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**OFIFC**

Ontario Federation of  
Indigenous Friendship Centres

**Response to *Opportunities  
for Aboriginal Persons  
in the Workforce***

**Report of the Standing Committee on Human  
Resources, Skills and Social Development and  
the Status of Persons with Disabilities**

# ***OFIFC Response to Opportunities for Aboriginal Persons in the Workforce***

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## **About the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres**

The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) is a provincial urban Aboriginal organization comprised of member Friendship Centres, located in towns and cities across Ontario. Founded in 1971, the OFIFC was created to represent the collective interests of the Friendship Centres, adhering to the following vision:

*To improve the quality of life for Aboriginal people living in an urban environment by supporting self-determined activities which encourage equal access to and participation in Canadian Society and which respects cultural distinctiveness.*

The OFIFC continues to advocate on behalf of member Friendship Centres across all levels of government in key policy and program areas to advance the priorities and needs of urban Aboriginal communities in Ontario. Currently, the OFIFC administers a number of culture-based programs which are delivered by local Friendship Centres in the areas of health, justice, children and youth, family support, and education. Friendship Centres also design and deliver local initiatives in areas such as employment readiness, literacy, and cultural awareness.

OFIFC programs are wholistic and are designed to support urban Aboriginal people across the entire life-cycle, creating a safe space for all community members who access Friendship Centres. Friendship Centres function as a central hub of social service provision in communities across Ontario and their programming is essential to the wellbeing of whole communities. This model of wellbeing is upheld through programming that guides children and youth to make healthy lifestyle choices, provides adults and parents with supports, and connects young people with Elders and traditional teachers to ensure that culture as 'everyday good living' is honoured and passed on.

The Friendship Centre Movement represents the most significant off-reserve Aboriginal service infrastructure across Ontario and Canada dedicated to achieving greater participation of all urban Aboriginal peoples in all facets of society, inclusive of First Nation – Status/Non-Status, Métis, Inuit and all other people who identify as Aboriginal.

## **Our Response**

The OFIFC acknowledges and is encouraged by many of the recommendations presented in the Standing Committee's report on *Opportunities for Aboriginal Persons in the Workforce*. Aboriginal labour market programming, like the Aboriginal Skills Employment and Training Strategy (ASETS), when coordinated with preventative and wrap-around supports for families – such as those provided within Friendship Centres – are critical for increasing employment opportunities and outcomes for urban Aboriginal people. The OFIFC has been an independent ASETS agreement holder delivering the Apatisiwin program since the inception of ASETS in October 2010. Prior to that, the OFIFC delivered employment and training programming in partnership with Grand River

Employment and Training through AHRDS II under the banner of O-GI, OFIFC-GREAT Initiative since 1998-99.

The OFIFC administers the Apatisiwin program in 26 urban, rural and remote Aboriginal communities, through 21 member Friendship Centres and five Delivery Sites. Apatisiwin is a Swampy Cree word that means employment and jobs. The Apatisiwin program is the largest network of employment and training services for the rapidly growing urban Aboriginal population in Ontario. Since 2010, Apatisiwin has supported approximately 2,000 people to find employment and has returned approximately 1,400 individuals to school. In 2012-13 Apatisiwin provided 12,000 points of service, including funded, non-funded and drop-in services.

While the OFIFC is in support of many of the broad recommendations, we would like to address the following notable gaps within the report:

This report is heavily focused on First Nations communities, with dialogue concerning opportunities for urban Aboriginal people being greatly minimized. The proportion of Aboriginal people residing off-reserve in towns and cities is steadily rising in the province of Ontario. Statistics Canada's 2011 National Household Survey data indicates that 84.1% of Aboriginal people in Ontario live off-reserve, the majority in urban centres.<sup>1</sup> These demographics speak to the strong role of and opportunities for Friendship Centres in Ontario to support Aboriginal families' healthy transitions into cities and towns, as well as their ongoing role in supporting the health and wellbeing of multigenerational urban-based Aboriginal families.

