



Opening the Lines of Communication

“What we’re hoping to establish is better partnerships for the benefit of the client,” explains Ron Sarazin, Apprenticeship Coordinator for Gheztoojig Employment and Training. In a monumental step forward in employment and training services, Sarazin is reaching out to local stakeholders in an effort to break down communication barriers and develop organizational partnerships. “What we wanted to do was to reach out to all of the players in our coverage area and say listen, let’s get together and see how we can go about increasing the numbers of Aboriginal people working in the trades and getting into apprenticeships.”

Funded in April of 2010 under the Gheztoojig Employment and Training Initiative, Sarazin is bringing together front line workers including band education officers, Ontario Works counsellors, band welfare associates and economic development officers in a commitment to combine services and funding for the benefit of the clients. With seven First Nations in their coverage area, Sarazin is ensuring the door is open to all clients, be they members of the Inuit, Métis, First Nation or urban Aboriginal communities.

“These partnerships break down a lot of the barriers that exist. A lot of our areas, where we’re dealing with First Nations, everyone has their own pocket of money but we don’t always work in unison so what happens is people bounce from office to office,” says Sarazin. However, the program isn’t just about sharing funding. “We’re trying to bring everybody who has something to offer to the table whether it’s financial or just services. Sometimes our clients need a little more support in regards to assisting them through their return to work action plans,” he explains. By identifying what services each department and partner offers, he feels clients can receive more streamlined assistance, not only in apprenticeship but in employment and training in general.

With players like Ontario Works, this initiative is a welcome addition. “A lot of our clients are mutual clients with them so when we brought them to the table it gave



their staff the chance to see what we’re about. It was a meeting to say, ‘Let’s work better together, also here’s what we can do, what can you do?’” says Sarazin.

Sarazin would like to see this kind of open dialogue across the board. “I’d like to see that everybody knows each others programs so that if I’m working with a client I can call somebody and say, ‘Hey I’ve got a client that’s currently on your system, I want to support him in school, will you allow him to stay on his benefits’. We work together so we can mutually benefit the client and use program dollars for the better benefit of the client.”

Currently, Sarazin is working on bringing area schools into the network, starting with Rainbow District School Board and Sudbury Catholic District School Board. “We’ve met with them and the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) coordinators and their guidance counsellors and they have in turn invited us to speak to their Aboriginal students regarding trades and apprenticeships,” he says. With a community supported by the local mine initiatives, Sarazin feels it’s important for students to be exposed to the trades early. “We have very few of our Aboriginal secondary students who register in OYAP so part of this is to encourage them to start identifying careers in the trades in high school,” he says. With proper communication, he feels students will realize the potential for employment in trades like mining.

Apprenticeship Feature Can You Handle the Heat?

The words flux core, tig and stick may sound like they belong in a late night sci-fi movie but for welders, they're the lingo of the trade. A welder permanently joins pieces of metal using heat from various tools and machines like flux core welders, tig welders and stick welders. Welders melt the work pieces and add a metal filler material to form a pool of molten material that when cool becomes a strong joint. In some cases welders are called upon to add new layers of metal to worn parts.

Welders can be found indoors in shops shaping and joining metal parts or on construction sites, working for heavy machinery contractors and even aircraft contractors. A welder may specialize in certain types of welding including structural construction welding, machinery and equipment repair welding or pipeline construction welding. Some tradespeople can even undertake extensive training to become an underwater welder.



The Life of a Welder

Work Environment

Welders are found as often indoors in shops as they are outdoors on construction sites. Although they may often work independently, a welder's job is integral to the work of other tradespeople and will often interact and work alongside other journey persons. Welders can be found in all four major construction sectors including: residential construction and renovation, heavy industrial, institutional and commercial, and civil engineering. Welding can be physically demanding requiring workers to hold awkward positions for long periods.

How Much Can You Earn?

As an apprentice, you will earn about 60 per cent of a journey person's hourly rate and increase during your apprenticeship until you reach the full rate. Apprentices generally start at about \$12 - \$18 an hour and grow to \$19 - \$24 an hour as a journey person.

