

## Knowledge Synthesis

### Promoting Skilled Trades in Rural Ontario

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#### INTRODUCTION

*This knowledge synthesis is part of The Monieson Centre's Knowledge Impact in Society (KIS) Project, a three-year endeavour to connect academic knowledge with economic development needs in Eastern Ontario. The synthesis is an accessible presentation of the latest research on issues affecting rural Eastern Ontario. The knowledge synthesis topics were determined through information gathered at 15 community workshops run in partnership with the Eastern Ontario Community Futures Development Corporation network. The KIS Project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. For more information, visit [www.easternontarioknowledge.ca](http://www.easternontarioknowledge.ca).*

The economic sustainability of rural communities is heavily dependent on their ability to attract and retain skilled and experienced trades-people. While skilled workers tend to enjoy around a 41% wage premium over unskilled workers, the latter are also more likely to be unemployed or underemployed and tend to require more social assistance. That being said, most rural areas in Ontario are currently experiencing chronic shortages of skilled trades-people. Projections suggest that such shortages will increase in the future.

#### KEY ISSUES

##### *Challenges*

- **Overall shortages of skilled trades workers** – It is estimated that Ontario will experience a shortage of approximately 100,000 skilled trades workers in the manufacturing sector alone over the next 15 or so years.
- **Growing presence of older workers in the labour market** – Projections indicate that the number of retirees is expected to exceed the number of new entrants sometime between 2011 and 2016.
- **Negative public perception of the trades** - Many young people and their parents view the skilled trades as a last resort option.
- **Lack of visibility and promotion** – In one survey 72% of young people said their guidance counselors did not encourage skilled trades as a career option, while another survey found that 37% of young people said their schools did not have accessible information on skilled trades.
- **Relatively low apprenticeship rates** – Recent research suggests that only 18% of employers utilize apprentices, largely because they tend to see such programs as costly.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### *Strategies and Tactics*

#### General

- *Develop a sound understanding of your region's specific skilled trades needs*
- *Enhance the image and status of skilled trades*
- *Develop visible avenues of entrance into skilled trades*
- Create partnerships and networks that allow for coordination and communication between key stakeholders (i.e. students, parents, teachers, employers, government agencies, community groups etc.)

#### Specific

- **Local Research** - Conduct local research on the supply and demand in the trades to gain an understanding and awareness of the local needs and opportunities.
- **Programs List** - Generate and distribute a comprehensive list of trades schools and programs in your immediate and surrounding areas.
- **Local Website** - Develop a central information resource website that contains information about trades and allows local employers to post job opportunities and job seekers to post resumes.
- **Early Promotion** - Initiate activities to build awareness of trades at an early age (at the elementary school levels) by using innovative promotional materials and campaigns that appeal to youth.
- **Teaching Awards** - Create a Rural Trade & Skills Teacher of the Year Award to encourage teachers to play active roles in trades promotion.
- **Local Business Engagement** - Encourage and support local businesses in the development of promotional materials covering the company's work, types of careers offered and expectations of workers. This includes visits to schools and tours of companies.
- **Local Trades Fairs** – Build awareness of and engagement in trades by hosting local trades fairs.
- **Employer Forums** – Bring together employers, government officials, and dignitaries that have success stories related to the enhancement of skilled trades.
- **Guest Speaking Engagements** – Arrange for employers and other stakeholders to speak at local schools, businesses, conferences, and community events.

- **Newsletters** – Create newsletters that contain trades information relevant to local community members including students, parents, teachers and employers.
- **Community Engagement** – Initiate and participate in round tables, discussion forums and conferences on trades related issues at the local level.
- **Mentorship and Apprenticeship** – Support the development and maintenance of local mentorship and apprenticeship programs. Provide or identify financial incentives that will help alleviate the burden on employers of developing and maintaining apprenticeship and mentoring programs. This could include the development of a “clearing house” that would help keep employers informed about different incentives and programs.
- **Completion Rates** – Evaluate the apprenticeship completion rates in your region.
- **Summer Trades Camp** – Organize a summer trades camp that provides opportunities for young people to find out about different trades and help initiate skills development.