The overwhelming majority of Aboriginal people in Ontario live off-reserve and in urban centres where a wealth of opportunities for success do exist, however greater supports must be more readily accessible to improve the standard of living and increase Aboriginal peoples participation in the economy. This demographic reality in Ontario is coupled with the growing urban Aboriginal youth population, which necessitates strategic inter-governmental collaboration in partnership with urban Aboriginal communities.

Friendship Centres play a crucial role in advocating for and supporting urban Aboriginal people in Ontario. It is in large part due to such efforts that a proportion of urban Aboriginal people now make up middle income earners in the province of Ontario<sup>2</sup> – a rather recent phenomenon that needs to be both sustained and increased. While the upward socio-economic mobility of one segment of the urban Aboriginal community represents an impressive milestone, the realities faced by a far greater proportion of urban Aboriginal families reflects the policies of governments that fail to meet the needs of urban Aboriginal communities.

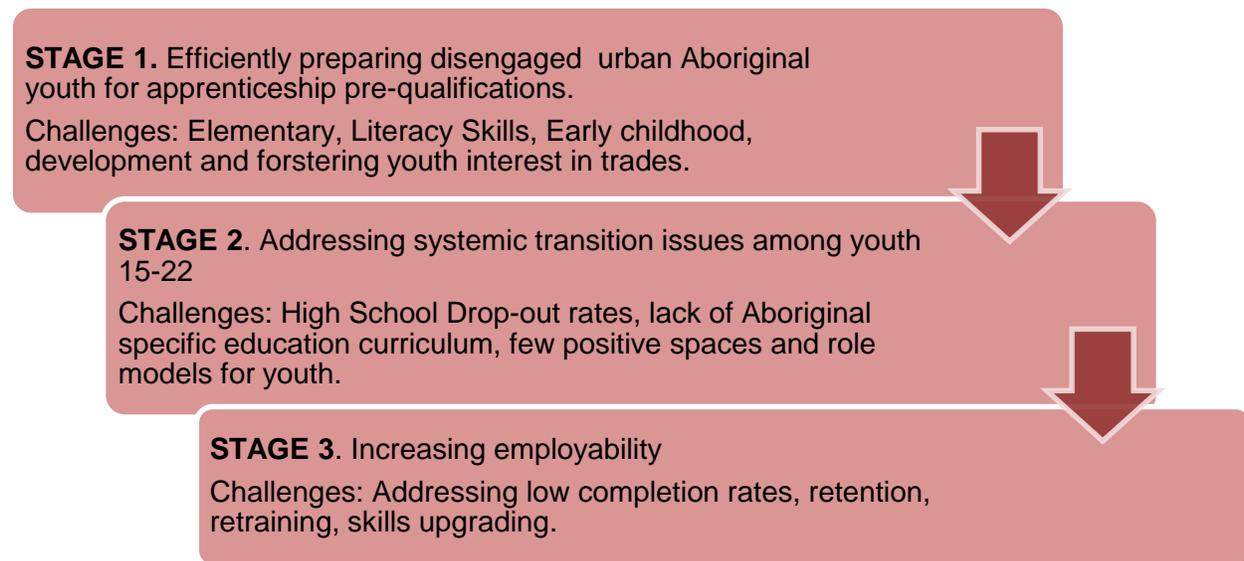
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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Finance. (n.d.). *2011 National Household Survey Highlights: Aboriginal Peoples of Ontario*. Retrieved from: <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/economy/demographics/census/nhshi11-3.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> In 2007, more than 22 percent of Urban Aboriginal Task Force (UATF) respondents belonged to the middle class. OFIFC, OMAA and ONWA (2007). *Urban Aboriginal Task Force (UATF) Final Report*. Toronto, Ontario: 91. Available at <http://www.ofifc.org/pdf/UATFOntarioFinalReport.pdf>

Urban Aboriginal people, youth in particular, face considerable challenges along the education to employment continuum. Identified in Figure 1, when entering into, and attempting to remain in the Ontario labour force youth are particularly at risk. In fact, in 2011 the unemployment rate for off-reserve Aboriginal youth, aged 15-24, was 23.5 percent compared to 15.6 percent for the non-Aboriginal youth population.<sup>3</sup> While the young and growing urban Aboriginal population has the potential to contribute to Ontario's labour force needs on a significant level, resources and programs must be available and targeted to meet their needs.