Are You the Right Fit?

Do you work well independently? Do you have the stamina to withstand holding awkward positions? Can you be precise, careful and patient?

Welders need all of these skills and more. Working in a hot environment, welders need to take care with their work for the safety of themselves as well as others. An eye for detail is key as well is the coordination to perform precise tasks.

Where Will it Take You?

Welding is a part of a multitude of trades. From the automotive industry to new home building to civil engineering, welders play an important part in many trades. Journey person welders who've attained their Red Seal are able to work in various industries throughout Canada.

Job Prospects

Employment in this trade is focused on new entrants, however 2017-2018 will see a surge with employers actively seeking qualified workers.

Education/Training

Training varies from province to province. In Ontario, you must have a Grade 9 education in order to enter a program. Some secondary schools offer pre-apprenticeship training programs, which allow you to work towards your career while attaining your Grade 12 diploma. Apprenticeship training programs generally offer 4,680 hours of on-the-job training as well as 24 weeks of technical training. Certification is not required in Ontario but is recommended. To be certified as a welder, you must complete a three-year apprenticeship program. Only those certified may apply for a Red Seal Certificate.

TRAVIS FRASER IS ON FIRE!

“I guess it just came natural to me, the welding,” says 27-year-old Travis Fraser from Six Nations of the Grand River territory. “It’s something that’s interested me for a while. I messed around with a welder in the backyard with the demo vehicles, putting them together and stuff like that, just tinkering around.”

Travis was one of the first to go through Ogwehoweh Skills and Trades Training Centre’s (OSTTC) pre-apprenticeship training course. At the time, he was interested in entering a trades career as an automotive apprentice. Six years later, he’s still in the trades but enthralled in the art of welding through OSTTC’s welding training course. “I didn’t really think there was that much thought into the welding itself but it’s so particular on how you hold the rod, on how you bring it with you, you have to watch almost everything you’re doing”, he says. Welding is all about the numbers he says, “If you don’t have your numbers high enough the weld is just going to sit on there and you can hit it off. If you have them too high, you can burn straight through the metal. So again, a steady hand comes into play, quick or slow depending on how much power you’ve got running through it.”

“It’s very interesting and I know that welding can take me almost anywhere across the world.”

During his eight week training course Travis learned the ins and outs of welding, including experiencing the more dangerous side of the trade. Welders wear protective clothing to prevent burns from sparks and slag, globules of molten metal that are expelled from the joint. However, in certain positions, such as welding overhead, slag can fall on clothing with the potential to burn. “The last incident I had my pants almost caught on fire. I was sitting there welding and then all of a sudden I could smell something,” laughs Travis. With burn marks on his boots and jacket, he chalks up the burns on his pants to just another learning lesson. “Those jackets are meant to take the fire. They can just have everything bounce off them but if something stays on it then it’s going to burn right though,” he says.



“Welding isn’t for everyone,” says Travis, “there are some people that just can’t get it no matter how many times they try. It is pretty much an art, you’ve got to be really precise and you have to have a steady hand.” As his first experience with welding, Travis is turning out to have an unknown talent. “Rick [his instructor] pointed out that I have a natural knack for it. He says, ‘You’ve got it, you just need to go through with it’,” he says.

“I’d like to get into an apprenticeship, it’s very interesting and I know that welding can take me almost anywhere across the world,” he says. Someday he hopes to get a position in the northern diamond mines, which require welders for maintenance on their vehicles and equipment. In the meantime, Travis is waiting to get into the second level of OSTTC’s welding course before seeking out an employer sponsor for apprenticeship. “My spouse she’s like, ‘Go for it, if your teachers told you that then keep going’,” he says.

Brian Pelletier

Believes in Apprenticeship

When Brian Pelletier was first considering his place in the world of work his uncle said to him, “You know Brian, I think you’d be good in the trades.” No truer words were ever spoken. Brian Pelletier has spent the majority of his life involved in and promoting the trades. From his beginnings as an electrician apprentice to his current position working as program manager for the Aboriginal Apprenticeship Board of Ontario, Pelletier has learned what apprenticeship means to individuals, communities and Ontario.

