

**THE HONOURABLE SHANE THOMPSON
MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUTH**

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NWT Youth Ambassador Program

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister Responsible for Youth, I am proud to speak today about one of our most successful youth initiatives, the NWT Youth Ambassador Program.

From November 14th to the 18th of this year, the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs hosted the NWT Youth Ambassador Program orientation and training event in Yellowknife. I was pleased to attend this orientation along with the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs, the Honourable Ms. Chinna.

Participants from all over the Northwest Territories were involved. Their selection was based on community involvement, commitment to a healthy lifestyle, and reflection on how the NWT Youth Ambassador Program will help them in the future. The youth are between the ages of 16-22. These fine young people are the role models and leaders of tomorrow.

The NWT Youth Ambassador Program has been in operation for 12 years. I am pleased to be able to say that I was part of this program from the very beginning in 2007 when I attended the Canada Winter Games in Whitehorse.

The program offers a guided and structured volunteer experience for Northwest Territories youth at major territorial, national and international events. Participants have the opportunity to develop life and job skills, as well as to build the confidence necessary to deal with complex life challenges.

Youth who participate in the program emerge with an increased sense of pride in their culture and community. Participants have reported back that they have, with the influence of this program, experienced personal development resulting in improved self-confidence and better mental health. They also report that they feel they are making healthier lifestyle choices including healthier eating, increased physical activity, living tobacco free, healthy sexuality and greater awareness of injury prevention strategies.

In anticipation of the 2020 Arctic Winter Games hosted in Whitehorse, officials joined the Ambassadors to highlight the key areas where the youth will be volunteering, the history of the Games, and some of the changes that the 2020 host society is making to include more Indigenous culture.

A representative of the North American Indigenous Games also attended to build excitement around the Games in Halifax. This included a session on the Mi'kmaq culture in Halifax. The youth were able to get their first task as volunteers and registered themselves in the online volunteer portal.

Mr. Speaker, the program has successfully identified 35 youth from across the Northwest Territories to travel and volunteer at either the 2020 Arctic Winter Games in Whitehorse, Yukon or the 2020 North American Indigenous Games in Halifax, Nova Scotia. 20 youth will be attending the Arctic Winter Games and 15 youth will volunteer at the North American Indigenous Games.

We know that for any program to be successful, especially when we are taking our youth in new and different locations, it requires the support of dedicated staff. I would like to thank all of the employees involved with this program from the Sport, Recreation and Youth Division, both past and present, for their hard work to coordinate the Youth Ambassador Program.

In closing, I would like to congratulate all the youth for a successful weekend. The NWT Youth Ambassador Program gives young people opportunities to travel, volunteer, meet new people, and develop leadership skills. It has been life changing for many participants.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.