**Figure 1: Challenges Experienced by Urban Aboriginal People along the Education to Employment Continuum**



In addition to the challenges presented within Figure 1, other systemic challenges also have a significant impact on urban Aboriginal youths' transitions along the education to employment continuum. These include racism and the lack of culturally inclusive educational and work spaces in urban centres. That underlying discrimination and lack of awareness of Aboriginal cultures among the non-Aboriginal population, and lack of culturally relevant spaces make it difficult for urban Aboriginal people – especially youth – to foster positive Aboriginal identities. Each of these issues significantly impact transitions to, and retention of employment opportunities. Poverty, insecure housing, and homelessness have also been found to have reinforcing effects on the barriers to education and employment. Further, it is critical to recognize the inter-relatedness of each stage along the education to employment continuum. Although shown above as stages, many individuals do not transition linearly from one stage to the next, but instead are often experiences the challenges as being intertwined with one another in ways that require wholistic and wrap-around approaches.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. (2013). *Canada-Ontario Labour Market Agreement, 2013-14 Annual Plan*. Retrieved from: [http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/labmark/LMA\\_Plan2013\\_14.html](http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/labmark/LMA_Plan2013_14.html)

The report contains an emphasis on improving access to employment opportunities in resource extraction and related industries, as noted by the list of witnesses and testimonies highlighted in the report, as well as the language used in the recommendations. The over-representative focus is problematic for Friendship Centre communities and urban Aboriginal people in general. The OFIFC acknowledges that there are numerous employment opportunities tangential to resource extraction, including health services, hospitality services, business management, and engineering. However, many of these opportunities require 2-4 years, or more, of post-secondary education, and as such are typically not targeted under such labour market interventions such as ASETS.

In the OFIFC's experience, the resource extraction sector is of limited interest to Friendship Centre communities, and in particular youth. Urban Aboriginal youth continuously express that they want to obtain an education and participate in the labour force, but they are not all interested in resource extraction, such as mining or forestry. Many youth share that they know that there are many other opportunities for participation in the economy on a broader scale, whether it is the arts, the social economy, or the health sector. A number of Friendship Centre communities have identified the inherent tension that exists between mining and sustainability. It is therefore important to recognize the challenges that the resource extraction sector presents for urban Aboriginal people, namely the incompatibility of these extraction activities and environmental sustainability and respect for land.

In many instances, the resource extraction sector, with its boom-and-bust cycles, does not promote long-term, sustainable employment and community development. Often employment in resource extraction is associated with shift work and live-in camp work sites. This can place strain on families, health, and well-being and is not well-suited to long-term employment throughout an individual's life-cycle. Additionally, resource extraction projects, in particular mining, have compounded the social issues experienced in many Friendship Centre communities. The population influx impacts and strains the existing services and infrastructure, while often significantly increasing the cost of living to the point where many families are uprooted from their communities in search of affordable housing.

Additionally, urban Aboriginal women are impeded by the emphasis on resource extraction. While women are increasingly working in these sectors, they are still challenged by systemic discrimination. Women experience a significant wage gap in the exploration, mining, and mineral production sector. On average women in this sector earn approximately 32 percent less than their male counterparts, which translates to a dollar amount salary differential of approximately \$16,000 (coal mining) to \$30,000 (support activities for mining) depending on the type of employment.<sup>4</sup> Further, in mining and exploration women are disproportionately employed in culinary services and administrative occupations – more than 70 percent of these positions are held by

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<sup>4</sup> Women in Mining Canada. (2010). *Ramp-Up: A study on the status of women in Canada's mining and exploration sector*, p. 9. Retrieved from: <http://www.mihc.ca/en/publications/resources/Ramp-UJFinal2010.pdf>

women, however management positions in these occupations are held by men.<sup>5</sup> Other mining and exploration occupations employ far lower proportions of women (less than 20 percent), including science professionals, engineers, technologists, and trade occupations.<sup>6</sup>

