

**Small Community Employment Support Strategy Progress**

Mr. Speaker, the social fabric of a small community is one of its strengths. Close family ties and a strong sense of community belonging are enduring characteristics and cannot be understated when residents make important life choices for their employment, education and skills training.

This government made a commitment to support small communities by developing and implementing a strategy to increase training and employment in all communities. This is a part of our mandate, to enhance the Small Community Employment Support Program, and develop and implement a strategy to increase employment and training in small communities that guides the delivery of territorial programming.

Last year, interim changes to benefit levels and greater flexibility were implemented to the existing Small Community Employment Support Program. Between April 1 and December 31, 2017, the creation of nearly 400 jobs were supported under this program, while Education, Culture and Employment developed a strategy to ensure the right mix of programs and supports are available to serve small communities.

Mr. Speaker, the Small Communities Employment Strategy is on schedule and we intend to release it later this spring.

In developing the strategy, Education, Culture and Employment conducted engagements that invited individuals, employers, community organizations and other participants from across the Northwest Territories to share ideas, provide input, discuss issues and suggest ways to support employment and training in small communities. There was an additional online survey posted to incorporate feedback from those that could not attend the in-person sessions. In total, input from 411 stakeholders from 31 communities informed the Strategy.

A first of its kind Mr. Speaker, the forthcoming Small Communities Employment Strategy outlines how the Government of the Northwest Territories will enhance employment and training opportunities and outcomes in small communities.

The Strategy recognizes the need to support the foundational aspects of employment and employability as well as program delivery. It will consist of programming, supports and services that extend beyond the scope of the existing Small Community Employment Support Program.

Mr. Speaker, we have learned from all of our partners across government, business and industry, and built on the work that has been completed to date. Over the next six years, this Strategy will direct our work with the vision that Northwest Territories residents in small communities have the knowledge, skills and attitudes for employment success.

The Strategy includes four goals that mirror those of our Skills 4 Success strategy and includes increasing skill levels, bridging education and employment gaps, growing the Northwest Territories workforce, and improving decision-making with relevant labour market information. We remain focused on creating training and job opportunities in small communities.

I would like to thank all of the people that took the time to attend the engagements and respond to the survey. I would also like to acknowledge the contribution from the Committee of Rural and Remote Communities. The input we received across the territory was invaluable, and has informed a Small Communities Employment Strategy built by Northerners for the North.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker