

## 2011 ABORIGINAL PRIVATE SECTOR BUSINESS ED OF THE YEAR AWARD WINNER NEECHIE GEAR, SK



Established in June of 2010, Neechie Gear is an award-winning clothing company with a social conscience. The Neechie Gear clothing line promotes humorous phrases with attractive designs that appeal to both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal market. The company was founded by Kendal Netmaker, a young Aboriginal entrepreneur from Sweetgrass First Nation in Saskatchewan. Remarkably, Kendal started the company while studying full time at the University of Saskatchewan for his degree in education. With the help of mentors, Kendal developed and polished his business skills, and managed to win over \$20,000 worth of cash and services from various business plan and pitch competitions in a little over one year. Although sales have been moderate due to Kendal's commitment to finishing school, Neechie gear has exceeded over \$22,000 in sales, and continues to grow. What is incredibly unique about Neechie Gear is its commitment to giving back to the community. Kendal established the NG Athletics Club Inc, which is a non-profit organization and arm of the Neechie Gear company that supports, develops and

manages Canadian youth based sports teams. Neechie Gear also offers educational bursaries for Aboriginal students enrolled at the University of Saskatchewan which provides the added benefit of free advertising for the company that reaches its strongest target market – Aboriginal youth.

### The Story behind the "Social Conscience"

Kendal Netmaker is from the Sweetgrass First Nation and was raised in a single-parented, low income family. Kendal attended elementary school off-reserve, and without disposable income or a vehicle, he did not have the opportunity get involved in any extra-curricular activities. During this time, he met a life-long friend who was from South Africa who recognized Kendal's athletic talent and wondered why Kendal did not join any of the same sport teams that he played on. Kendal told his friend that his family did not have the money to pay registration fees, or have any mode of transportation that would allow him travel to and from games and practices. He relied on the school bus to travel to and from school, and was restricted from participating in any after school activities. Shortly after this exchange, his South African friend pulled Kendal aside and said, "Kendal, I told my parents what you told me and they want to pay for your fee to play on my soccer team and we can even drive you to the reserve after all games and practices". Kendal was surprised and touched by the kindness and generosity of this South African family, and was extremely grateful for the opportunity to be part of many sports teams and continue with his education. Many years later, the South African family moved away – but before they left, they gave Kendal's family a running vehicle which would enable him and his sisters to continue their involvement in sports and would eventually carry them through high school and into university. Kendal believes that without his friends' help, he would not have a landed a college volleyball scholarship after graduating high school, finish university and later go on to establish an award-winning company! As a result of his life experience, Kendal has learned firsthand what sports can do for youth by developing elite athletes and future leaders. The support and kindness Kendal received from the generous South African family as a youth has changed his life. Kendal remains committed to "paying it forward", which is why he has incorporated the "social conscience" into his business model, where a portion of all profits are used to support Aboriginal youth achieve success through sports and education.

"Helping youth through the Neechie Gear Brand" – *Kendal Netmaker, 2011 Cando Conference*