In the report, there is also a lack of recognition of the distinct needs of individual communities due to the heavy emphasis on natural resource extraction and related industries. Given the geographic realities of many communities, urban Aboriginal and First Nations communities in eastern and southern Ontario are typically not located within the vicinity of resource extraction projects; their economies being more based in the knowledge and service sectors. Further, there is an implication in the report that all urban communities have vast opportunities for employment and training; however, there are a number of Friendship Centre communities, such as Red Lake, Dryden, Sioux Lookout, or Cochrane, where opportunities are significantly limited. Each urban community is unique in what is available and the challenges that they face. As a result, the OFIFC's experience in administering ASETS has been that labour market needs and gaps, as well as ideal sectors for engagement, are often locally determined. As a result, national or even provincial/regional solutions may not have a suitable amount of traction from one community to the next.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

**The Committee recommends that the federal government continue to invest in stable and long-term funding for early childhood education programs for Aboriginal people.**

It is crucial to understand that a positive learning environment for urban Aboriginal children and youth depends on programs and services aimed at supporting the broader development of the child, and specifically, the cultural and relational development of children and youth. The ability to apply culturally appropriate early learning concepts fosters an Aboriginal child's inherent resiliency to succeed with confidence. As such, it is critical that programs, such as Aboriginal Head Start, be not only continued but expanded.

Currently, of the fourteen total Head Start programs offered in the province of Ontario, all are located within Friendship Centre communities with some Friendship Centres acting as hubs for the program. Additionally, there are eleven identified Aboriginal child care centres in the province, four of which operate out of Friendship Centres. The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) also funds the Children's Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) and the Community Action Program for Children (CAPC), with 64 workers located in 23 Friendship Centres in Ontario. The OFIFC and Friendship Centres are involved and engaged in the provision of early childhood education, however many more communities would benefit from increased support and resources, recognizing that appropriate earlier interventions reduce the risks and costs of crisis interventions and more long-term supports later in life.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 10-12.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2**

**The Committee recommends that the federal government cover the cost of essential skills, high school equivalency and upgrading programs to facilitate entry into post-secondary education. This funding could be delivered through a post-2015 Aboriginal labour market program such as the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy.**

Urban Aboriginal communities are ready to embrace a prosperous and healthy future and as such, potentially represent the key to Ontario's overall future economic prosperity; however, this task cannot be accomplished without first succeeding in education. As such, there is a need to not only re-profile existing essential skills and upgrading programs, but to invest additional resources in communities that need them most. The majority of Friendship Centres have relayed that the greatest barrier to engaging in post-secondary education, training, and employment is a lack of essential skills.

Further, while many urban Aboriginal people re-enter the secondary education system after dropping out or being pushed out, there is a need to ensure supports and resources are in place as they progress through the education system to increase their resiliency and facilitate their successful transitions through K-12 and into post-secondary. Urban Aboriginal youth need to be provided with more cultural-based learning opportunities to ensure they complete high school. Alternative Secondary School Program (ASSP) offered within eleven Friendship Centre communities across the province is designed to meet the educational needs of urban Aboriginal youth. ASSPs support urban Aboriginal students who deal with multiple challenges affecting academic achievement by providing access to supports that include culturally relevant curriculum and traditional healing. Students attending ASSPs also have access to career and employment supports through Apatisiwin within Friendship Centres.

## **RECOMMENDATION 3**

**The Committee recommends that federally funded training programs for Aboriginal people encourage early exposure for students in secondary school to industries offering employment opportunities, including the resource extraction and related industries.**

The OFIFC acknowledges that early exposure and career guidance is critical in supporting successful transitions into the labour force. Urban Aboriginal youth sometimes lack awareness regarding admission requirements to post-secondary programs and the skills or education required for different careers. As such, many urban Aboriginal youth do not have the necessary credentials to pursue post-secondary education and training, including trades and apprenticeships. It is widely acknowledged that this knowledge and awareness must be provided at the start of secondary school where placement is critical. No or limited knowledge substantially limits career prospects before they even leave the education system or attempt transition into the labour market.

