

[kee/chi - nee/wesk] • *noun*

THE GREAT SPIRIT OF THE FEMALE SIDE OF LIFE OF ALL THINGS

KCI-NIWESQ

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA MAGAZINE



ISSUE NO. 17

**AFFORDABLE AND
RELIABLE INTERNET:**

A luxury only for some

POETA DigiSpark:

Bridging the digital divide
in Canada

INDIGENOUS WORKS:

For inclusion and engagement in
Canadian economy

Economic Resilience

Content

- 05 **MIIGWETCH**
Message from the CEO /
directrice general,
LYNNE GROULX
- 06 **HARD PRICE TO PAY**
for Internet in the north
- 08 **POETA DigiSpark**
to bridge digital divide in Canada
- 10 **WOMEN EMPOWERING WOMEN**
Bonnie Rogers' matriarchal roots steer
her path
- 13 **OPENING DOORS,**
creating more connections, for
Indigenous women
- 16 **WALKING SIDE BY SIDE**
with us toward economic prosperity

Economic resilience starts with opportunity. By ensuring access to resources, technologies, and education in rural and remote communities, Indigenous Peoples are able to acquire crucial skills needed for high-demand and high-paying jobs, today and in the future.

This edition celebrates some of the many ways that Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, Transgender, and Gender-Diverse+ People achieve economic success.

COVER PHOTO

Pictured: Bonnie Rogers, a Dene language teacher, who was guided through Traditional means in becoming a teacher

Photo cred: The BeYouTee Factory





A MESSAGE FROM NWAC'S CEO

LYNNE GROULX LL.L., J.D. | CEO

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA

WELCOME TO THE 17TH EDITION OF **KCI-NIWESQ**, THE MAGAZINE OF THE NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA (NWAC).

In these pages we invite you to join us in celebrating the huge economic potential of Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, Transgender, and Gender-Diverse+ (WG2STGD+) Peoples in learning necessary skills needed for jobs of tomorrow and, quite frankly, for jobs of today.

For too long, Indigenous WG2STGD+ people have been left on the sidelines of the Canadian economy. Inadequate education in home communities, followed by lack of opportunities at the post-

secondary level, means many are unprepared to join the workforce at levels above minimum wage. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls told us this economic marginalization is one pathway for maintaining violence, which the Inquiry has declared to be a genocide.

It is, therefore, essential that Indigenous WG2STGD+ people gain knowledge needed for jobs that put roofs over heads and food on tables—whether they aspire to be plumbers, electricians, teachers, or physicians.

In this issue, Kelly Lendsay, a long-time head of Indigenous Works—an agency created 25 years ago to improve the engagement of Indigenous Peoples in the Canadian economy—tells us that the employment prospects for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis have improved significantly over the past three decades. However, there is still much more to do, especially when it comes to opening doors at management levels.

We hear from Madeleine Redfern, Chief Operating Officer of CanArctic Inuit Networks and President of the Nunavut Inuit Women's Association, who tells us about the difficulties Northern people face in accessing the Internet—an essential service in remote communities.

Dawn Madahbee Leach, chair of the National Indigenous Economic Development Board, explains how investing in Indigenous Peoples, and their communities, is how barriers to Indigenous economic development are lifted.



You will meet Rebecca Kragnes, the first Indigenous woman—and, in fact, the first woman—to chair the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum. Ms. Kragnes, who is Cree and Métis, is a certified electrician who says it is life-changing to have the necessary skills to obtain high-paying jobs.

We will tell you about a program run by the Trust for the Americas, which teaches high-demand, digital skills to vulnerable and underserved people. The Trust has operated in countries throughout this hemisphere for several years, and NWAC is serving as its Canadian partner in bringing the learning to this country.

We will introduce you to Bonnie Rogers, a Dene language teacher, who drew inspiration from her matriarchal relations and Traditional guidance to direct her teaching path.

So, thank you once again for opening the pages that follow and reading the 17th edition of *Kci-Niwesq*. Please drop us a line and let us know what you think at reception@nwac.ca.

