



Resources For Learners With Apprenticeship & Skilled Trades Goals ...

APPRENTICESHIP & SKILLED TRADES FACTSHEET

Apprenticeship and the skilled trades are an important goal path for many adult learners and the province's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs provide valuable support to help prospective apprentices develop the skills they need to succeed. To learn more about this important issue, Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO) conducted research, wrote a report, and created three accompanying factsheets.

CLO's Apprenticeship and the Skilled Trades Factsheets cover the following topics:

1. Challenges
2. Strategies
3. Resources



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INTRODUCTION

In CLO's province-wide research, Literacy and Basic Skills programs and sector support organizations identified key challenges faced by apprenticeship-bound learners as described in our Challenges Factsheet. In response, literacy educators have developed a host of strategies, some of which are included in this factsheet, to combat some of the most prevalent challenges faced by learners who are working towards a career in the skilled trades.

SKILLS UPGRADING

THE CHALLENGE: The most significant barrier standing in the way of learners pursuing a career in the skilled trades is the need for skills upgrading to be successful in an apprenticeship.

STRATEGIES A key challenge for apprenticeship-bound learners is the need to upgrade their foundational and advanced math skills, interpersonal and soft skills, writing, communication and digital skills. Fortunately, LBS programs provide focused, targeted short-term training in many of these areas. Trades math and computer skills programs are of highest interest, as are "Exam Prep" workshops devoted to test-taking and studying strategies.

Literacy educators help prospective apprentices upgrade their skills by offering individualized support that meets the needs of each learner. This is a key strength of the LBS system, as learners can focus specifically on the areas that they need to develop, rather



than following pre-determined curriculum. This flexible, self-paced, teacher-supported learning helps learners at different levels progress towards their skilled trades goals.

Often learners have an unrealistic vision of the skills required in the skilled trades. To overcome this challenge, Literacy and Basic Skills programs have worked hard to integrate apprenticeship-specific materials into their programs to help demonstrate how those skills will be used on the job. Naturally, they access task-based activities developed for learners on the apprenticeship goal path, but they have also adapted other learning tasks, so that they reflect authentic situations in the skilled trades. Contextualized learning resources and occupation specific curricula that give learners a "preview" of the trade and include real-life examples are particularly valuable.

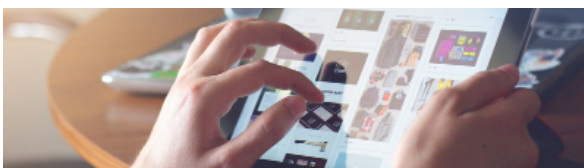
Linking with instructors who are delivering apprenticeship training at local colleges in order to identify the skills needed to be successful in their classes is another useful strategy to help learners recognize the skills needed to succeed in the college portion of their apprenticeship training.

FINDING EMPLOYER SPONSORS

THE CHALLENGE The second most prevalent challenge mentioned by LBS educators was learner difficulty in finding employer sponsors.

STRATEGIES The most common strategy for supporting learners who have trouble finding an employer sponsor is to connect them with local Employment Services to get support with employment preparation and connections to employers in the skilled trades. The Employment Ontario system offers a wealth of support for learners with employment goals both in and outside of the skilled trades, so supporting apprenticeship-focused learners in tandem is an excellent step.

Some Literacy and Basic Skills programs are taking that a step further by developing relationships directly with employers. These connections can serve multiple purposes, giving educators first-hand information to share with learners about the skills that these employers are looking for, and providing access to authentic workplace forms and documents that can be used in lessons. When employers are willing to visit programs to talk about their businesses, it puts learners in front of someone who could eventually become their apprenticeship sponsors.



“There’s an employer (pre-COVID) who would even come and present about their company to “sell” their business as a place learners could work post-program. He would tell his own personal story of immigrating to Canada and not even knowing about the trade that he ended up pursuing.”

Key Informant Interview

LACK OF AWARENESS ABOUT AVAILABLE OPPORTUNITIES

THE CHALLENGE Many learners who are interested in apprenticing in a skilled trade are unaware of the opportunities available.