Programs offered in Ontario such as the Dual Credit and Specialist High Skills Major can assist in creating early, direct linkages to the labour market for youth. Summer employment that is meaningful and career-related can also provide youth with experience in different sectors and guide their career paths. There is a need to create a direct link targeted to meet the needs of urban Aboriginal youth in existing high school programs and summer work experience funding. Many urban Aboriginal youth do not see themselves as viable candidates for mainstream youth employment programs. Friendship Centre staff are in some cases able to reach out to youth and assist them in applying for these programs, however youth employment programs would likely have a significantly higher impact on urban Aboriginal youth if there was targeted outreach to Aboriginal youth for Aboriginal-specific streams within programs. Re-introduction of the dedicated Aboriginal youth stream of Canada Summer Jobs could see a positive re-investment in Aboriginal youth job opportunities.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

**The Committee recommends that federally funded training programs for Aboriginal people encourage service delivery organizations to include the involvement of successful role models in their training.**

One of the key indicators for Aboriginal peoples' successful completion of postsecondary studies is having a family member with postsecondary credentials. However, pre-determining the need for the involvement of successful role models in future funding models may be challenging for all urban communities. While this is one model of training, it is cautioned that this model of training will not be viable in every community.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

**The Committee recommends that the federal government continue to support initiatives that provide Aboriginal people with access to high quality training in essential skills, including individualized training programs where appropriate.**

Without a doubt, this recommendation is supported and encouraged. The notion of individualized training is important to highlight, as individualized training often takes more time and resources for local Aboriginal employment service providers. Individualized training programs also recognize the local expertise of employment service providers and communities, and re-enforces the caution noted in recommendation 4 regarding prescribed models of training.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6**

**The Committee recommends that the federal government encourage industry partners to implement new or enhance existing Aboriginal cultural awareness programs and to foster improved cultural understanding in the workplace.**

Private sector employers, including small-medium businesses and large industry, are a key stakeholder in increasing employment and training opportunities for urban Aboriginal people. They can contribute to the development of an educated and trained

Aboriginal labour force in a variety of ways, however they are often unaware of partnering opportunities and lack specific knowledge or available resources to address the challenges around attracting, recruiting, and retaining urban Aboriginal employees.

The Committee must be clear in why improved cultural understanding is required in the workplace, and how cultural misunderstanding has occurred. Cultural awareness, or competency, should be a goal for every employer and staff person regardless of having or seeking out Aboriginal employees. Cultural competency programs or training should be developed in coordination with the Aboriginal community, such as the OFIFC and Friendship Centres. The OFIFC has had a great deal of success in working with employers and organizations across Ontario to offer cultural competency training, as have many of our Ontario ASETS Agreement holder partners. It will be critical to provide any resources to improve cultural competency to Aboriginal community organizations and not solely to industry and businesses.

### **RECOMMENDATION 7**

**The Committee recommends that the federal government, in its Aboriginal programs, take into account the importance of comprehensive support services in several areas of the lives of Aboriginal people to allow them to overcome barriers to their success in the labour force.**

Friendship Centres have the existing infrastructure and proven capacity to provide wrap-around culture-based, wholistic services for urban Aboriginal people. This contributes to the success of Apatisiwin in Friendship Centres, where clients and participants are able to access health, social and family services while they benefit from employment, education and training supports.

Participation in the economy must be recognized in the broadest sense. While positive return to school and employment results continue to be desirable, participation in the economy must also include outcomes that include Aboriginal peoples having the skills, knowledge and training to secure, maintain and excel in a strong and vibrant economy. It must be generally accepted that increased participation in the economy is achieved by individuals having a suitable education, a skill set, life skills, self-advocacy skills and can access and utilize the services/supports that reduce challenges and barriers.

### **RECOMMENDATION 8**

**The Committee recommends that the government consider offering business tax credits and/or other incentives to companies assisting new Aboriginal small businesses in remote areas.**

The OFIFC recognizes the recommendation as important however the caution here is in clearly defining the beneficiaries of these incentives, and ensuring that incentives are provided to Aboriginal business owners and Aboriginal companies as well as other companies who are clearly providing support to new Aboriginal small businesses. The notion of remote areas must also be defined and include urban communities where opportunities for Aboriginal small business may not exist.