### *Success Stories*

In 2007 and in response to skill shortages, an unskilled workforce, and a reluctance of employers to take on apprentices, Lanark and Renfrew Counties in collaboration with St. Lawrence College created an apprenticeship brochure titled “Making Cent\$ of Apprenticeship”. The brochure contains information about the benefits of apprenticeships to both prospective employers and apprentices. Another successful endeavour in these areas was a Skilled Trades Fair aimed at providing information and guidance to youth regarding work in skilled trades. The fair was attended by 1540 people and featured 62 exhibits from 36 organizations. A Rural Road Show was also launched in 2007 that provided the residents of Middleville and Lanark with information about the training and job opportunities in their areas. Eighteen service providers participated and over 50 individuals attended. Future actions planned to address skilled trades issues in Renfrew and Lanark Counties include the development of a fact sheet on the benefits to employers of taking on apprentices, conduct a survey to determine skills shortages in local labour markets, and actively encouraging those employers who have indicated skill shortages to sit on a “Champions Committee” aimed at addressing employer reluctance to take on apprentices. For more information, visit [www.algonquincollege.com/renfrewlanarkworkforce/Apprenticeship.htm](http://www.algonquincollege.com/renfrewlanarkworkforce/Apprenticeship.htm).

Another successful initiative was developed by the Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Local Training Board in Western Ontario. SLOME (Skills London Oxford Middlesex Elgin), an independent not-for-profit project, is an annual hands-on skills competition and career exploration day designed to provide over 4,300 local students with interactive information and opportunities about skilled trades. This initiative links the private, public and educational communities in developing positive publicity about skilled trades. In 2007 over 65 local organizations and private businesses exhibited at the event. For more information, visit [www.slome.org](http://www.slome.org).

## APPENDIX A – RESOURCES

There are a number of government funded programs that directly promote the development of skilled trades by providing support and opportunities to students, employers and educational institutions.

**Local Boards of Ontario** – Local Boards are not-for-profit, community-based organizations comprised of volunteers from business, labour, education and community groups. Their mandate is to work at the local level in developing solutions to labour market needs and issues that have been identified by the community. They do this by engaging their communities and community partners in labour market research and planning that leverages cooperative efforts among stakeholders to develop solutions to local problems. More information can be found at [www.localboards.on.ca](http://www.localboards.on.ca).

**Georgina Trades Training, Inc.** – GTTI is a community-based learning centre in the Lake Simcoe area. It is a unique partnership between public and private secondary school boards and municipal, provincial and federal government organizations to provide trades training. Courses and training are provided through educational partners, and are offered in both on-line and on-site modules. Further information is available online at [www.gtti.ca](http://www.gtti.ca).

### *Government Funded Programs*

- **Seat Purchase** – Provides funding to approved training delivery agents (TDAs) to deliver the in-school component of apprenticeship training.
- **Apprenticeship Innovation Fund** – Supports the development of new training programs, and innovative, flexible delivery methods in response to industry and apprentice needs.
- **Apprenticeship Scholarship and Employer Signing Bonus** – Supports training and employment for youth who have left school but require upgrading to meet the academic entry registration requirement for apprenticeship training: \$1000 scholarship for a young person who returns to, and completes academic upgrading and is registered as an apprentice; \$2000 per apprentice signing bonus for the employer who supports the candidate’s apprenticeship registration and provides apprenticeship training.
- **Loans for Tools Program** – Helps first-year registered apprentices pay for their initial costs of tools and equipment. This program offers loans that are interest-free during and up to one year after the apprentice’s training.
- **Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP)** – Offered through Ontario’s secondary school system and provides cooperative education and workplace-based experiences in the skilled trades to grade 11 and 12 students.
- **Pre-Apprenticeship Training Program** – Helps potential entrants to the apprenticeship system develop their job skills and trade readiness so that they will be prepared to find work as apprentices. Programs are up to 40 weeks in duration and include the Level 1 apprenticeship in-school training, relevant safety training and a minimum 8-week work placement.
- **Co-op Diploma Apprenticeship Program** – Combines a college diploma program and apprenticeship training leading to a Certificate of Qualification. The program enables participants to train as apprentices in a specific trade while obtaining an associated college diploma.
- **Apprenticeship Training Tax Credit** – Encourages Ontario businesses to hire and train apprentices in skilled trades primarily in the construction, industrial and motive power sectors.

The tax credit provides up to \$15,000 towards eligible apprentices' salaries and wages for the first 36 months of training by private sector employers of apprentices.

- **Skills Training Infrastructure Program** – Provides capital funding (one-year investment) to support upgraded and new equipment in union-employer training centres.
- **Apprenticeship Enhancement Fund** – Provides capital funding (five-year investment) to colleges delivering apprenticeship training programs to acquire up-to-date equipment and update facilities.

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