MIIGWETCH.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lynn Groulx'.

Pictured: Madeleine Redfern, Chief Operating Officer of CanArctic Inuit Networks and President of the Nunavut Inuit Women's Association, as well as former Mayor of Iqaluit.

Digital Equality

to bridge digital divide in Canada



HARD PRICE TO PAY FOR INTERNET IN THE NORTH

Reliable and affordable Internet is an essential service that remote, Northern, Indigenous communities do not have fair and equal access to, which further segregates Northern regions from important knowledge and opportunities readily available in other areas in Canada.

Madeleine Redfern, who was Mayor of Iqaluit at the time, was desperately trying to submit the online forms required by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).

For days in preparing the proposal, Ms. Redfern pasted a response into a digital box on her computer and hit save—the connection would quit, or her request would take too long to process before timing out, and her data would be erased.

Unpredictable, unreliable, and poor-quality Internet is a harsh reality in the Nunavut capital—even though its residents pay the highest connectivity rates in Canada.

Finally, two minutes before the clock hit midnight, the application successfully uploaded.

"I was so stressed, anxious, and infuriated because it's extremely frustrating," says Ms. Redfern, who is now the Chief Operating Officer of CanArctic Inuit Networks and President of the Nunavut Inuit

Women's Association, said in a recent interview. "This community, and those men, needed that shelter. And, if the submission had not gone in by the deadline, we would have had to wait months for the next intake of applications."

She raised the issue the following day with the CMHC representative, explaining there should be alternatives for the online application process for locations that do not have access to reliable Internet.

The CMHC official, "was just kind of blasé. She was like, 'Well you got it in,'" says Ms. Redfern, who learned a year later that the official was relating the experience as a success story.

That was maddening, says Ms. Redfern. "It is a story of sheer luck and frustration. Don't ever frame this as a success story. Because what you're trying to do is to let other Northern, remote, Indigenous communities know that if the mayor of the City of Iqaluit can file funding applications online, you can too." And, too often, they can't.

The fight for digital equality is very real for Indigenous people living in Canada's rural and remote communities. It is not just a matter of being able to get Netflix or play video games online. It is about being able to access what has become an essential means of communication in modern society. And it is a human right because, in some cases, it is a matter of life and death.

"When connectivity goes down in the North, the RCMP tell our community members: 'You can't call us.' In order for us to respond to an emergency, you need to physically come to the detachment," says Ms. Redfern. "Now, imagine people who are at risk in a domestic violence situation, or having a heart attack, or a child who has broken her arm. And the only way that you can get help is to physically leave the house and actually go to the RCMP to ask for assistance. That puts lives at risk."

It is an issue that has led to the creation of the Indigenous Connectivity Institute, an international organization working to bridge a digital divide that leaves Indigenous people and communities disproportionately offline, and excluded from opportunities the Internet enables. Ms. Redfern sits on its advisory committee.

Internet access provided to Indigenous Peoples is inconsistent across North America and around the world, she says. But Canada, which is often heralded as a beacon for Indigenous rights, is well behind other countries in ensuring First Nations, Inuit, and Métis can connect affordably and reliably.

In the United States, for instance, a portion of the wireless spectrum is reserved, without fees, for Indigenous use. The same is true in New Zealand and Mexico. But not in Canada.

In this country, the provision of Internet is in the hands of a small number of companies.

"Those big companies have said to the Government of Canada for decades, 'we cannot serve the rural and remote Northern communities without major public subsidies because it's too expensive,'" says Ms. Redfern. "They take the public subsidies, but services are not significantly improved. So, we're getting screwed on all sorts of fronts."

So much so that a 2021 report by the Council of Canadian Academies

entitled *Waiting to Connect* concluded government's policies and investments in telecommunications have resulted in racist outcomes for Indigenous Peoples.

The fastest Internet speed in Nunavut is eight times slower than the national average.

And yet the cost for the service would seem outlandish to most Canadians in the South.

