

## **PRESS RELEASE**

Local agency wins Minister's "Service Innovation Award of Excellence." Job Connect- a program offered through Northern Community Development Services recently received the prestigious 'Service Innovation Award' from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Executive Director Jennifer Greenhalgh explained "The board and staff of NCDS recognize the importance of skills training and development to our local economy. What has become apparent to us is that First Nations are underrepresented in the apprenticeship and skills trades. If you consider the fact that First Nations are an ever increasing percentage of the workforce we felt it was necessary to reach out to our First Nations neighbors with the intention of creating a partnership". The Service Innovation Award was presented to NCDS by the Honourable Chris Bentley, Minister of Training, Colleges & Universities to Northern Community Development Services on November 20, 2006 at an Awards dinner in Toronto. This was the only award presented to a Northern Job Connect Agency!

The Award for Service Innovation recognizes unique and creative business practices that have resulted in improved Job Connect Services. The program called "The Aboriginal Bridge" is a program which is aimed at assisting First Nations to take ownership over the development of skills and trades for their citizens. After developing partnerships in the community, applying and receiving approval for funding from the Northwest Training & Adjustment Board, the staff of Job Connect started by planning a forum to raise the level of awareness of skilled trades within the Aboriginal workforce. In the last year the number of Aboriginal youth who are working in skilled trades and are now eligible to be placed in apprenticeship programs have increased by 35% as of September, 2006. However, only three Aboriginal youths are currently apprenticed in the Kenora / Rainy River Districts. "We believe it is a good first step and we are willing to take the lead in engaging Aboriginal Youth. It is something the Aboriginal communities identified in the brainstorming session we held recently. They wanted to meet and discuss potential avenues and models to build apprenticeship programs, and we are proud assist in accomplishing this", says Ms. Greenhalgh.

Northern Community Development Services has been in operation since 1975, and through initiatives such as this service will continue to be reflective of the clients they serve.