As a federal government employee working with the Aboriginal Affairs Directorate in Ottawa for 32 years, Pelletier spent the majority of his time managing the Aboriginal file. The last six years however he has focused on promoting apprenticeship among Aboriginal communities across Canada. “I’ve been working with provincial government, the AHRDAs, the Aboriginal community, and the industry trying to build the capacity within the AHRDAs to start working with Aboriginal people, that this is an option for them to get into a career in the trades,” he explains.

The Aboriginal Apprenticeship Board of Ontario (AABO), which started as the Ontario Aboriginal Apprenticeship Working Group, was based on the expertise of the Aboriginal Institute Consortium (AIC). While not an official member of AABO at the time, Pelletier was on hand at the startup to provide advice as AABO forged its name as an

authority on Aboriginal apprenticeship. “We took what the AIC did and we validated it and we held a two-day symposium in Toronto where we brought all the AHRDAs in and we talked about apprenticeship,” says Pelletier.

With AABO into its ninth year, co-chairs Brian Doolittle and John Wabb invited Pelletier to take a more active position within the organization and requested a secondment from the deputy minister. In a unique partnership between Aboriginal communities, the federal government and the Construction Sector Council (CSC), Pelletier is now able to devote all his time to promoting Aboriginal apprenticeship across Ontario through AABO.

“The AABO Secretariat wants to make it easier for Aboriginal people to be hired.”

“The federal government believes in apprenticeship and believes in Aboriginal people and to make a difference in the trades they agreed to second me for two years to work on ways to increase the numbers of Aboriginal people becoming indentured registered apprentices,” explains Pelletier. On top of the salary provided by the federal government to pay Pelletier’s wages, the CSC has also partnered and offered office space. “The CSC, that’s the industry, they have an Aboriginal engagement strategy. They believe in Aboriginal people as a solution to meeting the shortage in the skilled trades. So they said, ok we’ll partner with you, we’ll sign the agreement, Pelletier can work out of our office we’ll be liable for this,” he adds.

Pelletier is working more and more with the province of Ontario and is focused on engaging them as a full partner. “This is value added, we’re making Ontario more competitive and by doing that we’re supporting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit living in Ontario,” explains Pelletier. Overall, AABO wants to see more Aboriginal people getting jobs in the construction industry and finding self-fulfillment through work. “If you have self-fulfillment through work it’s easier to go to work,” he says, adding, “The AABO secretariat wants to make it easier for Aboriginal people to be hired and we want to manage those expectations. And how we’re going to do that is it’s going to be dependant on the principles of trust, transparency, commitment and collaboration. Those four things are what’s going to drive the end result. That’s the mission I’m on.”



The Dilemma of Apprenticeship in Remote Communities

Aboriginal communities in remote locations face unique employment and training situations. While access is a large hurdle, lack of employers to supply training within the area forces potential apprentices to leave their communities to seek training needed to kick-start their careers. “It’s an economic thing really,” explains Sherry Hogan, of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. “If there’s no big economy to support someone as a journey person or an apprentice in the community, regardless of whether it’s an Aboriginal community or any other small community, they can’t sustain themselves.”

First Nations supported by large mining, timber or manufacturing projects provide apprentices with ample opportunity to train in the trades. However, for communities without ongoing construction or manufacturing projects, the work just isn’t there. “Everything is supply and demand and if there’s no demand for that kind of work it’s hard to train anyone in it,” explains Hogan.

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With numbers of skilled tradespeople continuing to dwindle, now more than ever it is crucial to ensure communities have a base of trained workers. To ensure this, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) is willing to consider creative approaches to apprenticeship.

Rocky Bay First Nation was one such instance. As a small semi-remote community, they lacked the resources to train apprentices. Faced with a number of community members who wanted to train but weren’t ready to go away to school, the MTCU worked with the First Nation to develop a modified training plan allowing the supervising tradesperson to also offer the in-school training.