Ms. Redfern says the monthly bill for her cell phone service, which she shares with her spouse and her father, is more than \$500. Her monthly Internet bill ranges from \$500 to over a \$1,000 a month because if she goes over the usage cap, she can expect overage charges of a \$100 a day. And her cable package, which she describes as pretty basic especially by Southern standards, is \$125 a month.

"Internet and cell phone costs are so expensive that people have to decide if they're paying their Internet bill or if they're going to skip meals,"

- Ms. Redfern

"And this is in a place where we already have high rates of food insecurity. But people so desperately need access to telecommunications, these are the tough choices they are having to make."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries in Nunavut closed. That meant people who relied on Internet through libraries and the Community Access Program could not get information about the pandemic and protective measures required.

Children who were not connected at home didn't have the ability to take part in online learning. That was true at the primary and secondary levels, and it was true as well for college and university students.

Emma Greenfield, who is now a faculty developer and Indigenous teaching guide at Georgian College in Ontario, was a Connectedness Fellow in 2020 with the Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness.

From July 2020 to February 2022, she held virtual Sharing Circles with academic staff and faculty working with Indigenous students to talk about the pandemic supports they required.

"Time and time again, digital inequities continued to be the number-one issue that impacted Indigenous students," says Ms. Greenfield. There was a "lack of Internet access, lack of technology, etc."

Digital equity is about recognizing how necessary the technology has become, and how it is evolving. Ms. Redfern says. Even her hunter's boat motor has a computer chip that is regularly expecting to update itself via the cloud or a nearby online connection. But the cloud barely exists in Nunavut.

When she was mayor of Iqaluit, the lands department was forced to store all of its land registry data every 48 hours, first on floppy disks and then on thumb drives, which were placed in the vault at the Royal Bank. "This is because, if the building burned down, they would lose all their records—and this wasn't a theoretical risk because that building did have a fire."

A lack of regular Internet access also means there are no regular updates for cyber threats. Just before the pandemic, the territorial government was targeted by online pirates. The territory chose not to pay the ransom but spent millions of dollars restoring data related to its own internal and sensitive data but also the data of residents, patients, correspondence, and reports, much of it private in nature.

At its heart, digital inequity is standing in the way of reconciliation, including cultural protection.

"Technology is incredibly important for governance, delivering government services, education, health care, economic development—especially developing a digitaleconomy, business communications, and cultural revitalization," says Ms. Redfern. "When Indigenous Peoples have been subjected to colonialism, loss of language, and loss of culture, technology and telecommunications can help us to produce our own unique cultural content and begin the process of cultural revitalization. But we can't do it with the digital inequity that we currently are dealing with."

POETA DigiSpark

the digital workplace



Pictured: **Claudia Figueroa** graduated from the POETA DigiSpark program and went on to develop guided kayak tours in her home country of Sante Fe, Argentina, for people of all abilities, ages, and body types.

POETADigiSpark

Preparing young Indigenous people for the digital workplace

NWAC is serving as the first Canadian partner in bringing a high-demand, digital skills training program to vulnerable and underserved people. The program, POETA DigiSpark, is run through the Trust for the Americas.

Bárbara Mamani is a young Indigenous woman who, along with her family, makes a living by growing organic tangelos, oranges, pica lemons, and herbs on their Chilean farm.

It is an ancient way of life. But Bárbara has brought the business into the 21st century with social media skills learned through a program called POETA DigiSpark, which is available in countries throughout the Americas. Starting this year, the culturally sensitive training in digital literacy, computer competence, and life skills is being offered to Indigenous people in Canada.

The Trust for the Americas has asked the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) to be its Canadian partner in the 10-year-old program, which it now operates in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, and Uruguay.

The Trust is providing the template for the course work, including training for the instructors. NWAC is providing the classroom space at its new Social, Cultural and Economic Innovation Centre in Gatineau, Quebec, as well as recruiting participants.

The aim is to provide career options for individuals from vulnerable and underserved communities. In each country, the Trust works closely with the local partner, such as NWAC, and local trainers to ensure that the classroom experience is culturally relevant.