STRATEGIES LBS programs help build awareness of the opportunities that exist in the skilled trades by facilitating connections with Employment Services and employers. They reinforce this message through a variety of other means such as sharing labour market information with learners that show how many jobs are available in specific trades and what the pay levels are for those jobs.

Literacy programs that have strong relationships with their local Workforce Planning Boards find that they have quick access to up-to-date labour market information to support this effort. There are also many helpful resources available online, in particular, Ontario’s Labour Market Information website.

First-hand stories of becoming an apprentice shared by people who have already started their journeys was reported as one of the most successful awareness-building opportunities. These success stories can help learners understand the opportunities available to them in a way that resonates far more than reading about them in a book or on a website and allows learners to ask questions to reinforce their understanding of their skilled trade journey.

“We invite graduates from our Academic Upgrading program who’ve moved on to the trades to come back and share their story with current students. For example, we provide communications and math to help students prepare to be successful in the college’s millwright program. One of those students became a Millwright, and when he found work, he was able to tell current students about it.”

Key Informant Interview

DIFFICULTY NAVIGATING THE APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM

THE CHALLENGE It is difficult for learners to understand how to navigate the complexity of the apprenticeship system.

STRATEGIES Speaking with someone who’s been there is an excellent way to help learners understand how to navigate the complexity of the apprenticeship system. Some LBS programs have arranged visits from staff at

their Employment Ontario Apprenticeship Office, local trade unions, and colleges delivering apprenticeship training to explain their roles. In areas where there are collaborative apprenticeship committees in place to promote the skilled trades, they’ve proven to be valuable guests as well. As well, some Regional Literacy Networks have held events where representatives from the trades speak to learners from multiple programs and areas.

LBS staff noted that understanding the system is easier for learners who have a clearly defined goal – who know which skilled trade they want to work in. With an end goal in mind, it’s easier to map the paths a learner may take to get there, and who might be involved in each path. Creating that step-by-step path at the beginning of an LBS learner’s journey also helps them stay focused on why they’re upgrading specific skills and how the skills connect to their long-term goal.



“Try to have learners articulate and plan a tangible next step with their apprenticeship goals. Learners lose interest in upgrading for the sake of upgrading.”

Key Informant Interview

THE AMOUNT OF TIME REQUIRED

THE CHALLENGE The time it takes to both prepare for and complete an apprenticeship drives some learners away from this path.

STRATEGIES It's a common belief that the first step to starting an apprenticeship is to find an employer to sponsor you. However, LBS programs recognize that it's often far from the first step, with prospective apprentices needing to upgrade their foundational skills and earn recognized credentials first. Not every learner will be prepared to commit to the time it takes to complete these steps or work their way through several levels of an apprenticeship.

While LBS has no control over apprenticeship timelines, educators can help set realistic expectations of the commitments involved and share the benefits of staying the course. Providing learners with an outline of pay scales in the skilled trades and how they go up with the successful completion of each level of apprenticeship training can help them recognize the benefits of investing this time.

Some learners also have a misconception that if they find an employer offering jobs in the skilled trades, that this employer would automatically be willing to sign an apprenticeship contract agreeing to sponsor them. Being an employer sponsor



is a big commitment and few employers are willing to make it the first step of their working relationship with a new employee. LBS programs help learners understand that it's a much more common a practice for employers to hire prospective apprentices in general labour positions first. This gives the employer an opportunity to see how this person works with their team, if they have the required foundational skills, and to confirm their reliability and work ethic. While it adds to the timeline that learners may have expected, helping them understand these timelines can ensure that those who pursue the skilled trades are prepared for the length of the journey ahead.

“Managing expectations is part of it. It's a huge commitment for an employer to take on an apprentice both in signing and in mentoring.”

Key Informant Interview

DIFFICULTY BALANCING WORK, LIFE AND EDUCATION

THE CHALLENGE It is difficult to manage the competing demands of work, home, LBS upgrading and apprenticeship training.

STRATEGIES Trying to balance work, school and life responsibilities can be challenging for anyone, and LBS programs are well-suited to respond to the busy lives of many

apprentices. Programs shared the benefit of offering flexible attendance instead of requiring learners to attend a minimum number of hours per week, allowing learners to balance their evolving needs without being removed from the program. Learners can step away from their programs for a time and when they need support to improve their skills for work or prepare for an upcoming exam, and they can quickly return to their LBS program for individualized help.