## **RECOMMENDATION 9**

**The Committee recommends that the federal government work with industry to encourage the creation of a forum for Aboriginal communities, government and industry to share best practices about successful training, employment and procurement initiatives to improve Aboriginal training and employment outcomes.**

The OFIFC recognizes the value of collaborative forums and processes in sharing best practices and realizing new opportunities and forging synergies. Aboriginal communities in addition to industry must be engaged early and often in creating such forums and processes. These activities and events cannot be done in the absence of Aboriginal community partners exclusively between government and industry.

## **RECOMMENDATION 10**

**The Committee recommends that the federal government renew the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy, or a similar program, for a minimum of five years, determine the terms and conditions of the new program, and communicate that decision expeditiously to all parties involved to avoid gaps in programming and cuts to personnel.**

The OFIFC concurs with this recommendation; however, there is a need for additional resources, including financial resources, for urban ASETS holders. In the OFIFC's response to the review of the National Aboriginal Resource Allocation Model (NARAM) we highlighted the need to re-evaluate the funding formulas to adequately represent the demographic realities of the Aboriginal population with 81.4 percent now living off-reserve. The current NARAM was developed in 1999 and utilizes data from 1996. Ontario's portion of the National Urban Aboriginal allocation has been maintained at approximately \$6.2 million annually since the late 1990s and is not reflective of the significant pressures and changes in urban population and demographics since that time. The fact that Service Canada Ontario Region secured an additional \$3 million annually from mainstream regional allocations for urban Aboriginal services signals and acknowledges the need for increased allocation specific to urban Aboriginal people under the NARAM.

Salaries and benefits for Apatisiwin Employment Counsellors have not had increases since the beginning of this agreement, and for many Employment Counsellors hired during AHRDS there has been no increases for over a decade despite the rising costs of living. In order to maintain our valuable workforce into the next agreement, we must be able to offer competitive salaries that attract and retain staff with the skills, knowledge and experience to administer and deliver this program and who can perform at the high level of proficiency required under ASETS protocols and procedures.

Additionally, the resources available to Service Canada for staffing and personnel must be re-examined to better serve ASETS partners. For example, the local *Labour Market Monitors*, developed and distributed by Service Canada Regions have been discontinued in recent years and was not replaced with any comparable resources

resulting in a significant gap in regional and local labour market information (LMI). The lack of these resources presents challenges in projecting local employment opportunities and in administering demand-driven programming. In the absence of adequate LMI tools, Apatisiwin delivery sites work independently, and in partnership with local businesses where possible, to generate their own information. Often, this is through word of mouth. While this has some efficiency, we believe more can be done to support their work.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 11**

**The Committee recommends that Employment and Social Development Canada continue its efforts through the [Reducing the Reporting Burden] working group to find solutions to the reporting problems related to the agreements under the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy. All options should be considered in the discussions surrounding the potential renewal of the Strategy.**

The OFIFC supports this recommendation and moves that the final report of the Reducing The Reporting Burden Working Group be brought forward in consideration of the renewal of the Strategy. The recommendations of the working group have been informed by countless hours of work and thought by both employees of ESDC and ASETA Holders.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 12**

**The Committee recommends that the federal government encourage multiple agreement holders who cover areas in proximity to each other to work collaboratively on administrative matters, which could allow for savings to be made and reinvested in additional technology or training opportunities.**

While this is reasonable in attempting to coordinate resources to have more resources for training and clients, a closer analysis of the realities of geographic proximity and population demographics must be also considered. Geographic proximity is not the only factor to consider in such an analysis.

Additionally, the current reporting limitations under ASETS actually discourage working partnerships between ASETAs when considering sharing administrative and client intervention activities. Specifically, the limitation of only being able to report one SIN result per year causes competition amongst employment and training service providers locally, which defeats the purpose of partnerships and leveraging of existing resources. This further limits their willingness to partner in administration of programming. Re-visiting the reporting of results vis-à-vis SIN limitations could promote more partnering among ASETA holders in supporting clients.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 13**

**The Committee recommends that the federal government continue to make quality and safe child care an integral part of the skills development and training component under the recommended renewal of the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy. The government should also consider offering**

**child care dollars to all Aboriginal people taking part in skills and training programming under the Strategy.**

Child care is a requirement for many urban Aboriginal workers, as evidenced in the Committee's report. This means equitable service provision for Status and non-Status First Nation, Métis and Inuit individuals and their families. A new approach would be ideal for agreement holders who have historically been left out of receiving First Nation and Inuit Child Care Initiative (FNICCI) resources. If such a policy change were to occur, that is, ESDC to provide dedicated childcare resources for all ASETS holders, an increase in investments would need to follow. It would not be acceptable to forge a policy change without an increased investment, e.g. re-distribution of existing FNICCI funds.