Ms. Mamani, who began her POETA training in May 2020, calls her social media venture *quiri nayankiwa*, which translates to "my treasure," in honour of her Indigenous roots and culture. She says the program has helped her realize advantages of using technology to market her family's produce. It has also taught her

PO
ET
A
DigiSpark

how to create a business model, manage clients, and convert her clients' interests into sales.

Lara Bersano, Director of Communications of The Trust for the Americas, has helped Bárbara develop new strategies to strengthen her business with technological tools. Through the constant support of the POETA program and the coaching sessions, Bárbara has doubled the sales of her business and says she feels driven to grow it further.

POETA DigiSpark aims to bridge the digital divide, says Linda Eddleman, CEO for the Trust for the Americas, an affiliate of the Organization of American States.

"The project empowers young adults typically between the ages of 16 through the mid-30s, through training in digital, technical, and life skills in line with the skills that the labour market demands," says Ms. Eddleman. "In this sense, POETA DigiSpark prepares participants with the hard and soft skills required to compete in the labour market of the 21st century."

POETA DigiSpark was started in 2013 under the name POETA YouthSpark. It was modified in 2020 to include an older cohort of participants and renamed DigiSpark.

The participants work on individual computers or in groups of two to three people under the guidance of the trainers. There is constant monitoring and evaluation, as well as continuous feedback and follow-up through chat, email, and WhatsApp messenger.

"We strive to walk the extra mile, not only by training but also by offering mentoring and career development to ensure that each participant achieves an economic opportunity," says Ms. Eddleman.

Claudia Figueroa is another POETA DigiSpark graduate. She lives in Santa Fe, Argentina, with her partner and children.

In 2020, Ms. Figueroa began taking courses at CILSA, an organization for inclusion that is the Trust for the America's partner in her country. She studied web development, cloud computing, and marketing and digital communication.

Ms. Figueroa says her learning journey inspired her and her partner to create Setúbal Kayaks, a company that offers group guided tours in kayaks that are suitable to everyone, including people with disabilities and people who are overweight. She uses the tools she learned through POETA DigiSpark to advertise her business online, including on Santa Fe's official tourism website.

Ms. Figueroa says that CILSA and POETA DigiSpark gave her clear and precise guidelines on how to carry out her work in a more organized and agile way, and says she would recommend POETA DigiSpark, not only to those looking for a new a job, but also to those currently employed.

"My personal achievements so far have been to set goals and carry them out with a lot of effort and constant work," she says. "One can propose a goal and develop a strategy, but teamwork is also essential."

"POETA DigiSpark prepares participants with the hard and soft skills required to compete in the labour market of the 21st century."



Pictured: **Bárbara Mamani**, a young Indigenous woman who has utilized social media training through the POETA DigiSpark program to grow her family business.

POETA DigiSpark TO BRIDGE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN CANADA

BONNIE ROGERS

“

Looking back, I'm really, really fortunate that I can understand my language, and read and write it.”

BONNIE Rogers

WOMEN EMPOWERING WOMEN: BONNIE ROGERS' MATRIARCHAL ROOTS STEER HER PATH

Bonnie Rogers, a Dene language teacher, drew inspiration from her matriarchal relations and Traditional guidance to direct her teaching path.

Bonnie Rogers is a Dene language teacher, who has been driven through Traditional means, strong matriarchs, and a desire to pursue mainstream education in pursuit of her calling.

Although Ms. Rogers' path wasn't straightforward, she knew she wanted to follow in the footsteps of her Aunties and pursue post-secondary education. She completed a degree in health, with a concentration in Indigenous studies, and also obtained a certificate in beauty. Her intent was to become a public health inspector and practise as a beautician on the side.

But when she found herself struggling to find her path, she turned to her ancestors for guidance.

"I ended up going to a ceremony and seeking guidance there ... and I just heard in my mind, 'teach your language,'" Ms. Rogers says.

Though the message came through loud and clear, she was taken aback by unexpectedly being steered toward something that "wasn't even on the radar." She asked a second time and found, "Dene language started coming to me. I was really shocked to get that feedback from my ancestors."

