success. Through programs like the Enabling Accessibility Fund, we are creating accessible spaces for Canadians with disabilities, spaces made possible by the skilled workers in Northern Ontario and across our country. Together, we are building Canada strong and making sure no one is left behind."*

"Almost 1 in 3 Indigenous people have a disability – a much higher rate than that of the general population," adds Jordan Hatton, President, AETS Board of Directors. *"Installing this lift is a major*

step in the right direction when it comes to accessibility for our clients and staff. On behalf of the Board, I'm incredibly proud of this accomplishment."

The ribbon cutting ceremony concluded with AETS client, Anita Thompson, taking the first ride in the lift, signalling its official launch.

"I'm honoured to be the first one to use the new lift," says Thompson. "It's so important for people of all abilities to be able to exercise their independence, and this lift is a big step in that direction. It's great to see a project like this created by students who are building their skills while creating a more accessible community."

At the event, a ceremonial plaque was unveiled, featuring names of all the students who worked on the project. AETS also revealed "Wellness" – a custom painting created by artist Kevin Belmore. In a note accompanying the painting, Belmore explains; *"This image depicts a family unit seeped in culture. The idea is to promote growth, wellness and strength in the family. The flowers and leaves envelope the family, which shows close ties to old traditions that still have meaning today."*

For more information, visit aets.org.

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Media Contact

Kaylee Lambert

Firedog Communications

Tel: 807-767-4443 ext. 225

Email: kaylee@firedogpr.com