



MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, March 8, 2018

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**KIIKENOMAGA KIKENJIGEWEN EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING SERVICES (KKETS) HOST
GRADUATION OF 5th COHORT OF STUDENTS ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

THUNDER BAY, ON: Kiikenomaga Kikenjigewen Employment and Training Services (KKETS) today hosted a graduation ceremony for 66 students successfully completing the 2017-2018 Aboriginal Skills Advancement Program (ASAP). Students obtained their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) with many also completing their post-secondary entrance requirements. The graduation took place for the first time at the Thunder Bay Community Auditorium in the traditional territory of Fort William First Nation and fell on International Women's Day 2018.

ASAP is a one-of-a-kind adult education program that goes beyond the education essentials by incorporating the social, emotional, cultural and transition supports to the learner. Since its inception in 2012, ASAP has assisted 324 Matawa First Nations members in obtaining their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

Of the students completing the ASAP program since 2012, 52% (171) were women. Ensuring the equal participation of Indigenous women within the Matawa region in this program has been a priority for Matawa leadership including ensuring educational and training programs are in place to narrow the gap in employment and labour market participation amongst Indigenous Peoples. It also aligns with the goals of gender equality and increasing the participation of women in the workforce in the 2018 federal budget which came down last week. Additionally, it aligns with the Ontario government's commitment to women's increased participation in education and the workforce. Acknowledging the accomplishments of ASAP women graduates today was an important step around the "Pressing for Progress" campaign theme for International Women's Day 2018 which is a call-to-action to press forward and progress gender parity.

The graduation ceremony included remarks from Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, KKETS Board of Directors, officials from the Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, Ministry of Community and Social Services, Lakehead School Board and the Lakehead Adult Education Centre. Chiefs from Aroland, Long Lake #58, Ginoogaming, Eabametoong, Marten Falls, Neskantaga and, Nibinamik First Nations, along with proxies from other Matawa communities also attended. Valedictorians were Margaret Boyce and Joseph Meeseetawageesic, graduating students from Eabametoong First Nation.

QUOTES

“To the students of KKETS, I urge you to apply your knowledge. It is the key to opening the door to wisdom.”

– *Joe Baxter, KKETS Board of Directors President*

“I want to congratulate this year’s ASAP graduates. Education is key to reconciliation and Indigenous participation in our growing economy. It’s great to see more Indigenous learners finish their high school education, and it’s our hope that this is a first step towards postsecondary studies, training or starting a career. To help, our government introduced free tuition last year, and we’ve already seen a 34 per cent increase in Indigenous learners accessing aid to go to college or university — making higher education and training a reality for more Indigenous families.”

– *Hon. Mitzie Hunter, Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development*

“Success is measured on how many times you have fallen and for how many times you have stood up, your falls has helped you get back up and now you stand taller after each fall, this is your success. Congratulations to all for you are now taller than your falls, your achievements over the past while are now a part of you and you were the ones that earned them. Keep your heads up high and remember these moments, they belong to you. With such accomplishment comes opportunities, please explore your options and let us help you with that, we are your biggest believers. Congratulations to the graduating class of 2017-18, it is an honor to be part of your successes.”

– *Roger Wesley, KKETS Executive Director*

“On behalf of the ASAP staff we congratulate 2017/18 graduates on your achievement of obtaining your high school diploma. There is no ending to your current success. Hold onto this feeling of achievement and continue on as your journey has just begun and there is no ending.”

– *Carolyn Zadnik, ASAP Project Coordinator*

“It is a privilege for all of the teachers and the staff of Lakehead Adult Education Centre (LAEC) to deliver programming and to support the learning of the students enrolled in the Aboriginal Skills Advancement Program (ASAP). Each and every one of the students graduating should be incredibly proud of all they have achieved throughout their time in the program. On behalf of LAEC and Lakehead Public Schools, congratulations to the graduating class of 2017/2018.”

– *Samantha Peotto, Acting Manager, Lakehead Adult Education Centre*

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For more information, please contact Carol Audet, Communications Manager – Matawa First Nations at (807) 632-9663 or by email at caudet@matawa.on.ca.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Kiikenomaga Kikenjigewen Employment and Training Services (KKETS) is an Agreement Holder with Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) under the Aboriginal employment and training program “Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS). The [Aboriginal Skills Advancement Program](#) is funded through the Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development.

Matawa First Nations Management is a Tribal Council providing a variety of advisory services and programs to 8 Ojibway and Cree First Nations in James Bay Treaty No. 9 and 1 First Nation in the Robinson-Superior Treaty area. Follow us on Facebook or Twitter @MatawaFNM.