Though she'd been surrounded by the Dene language her whole life—she was raised by her grandparents, who were fluent in Dene—she never envisioned a career in teaching it until she received that message.

"This whole time, the language component was not on the radar or my mind at all," said Ms. Rogers. "It was not obvious to me. Maybe subconsciously it was there, but it was not on my mind."

From there, things just fell into place. She applied to a masters of language program and became the Indigenous Language Coordinator at a Friendship



Pictured: Bonnie Rogers applies makeup to model Charlene Johnny during Indigenous Fashion Week, in Vancouver. **Photo credit:** Tyrrah Appanah



Centre in Regina, all within about a month from receiving direction during that single ceremony.

"I just knew I had to listen because, I knew it was a definite message," Ms. Rogers said. "Looking back, I'm really, really fortunate that I can understand my language, and read and write it."

She attributes her success, both in her career and in life, to the strong, driven, matriarchal Dene women who came before her.

"The reason why I chose to pursue secondary education in the community is because I saw my Aunties do it, and be single mothers and get their degrees and struggle. It's really powerful to see that. I see them in my community now and some of them are directors of their area of expertise," says Ms. Rogers. "It's just really amazing to see and to come from a community where women are supported in that way."

Ms. Rogers says that no matter where she was travelling, either for work, school, or pleasure, it was always reassuring knowing she had her matriarchal roots waiting for her in her community, in Northern Saskatchewan.

"I feel really fortunate that back home that matriarchal society is still somewhat intact. We are respected. The political leadership is actually a lot of females. It's really empowering," she says. "It does fit naturally to my family, and my hometown, to have women in those roles."

Seeing examples of women leading women while she was growing up has been empowering, for her and for the whole community. If these roles were embraced in other communities, Ms. Rogers says, she can't even begin to describe how inclusive, progressive, and forward-thinking this would be.

"If those opportunities were there for people all over, I can just see how that would impact their families and the generations to come too," Ms. Rogers describes. "To [go into] leadership positions and have the confidence to pursue whatever they want."



"I saw my Aunties be single mothers and get their degrees. It's really powerful to come from a community where women are supported in that way."



Pictured: Bonnie Rogers, Dene language teacher.
Photo credit: Bonnie Rogers.

INDIGENOUS Workers

Opening doors, creating more connections,
for Indigenous women



Photo of Indigenous women attending an Inclusions Works conference run by Indigenous Works.

Opening doors

creating more connections,
for Indigenous women

Indigenous Workers

Employment prospects for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis has improved significantly over the past three decades. However, there is still much more to do, especially when it comes to opening doors at management levels.



There has been a dramatic and positive shift in Indigenous employment in Canada over the past three decades. And, while there is still a wide gap in jobless rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers, Kelly Lendsay says he believes a number of factors, including workplace shifts prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, are helping to narrow these gaps.

The new challenge, says Mr. Lendsay, President and CEO of Indigenous Works, is to create space for Indigenous people who aspire to go beyond entry-level positions.

“Indigenous women are trying to break into the ranks of executive and management positions, right into the boardroom,” Mr. Lendsay said in a recent interview. “Yes, the trades are important, but what about a woman who wants to run a trades company? This is where we need to get them the training, open the doors, give them the mentoring, so they can be successful in these management and executive positions.”


Indigenous Works is a non-profit national organization created in 1998 following a recommendation in the report of the seminal Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Its mandate is to improve the inclusion and engagement of Indigenous Peoples in the Canadian economy.

“In 2023, we celebrate 25 years working with companies and organizations to strengthen their performance and results in Indigenous employment, workplace engagement, and inclusion,” says Mr. Lendsay, who is of Cree and Métis ancestry.

Indigenous Works has done that in a number of ways, he says. It created a seven-stage model called the Inclusion Continuum, which is a seven-stage road map to becoming an employer of choice. Employers can benchmark their inclusion performance and build sustainability strategies for becoming more inclusive. It develops tools and training programs, and conducts extensive webinars, to help managers understand issues related to Indigenous employment. And it conducts extensive research on Indigenous engagement and the labour market.