Additionally, the in-school training, which would normally happen in an eight-week block, was broken up and expanded into a year. “So he would be working with them, and they would be building homes, and if it was a rainy day,

instead of just working through the rain he would turn that into their in-school day and he would do the curriculum so it was related to what they were doing on the job right then,” explains Hogan.

Rocky Bay First Nation was a unique situation where all factors lined up allowing the MTCU to negotiate training on the First Nation’s terms. However, Hogan stresses that while they are willing to accommodate individuals they still want to ensure training is happening in a timely matter.

“We would like to make it work as long as it’s not watered down. Because we can’t water down the trades. If people want to get a trades certificate they have to get one that is equal and recognized and respected in the same way across the board,” she says. “In all circumstances, as long as we’re meeting the requirements of the apprenticeship and the requirements of the curriculum, if there’s a way for us to be flexible, things don’t have to happen in the exact time frames that are considered normal,” she says.

For remote communities, Hogan thinks the best thing the MTCU and communities alike can do is work to build a base of certified tradespeople within the communities who can act as ambassadors for the trades. “When someone gets their trade ticket and is working in the community everyone is looking and going, ‘wow, I can do that too’. And if this person with the trade ticket gets called away to do jobs and travel around, that’s pretty impressive,” explains Hogan.

However, the struggle is, how do we build that base? Hogan feels there needs to be a greater general understanding of what apprenticeship is, and the commitment to training it takes. “You need at least one person who’s willing to do what it takes to get out there, in the mainstream, get their trades certification and then go back home. But that’s easier said than done,” says Hogan.

In the meantime, the MTCU will continue reaching out in Aboriginal communities to promote apprenticeship training. “We’ve been working with communities for a long time. We work with Sioux Lookout Aboriginal Area Management Board and we’ve had a lot of connections with a lot of the communities. We have pre-apprenticeship programs and the knowledge is slowly but surely getting out there,” she says.



CAF Focuses on Essential Skills

With such a high demand for skilled trades workers, what will make you stand out in the crowd? According to the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, essential skills are becoming a hot topic among employers. Numeracy, deductive skills, and communication are all labelled by Human Resources and Skills Development as skills essential for effectiveness in apprenticeship. “We heard from employers that one of the reasons they provided for not hiring apprentices, about 10 per cent of them said there was a lack of essential skills,” explains Danielle Matheusik, project manager for the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (CAF).

Essential skills are becoming an increasingly important issue for those in all workplaces, not just the skilled trades. In 2007, CAF completed a study looking at the link between essential skills and training and found a distinct correlation between essential skills and success in an apprenticeship program. “For example, numeracy could be an issue. If they are having challenges with measuring or making calculations it could affect their productivity in the workplace, it might take them longer to complete a task or if they need more supervision on the job then that may hamper their continuation into upgrading

their skills. They need the essential skills as the foundation and from there they continue on getting lifelong learning skills,” she says. Safety is also an issue; apprentices with essential skills make fewer mistakes leading to fewer workplace accidents and higher productivity.

To meet the challenge of incorporating these skills into apprenticeship training, CAF has developed four webinars for employers who hire apprentices. Each webinar goes through the steps for implementing essential skills programs into the workplace and explains the importance of, and benefits to upgrading their apprentices essential skills. “When employers invest in essential skills in their employees it suggests they are investing in the whole employee too which also leads to higher recruitment and retention rates. It shows that you’re part of that apprentice’s lifelong learning plan,” says Danielle.

Already, some employers in Ontario have participated in the webinars with tremendous success. CAF’s National Forum Dialogue in February 2011 focused on the issue of essential skills in apprenticeship and highlighted reasons for the shortage. “Participants noted that awareness of essential skills issues is one of the key areas to continue working on. Not only the public, but people need to recognize themselves that they may have essential skills challenges and take their own initiative to upgrade,” explains Danielle. What it comes down to, essential skills are everyone’s responsibility from the individual apprentice to the employer and anyone else who supports apprentices.

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