



# Challenges 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

The challenges facing learners seeking to enter the apprenticeship and skilled trades sectors are an important issue for Ontario's adult literacy educators and remain of significant concern for the provincial government. It is clear that between pending retirements, a current shortage of certified tradespeople and low apprenticeship completion rates, a skilled trades crisis is certainly upon us.

Via a province-wide survey and key informant interviews CLO asked representatives from Literacy and Basic Skills programs and sector support organizations to share the challenges they've encountered when working directly with learners who are, or who could be, pursuing a career in apprenticeship and the skilled trades. The top challenges for learners, described in priority order, are identified in this factsheet.

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## THE NEED FOR SKILLS UPGRADING

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. The greatest skill deficiencies reported by LBS educators were foundational and advanced math, interpersonal and soft skills, writing, communication and digital skills (in ranked order).

Unfortunately, this issue is exacerbated by a general lack of understanding about the actual need for these skills on the job.

Literacy program staff find themselves working with learners who have an unrealistic vision of the skills actually used in the trades and shared how difficult it can be to convince someone that, for example, having low math, literacy or interpersonal skills will actually be a barrier to their success.

“There’s a misconception that the trades are not “academic” or rigorous and therefore don’t require solid essential skills.”

LBS Survey Respondent

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## FINDING EMPLOYER SPONSORS

The second most prevalent challenge mentioned by LBS educators was learner difficulty in finding employer sponsors, either due to an actual or perceived lack of employers signing new apprentices. This challenge is compounded by employers who are said to hire only people with previous experience in the skilled trades rather than those just starting out.

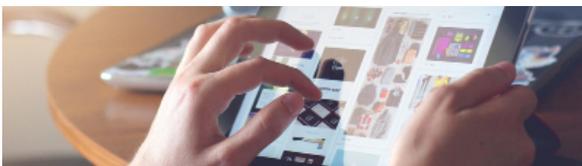


This issue has resulted in a lack of confidence in some learners, who feel that putting the time and energy into upgrading their skills to pursue an apprenticeship won't pay off with a job. Those with lower interpersonal or communication skills face additional challenges, as they may be unable to successfully approach employers to negotiate a sponsorship.



“Employers want candidates with some experience or education in the area.”

LBS Survey Respondent



## LACK OF AWARENESS ABOUT AVAILABLE OPPORTUNITIES

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Many learners who are interested in apprenticing in a skilled trade are unaware of the opportunities available. Literacy and Basic Skills educators pointed out the number of different paths that someone could take to become a tradesperson, especially in the voluntary trades.



“There are so many paths – it’s hard to know which to take (and almost all paths require a high degree of literacy).”

LBS Survey Respondent

While apprenticeship options exist in these trades, many learners are only aware of private training institutions with large marketing budgets, or public colleges offering trades-based programs. For reasons both financial and self-confidence related, these options often feel out of reach.

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## DIFFICULTY NAVIGATING THE APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM

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There is a significant lack of understanding about how to navigate the apprenticeship system. With multiple people and organizations involved, processes to be followed, and steps to take, many learners find themselves lost and unsure of how to reach their goals.

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## THE AMOUNT OF TIME REQUIRED

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The time it takes to both prepare for and complete an apprenticeship drives some learners away from this path, sometimes before they even begin. It can be incredibly intimidating to learn that the apprenticeship journey in your chosen trade could take upwards of five years – and that’s after you’ve found an employer to sponsor you. For those who need to upgrade their skills before beginning the journey, the path can seem unrealistically long and overwhelming.

## DIFFICULTY BALANCING WORK, LIFE AND EDUCATION

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It is difficult to balance the challenge of managing the demands of work, home, LBS upgrading and apprenticeship training. There are only a limited number of hours in the day, and for learners who are registered apprentices, attempting to work full-time, study for their in-school training, attend a literacy program for support, and live up to family responsibilities often find themselves pulled in too many directions to continue.



“Family demands prevent them planning to study in the evening while working in the day.”

LBS Survey Respondent



## REQUIRED LEVEL OF EDUCATION

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Low educational attainment combined with confusion around the actual level of education needed to sign as an apprentice creates challenges for learners. Not only does that educational requirement change from trade to trade, but the level of education prospective employer sponsors may be looking for doesn't always align with the minimum level of education required to sign an apprenticeship contract.

## FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

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While the financial rewards of completing an apprenticeship can be great, so too are the financial challenges encountered by many learners in Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills programs. The need to find paid work of any kind can easily take precedence over the long-term planning it takes to successfully navigate the apprenticeship system, particularly for someone with urgent financial needs. Many learners struggle financially and may be in receipt of Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program benefits.



For learners in smaller and more rural or remote communities, or in areas where opportunities for work in the skilled trades are on the outskirts of town, the cost of transportation becomes a barrier. Those who do pursue an apprenticeship can face additional financial challenges with paying for books, traveling to write exams, and even relocating for work.

“Because there are currently so many job opportunities available at an entry level, learners are hesitant to commit to a longer skilled trade or apprenticeship journey.”

LBS Survey Respondent

## KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW

“The academic requirements of apprenticeship are significant – but I could have a basic-level Grade 12 from 30 years ago that satisfied the official requirements to be signed as an apprentice, and not have the skills that correspond. This is probably one of the reasons that some employers are looking for more or won’t sign until you’ve worked for them and proven yourself.”



“We find that individuals pursuing this goal path often require high school credits before they can even start to think about becoming an apprentice. Unfortunately, many people are not made aware of the requirements (i.e., Apprenticeships requiring minimum Grade 10 or high school diploma).”

LBS Survey Respondent

## 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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