But, perhaps most importantly, says Mr. Lendsay, Indigenous Works developed social capital by creating new networks, connections, and relationships between and among business partners, supportive organizations, and Indigenous groups. Over the decades it has been in operation, Indigenous employment has grown.

“If you look at the Canadian labour market stats, at the data from 1996, unemployment rates of Indigenous people were triple what they are today,” says Mr. Lendsay.



“There was little social capital. There were few connections between and among Indigenous labour market groups and the mainstream economy. There were few connections with the academic community, the colleges, and universities in this country.”

“The Indigenous labour market is fragmented,” says Mr. Lendsay. “Though, again, there is a tremendous amount of good work being done by the network of 110 Indigenous skills employment training organizations that criss-cross the country and provide employment services for the Indigenous population. However, companies continue to find it difficult to navigate the Indigenous landscape in the labour market ecosystem.”

Another barrier, he says, is skills training for current and emerging careers. There needs to be more of it, and it needs to be better targeted.

A third barrier is a lack of awareness among Indigenous people, and also non-Indigenous people, about the types of career opportunities that are open to them. “Career fit is about finding where your passions are, where your skills and attitudes and attributes are best aligned,” says Mr. Lendsay. “We still lack sophisticated career mapping tools.”

But overall, he says, trends over the past three decades have been positive.

For instance, there has been a major expansion of Indigenous-led institutions, says Mr. Lendsay. “There are now tens of thousands of Indigenous organizations, companies, and for-profit NGOs. That was one of the recommendations in the Royal Commission report—to grow institutions that can manage our economies, politics or social systems, and our education systems.”

There are still significant social issues to be tackled, including bringing equality to Indigenous child welfare

and improving Indigenous education, says Mr. Lendsay. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action are generating some traction, but more ‘action agendas are needed.’ The Indigenization in colleges and universities is increasing. In every province and territory, we have a trade apprenticeships strategy. The trajectory is in the right direction, but we need to accelerate the outcomes and impact.”

At the same time, the tight labour market that Canada is currently experiencing has created employment for Indigenous people. “Employers say, ‘Ok, I’m so short of labour, let’s try to work with these indigenous groups,’” says Mr. Lendsay. “For some employers there may be reluctance and for others, it’s a lack of awareness, but the important thing is to create the linkages.”

COVID-19 has also caused business owners and managers to rethink their labour markets, he says. They are starting to realize that, for many jobs, people can work productively from their own homes, and that opens doors to those living in rural and urban communities, including Indigenous communities.

Another positive trend, says Mr. Lendsay, is that Indigenous entrepreneurship is growing many times faster than the rate for the mainstream economy. However, Indigenous people, and Indigenous women in particular, need help opening markets and getting access to capital for those who want to pursue careers as entrepreneurs and to be self-employed.

Today, as more Indigenous people are finding work, it is possible to think about breaking down the barriers in a more systematic way, he says. We have to look not just at ways to create jobs for Indigenous Peoples, but to create

good jobs that will bring fulfillment and satisfaction.

We have to ask: “What are the career skills and competencies we need for the jobs of the future. More than 50 percent of the jobs will be disrupted and digital fluency will be the number-one competency,” says Mr. Lendsay. “I think we have to become a little more surgical and say, ‘Well, how do we move women into these particular sectors, into all areas of the economy?’ We need to create more innovative labour market solutions for everybody.”

“The Indigenous labour market is fragmented and companies continue to find it difficult to navigate the Indigenous landscape in the labour market ecosystem. We need to create more innovative labour market solutions for everybody.”



Pictured: Kelly Lendsay,
President and CEO of Indigenous Works.

Walking side by side with us toward economic prosperity

Investing in Indigenous Peoples, and their communities, is how barriers to Indigenous economic development are lifted.



Pictured: Dawn Madahbee Leach, Chair of the National Indigenous Economic Development Board. **Photo credit:** Cindy Moleski Photography

Canada's history demonstrates how Indigenous Peoples were purposely left out of Canada's economy, as our lands, waters, and resources were used to build this country.