The OFIFC continues to advocate that existing Aboriginal child care spaces should be enhanced to ensure an Aboriginal focus towards early learning, further to notions provided in Recommendation #1. Most often, Aboriginal early child care services are provided free-of-charge or are geared-toward-income. The opportunity for Aboriginal children to attend an Aboriginal child care centre is instrumental in providing parent support and child care, play-based learning, developing language and literacy skills and the early identification for risk factors in a way that is culturally competent, appropriate and, most important, safe.

**RECOMMENDATION 14**

**The Committee recommends that the federal government examine, through consultations with Aboriginal agreement holders and the upcoming evaluation of the Strategy, whether there is a need to allocate predictable and flexible funding under the recommended new Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy.**

The OFIFC wishes to confirm that this is a general reference to renewal activities and is not a signal for an additional planned evaluation of ASETS. ASETS has been undergoing several renewal and evaluation activities over the course of the last two years. The OFIFC encourages careful and thoughtful review of all evaluation content that has been generated by ASETS partners since 2012. The OFIFC further supports the consideration of flexible funding models under any new agreement, including funding models that support more flexible training interventions, e.g. training/education that is longer than 52 weeks as is often required of more intense study/training period and professional degrees/diplomas.

**RECOMMENDATION 15**

**The Committee recommends that the federal government ensure that future programming under the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy be responsive to and inclusive of all Aboriginal constituencies where feasible.**

Friendship Centres' catchment areas often include First Nations; however, the OFIFC and Friendship Centres operate on a status-blind basis. It will be important to clearly articulate what is meant by Aboriginal constituencies in this context, and to continue to

provide the highest level of services and supports to all Aboriginal peoples, regardless of status, geography, political affiliation, gender or age.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 16**

**The Committee recommends that the federal government increase its activities to promote the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy to the business community and that it encourages industry groups to make investments in skills development and training programs.**

The OFIFC extends its support for this recommendation. It will be important that any encouragement of industry groups be shared with and inclusive of Aboriginal communities, and that Aboriginal communities directly benefit from any investments or incentives to industry groups in this regard.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 17**

**The Committee recommends that the federal government review the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy and the Skills and Partnership Fund delivery models with respect to employment outcomes, possible overlap and mandates.**

The OFIFC extends its support for this recommendation, and any other processes that look to limit or avoid administrative overlap or implementation of programming/initiatives with duplicate mandates through multiple streams of funding. It will be imperative to be clear about the notion of overlap and to not confuse this with duplication of investments.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 18**

**The Committee recommends that the federal government, in collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, review the possibility of expanding the eligibility for apprenticeship grants to younger apprentices who are beginning their program in the last year of their high school education, and assess whether there is a need to increase the amount of financial support or modify its delivery.**

The OFIFC extends its support for this recommendation and encourages that apprenticeship grants be made available for youth and younger apprentices in any of the recognized apprenticeable trades in Ontario.

#### **Conclusion**

The OFIFC acknowledges the positive recommendations put forward by the Standing Committee concerning opportunities for Aboriginal people in the workforce. However, the focus on First Nations and resource extraction raise concerns for Friendship Centre communities in Ontario. Further, at this point it is unclear how government will move forward with the implementation of these recommendations. There is still much work to be done. More action, consultation, collaboration, and meaningful partnerships with measures for accountability of all partners will need to take place. Aboriginal community-based organizations such as Friendship Centres have the knowledge and capacity to meet the needs of urban Aboriginal people. With the adequate resources to

meet the increasingly growing urban Aboriginal demographic and partnerships with government and the private sector, the existing infrastructure of the Friendship Centres in Ontario and their proven capacity in providing culture-based, wholistic services is well placed to continue to support urban Aboriginal people in accessing opportunities in the Ontario workforce.