

**Building Capacity in Small Communities**

Mr. Speaker, three years ago, this government set a mandate to increase employment in small communities. Since then, meaningful progress has been made.

Under the Small Community Employment Support Program, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment has provided funding that has supported almost 2,900 jobs in communities across the NWT since 2018. In addition, the department provided direct financial support to over 1,100 individuals and 285 employers over the life of this Legislative Assembly through its suite of labour market programs. These programs provide a range of supports, including funding for training, wage subsidies, and supports for organizations to design and deliver employment initiatives.

The comments and testimonials from clients of these programs have been moving. In the Sahtu Region, a youth canoe program accessed funding through Community Training Partnerships. In addition to increasing employability, it assisted youth in connecting with their land, culture, and other youth across the region while promoting wellness and resiliency. In the Dehcho Region, three cousins accessed the Skills Development Program and completed the Surface Miner Training Program together. In doing so, they created a unique support system and are now all currently employed at various mines in the NWT. There are many more examples like this.

Mr. Speaker, to be prepared for future job and business opportunities, residents need to know what is on the horizon. That is why the department published 20-year forecasts for jobs in-demand in the territory. Using updated labour market information, the forecasts provide information by education level and include the number of anticipated openings and wages for each occupation. These forecasts will inform students of the jobs that are, and will be, in demand, and how to access education and training to secure those jobs.

Skilled tradespeople continue to be in high demand across the territory. To help meet this demand, the department released updated occupational standards for the Housing Maintainer program in 2022. This program prepares individuals to perform preventative and on-demand maintenance, minor repairs, and modernization improvements. Housing Maintainers provide an important service, particularly in our small communities, and are trained in a range of areas from basic plumbing and electrical, to tiling, woodwork and drywall.

To build our skilled trades workforce, the department helped 110 employers access financial supports to offset the wages of hiring and training 407 apprentices. Recognizing that one of the challenges for developing the skilled trades workforce, in our small communities, is the availability of certified journeypersons to mentor new apprentices, this government offers a Designated Trainer stream. If an employer does not have a certified journeyperson to provide training for an apprentice, they may apply to have an experienced tradesperson, without a certificate of qualification, be recognized.

We have also supported the launch of new learning supports designed to assist apprentices in addressing academic gaps and learning barriers. These programs, including Build Your Skills and the Virtual Learning Strategist pilot, help fill a key gap and have been well received.

Mr. Speaker, this government has been committed to enhancing employment and training opportunities in small communities and continues to work collaboratively with communities to identify and address their specific need and challenges, and to create new jobs and opportunities for the people of the NWT.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.