As Canadians become more aware of this historical truth, there is growing interest in working toward economic reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples—to ensure their economic inclusion, says Dawn Madahbee Leach, Chair of the National Indigenous Economic Development Board.

"Many barriers and restrictions were imposed on us through colonization and through legislation that continues to exist today. This reality has limited our ability to develop our own lands and to raise the capital we need to invest in our communities and in our people," says Ms. Leach. "Besides the critical need to reconcile all outstanding land claims, we

require access to affordable capital and to the supports needed to build the capacity of our people in order to fully engage in the economy."

In Canada, we have a national network of 53 Indigenous-owned, financial institutions. For 35 years, these institutions have helped to establish nearly 60,000 Indigenous businesses.

"However, the financing limits of these institutions have not increased during that time to meet the capital requirements needed today for larger heavy equipment, commercial buildings, or to become involved in the major projects that would generate the revenues we need to cover costs of our infrastructure and community needs," Ms. Leach says.

"In addition, not all communities are deriving the benefits, or the true value, of the social licence they possess with respect to development in their Traditional Territories," she adds.

"Through legislation, we only have access to sub-surface resources to the depth of a plow. This is a huge economic and legislative barrier, knowing that many of the critical minerals needed to achieve net zero are in our Traditional Territories. Going forward, our communities need to exercise their jurisdiction and determine fair value of their social licence with respect to any development in their territories."

Ms. Leach says a misconstrued "perception" exists that Indigenous Peoples do not have the capacity to become involved. However, she explains that we have a growing number of educated leaders building Indigenous-led institutions to support communities.

"Indigenous-led centres of excellence would help address capacity needs," she adds. "People are starting to recognize that we have strong leadership in every field and that it makes good business sense to include the indigenous voice and lens at the highest levels of decision-making."

"We are removing these economic barriers," Ms. Leach adds, citing recognition in Supreme Court case rulings. "Our people are starting to work together and collaborate more," resulting in progressive entities such as the First Nations Major Projects Coalition, creating an information hub for Indigenous Peoples

“It makes good business sense to include the indigenous voice.”

to learn, share, and mentor one another.

Another example of collaboration is when more than 20 national Indigenous organizations came together to launch the National Indigenous Economic Strategy for Canada, in June 2022.

“It was created by Indigenous people with an array of expertise and backgrounds. We held the pen in creating this strategy as we know better than anyone else what our needs are and how to address those needs. The strategy includes the four strategic directions: people, land, infrastructure, and finance. It also includes 107 calls to economic prosperity, which all sectors of Canadian society can embrace.”

“We fully understand that we require the knowledge to make informed decisions,” she says. “It is powerful when our people come together. When sharing with each other, we are building each other’s capacity to help our communities to move forward.”

“Canada’s future is dependent on including Indigenous Peoples meaningfully in the economy and in all major developments,” Ms. Leach adds. “Ideally, our future will see Canada walking with us, side by side, on the path toward reconciliation, inclusion, and economic prosperity for all.”



Pictured: Dawn Madahbee Leach, Chair of the National Indigenous Economic Development Board. Photo credit: Dawn Madahbee Leach

Kci-
niw
esq

PUBLISHED by NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
ISSUE 17

KCI-NIWESQ

is a monthly magazine of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC). Its objective is to highlight the work of the organization and to tell the stories of the Indigenous women of Canada.

NWAC, which was founded in 1974, is a national Indigenous organization representing First Nations (on and off reserve, with status and without), Métis, and Inuit women, girls, and gender-diverse people in Canada. Its goal is to enhance, promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural, and political well-being of Indigenous women within their respective communities and Canadian society.

PUBLISHER

LYNNE GROULX
NWAC Chief Executive Officer

EDITOR

JOAN WEINMAN

SENIOR WRITER

GLORIA GALLOWAY

DESIGNER

KYLA ELISABETH

WRITER

ASHLEY ESPINOZA

TEXTURE PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED BY ENVATO ELEMENTS



NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA MAGAZINE

KCI-NIWESQ

nwac.ca

