



DRYDEN

Media Release

Cheryl Edwards is the recipient of the 2026 Ogimaapiness (Leonard Sky) “Building Bridges” Award

DRYDEN, ON – May 29, 2026 – The Working Circle presented Cheryl Edwards with the Ogimaapiness (Leonard Sky) “Building Bridges” Award, which recognizes an individual, business, or organization who has demonstrated leadership in enhancing diversity, respect, harmony, equality, and humility for others.

With the award, Cheryl also received the special gift of a Star Blanket. The blanket demonstrates great respect, honour, and admiration for the recipient. The giver of the blanket holds the individual in very high regard, and when placed on the recipient, it is wrapping them with respect and admiration. The Star Blanket also brings good dreams, prosperity, and protection.

The Leonard Sky Building Bridges Award was conceived in 2015 to honour Leonard Sky, a long-time teacher, and Elder in the Dryden Area. His Anishinaabe Heritage and Language courses at Dryden High School opened many students’ eyes to their shared history, increased their pride in their culture and language, and began building bridges and better understanding in Dryden and the surrounding area. The award was previously sponsored by the Dryden Area Anti Racism Network (DAARN) and as of 2023 has transitioned to the City of Dryden Working Circle to be administered.

Cheryl Edwards is the previous Executive Director of the Dryden Native Friendship Centre, having retired in the spring of 2025. Cheryl was nominated in recognition of her outstanding leadership and commitments to building meaningful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in our area, across Northwestern Ontario, and throughout the rest of the province.

Cheryl has demonstrated a lifelong dedication to reconciliation, inclusion and community healing. Under her leadership the Friendship Centre became more than a service organization, it became a gathering place where people from all backgrounds could come together in a spirit of understanding, respect, and a shared purpose.



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Her efforts helped foster important community conversations surrounding truth, reconciliation, cultural awareness and respect for Indigenous history and identity. Her leadership extended beyond advocacy into tangible action.

Cheryl has also been a strong advocate for Indigenous women, children and their families helping to develop and support programming focused on housing, education wellness and cultural empowerment. Her work consistently emphasized inclusion, dignity, and the importance of ensuring all people feel valued and supported. What made Cheryl's leadership especially impactful was her ability to bring these people together. She has built bridges between organizations, governments, health care providers, educators and community members through compassion, her unwavering honesty, and a deep belief that reconciliation is achieved through relationships and our shared humanity.

Cheryl's years of service at the Friendship Centre have left a lasting impact on our community and have helped create a stronger, more connected future for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike.

The members of the Working Circle extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who submitted a nomination. The exceptional quality of this year's nominees truly reflects how many dedicated individuals are building bridges to create a more inclusive, stronger community for all.

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