Programs offering evening hours provide support that's valuable for learners who work during the day. As well, and most LBS agencies offer different types of digital service delivery which provides additional flexibility to work around learners' complex and competing priorities.

“Being able to offer online learning upgrading, study support and test-taking skills, LBS assessment and training has been a big help.”

Survey Respondent

LEVEL OF EDUCATION

THE CHALLENGE Low educational attainment combined with confusion around the actual level of education needed to sign on as an apprentice creates challenges for learners.

STRATEGIES LBS educators have long recognized that having a high school diploma or equivalent doesn't necessarily mean that

your skills are at a Grade 12 level – and that not having a high school diploma doesn't mean you are unskilled. There are firm guidelines around the educational attainment required to sign an apprenticeship contract however, and the expectations of employers may or may not align with those rules.

Literacy and Basic Skills programs are well-versed at supporting learners as they work towards achieving the levels of education needed by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, employers, and unions.

In addition to offering foundational upgrading, all LBS programs can support learners in preparing to write the General Educational Development (GED) exam. The GED exam measures proficiency in high school-level math, language arts, science, and social studies, and those who pass are awarded a certificate that is recognized for apprenticeship registration.

Prospective apprentices who are enrolled in LBS programs offered by school boards can continue to take the credit classes they need as well as have access to Guidance Counsellors who can offer Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition. PLAR is a process through which the school can award high school credits based on work and life experience. College-based LBS programs offer access to the Academic and Career Entrance program that can provide a certification that's accepted for apprenticeship registration.

“More employers are asking for a higher requirement than officially needed in the trades (e.g., they want their prospective Apprentice to have Grade 12 physics even though the trade says just Grade 10).”

Key Informant Interview



FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

THE CHALLENGE Many learners in Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills programs face considerable financial challenges.

STRATEGIES While becoming an apprentice can be an excellent opportunity to “earn while you learn”, the costs associated with preparing for this journey, combined with other financial obligations, can feel overwhelming. The flexible hours and digital programming that Literacy and Basic Skills programs offer allow learners to balance work and upgrading. Program staff often make additional efforts to support learners who have financial challenges, such as providing bus tickets and other transportation support, or investigating what funding is available for traveling to apprenticeship exam locations. As well, LBS educators actively work with learners to create awareness of financial supports and services available in their communities. Letting learners know about financial

incentives related to apprenticeship can also be eye-opening, as many do not recognize the additional financial support available.

Anyone who has faced financial challenges knows firsthand the stress these challenges can cause. Offering soft skills training on topics like resiliency is one way that LBS educators try to help, but they often take it step further by working one-on-one with learners to help them build confidence. As one survey respondent suggested, LBS educators are “a cheerleader until they believe in themselves.” Helping learners recognize the strength they’ve shown just by taking the first steps to return to education is a specialty of many LBS educators.



“People have goals and need to accomplish tasks, but we really look at the stability of someone’s life and how that impacts their goals. It’s everything from whether they have heat, to a place to wash their clothes. We talk a lot about maintaining stability through times of change. Running “Getting Ahead” and other life stabilization and poverty reduction initiatives provides them with a foundation that actually allows success.”

Key Informant Interview

CONCLUSION

The Apprenticeship and the Skilled Trades Factsheets were researched and written by Community Literacy of Ontario. CLO is a provincial network of community-based Literacy and Basic Skills agencies. We are located in Barrie, Ontario. You can learn more about our organization by visiting our website and by following us on Facebook and Twitter.

Our factsheets can be freely downloaded from CLO's website at: <https://www.communityliteracyofontario.ca>. In addition to these factsheets, CLO researched and wrote an in-depth report called Apprenticeship and the Skilled Trades - Through the Lens of Literacy and Basic Skills. You can download

this report at: <https://www.communityliteracyofontario.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/CLOs-Apprenticeship-and-the-Skilled-Trades-Report-March-2022.pdf>

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