

Aboriginal workers called role models

By ANNE KYLE
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Delegates attending the Aboriginal Government Employees' Network (AGEN) 13th annual conference Wednesday in Regina were told they are the role models for today's youth as they prepare to enter the workforce.

"All people in the workplace want is to know that they matter, that they have a voice in the workplace and are being heard, and that they are understood," said Brenda Merasty, vice-president of student services and academics at the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT).

Merasty said she learned some valuable lessons from her research and dealings with individuals with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder and that these lessons can be replicated in the workplace.

People tend to focus on the bad behaviour and the deficits of someone with FASD rather than on their strengths, she said, "and that is what we do in the workplace. We come up with evaluations and critiques of the person's skills and work habits, rather than build on the strengths of people."

"We need to do more celebrating

and bragging about our accomplishments. We need to tell people what we are good at," she said, chastising mainstream media for failing to promote the positive achievements of aboriginal people and perpetuating the negative stereotypes.

As government employees, Merasty said, members of AGEN are the vanguard of their community, the role models for the young people who will be following in their footsteps.

Recognizing the growing demographics of young aboriginal people in this province, Merasty said, aboriginal people have to mobilize and work together to build relationships and partnerships with the provincial government, Crown corporations and unions.

Dona Desmarais, director of aboriginal relations with SaskEnergy, said that when she joined the Crown corporation in 1992, less than one per cent of the workforce was aboriginal. "I am really proud that some 13 years later we are almost at the 100 mark, and that means one tenth of the organization's workforce is aboriginal. And I believe that is how we influence change, those 100 people are interspersed throughout Saskatchewan but they do have a collective voice."