

Trades report: Plenty of jobs, not enough people and a 'broken' system

Ontario's apprenticeship system and stigma against trades jobs creating huge trades gap across the North

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A new report from Workplace Planning Sudbury and Manitoulin shows the region has an aging skilled trades workforce, and faces challenges filling a growing labour shortage. File photo.

The average trades journeyman in the region is nearing retirement and the high demand for new tradespeople is not being met, according to a new report from Workplace Planning Sudbury and Manitoulin.

The report found the average age for a journeyman in Sudbury's top 10 compulsory trades – which are required to register with the Ontario College of Trades – is almost 52 years old.

“They're eligible for retirement within the next three to five years if they want to,” said Reggie Caverson, executive director of Workplace Planning Sudbury and Manitoulin.

But Caverson said there are flaws in Ontario's trades employment data, because only 22 of the province's 156 trades are compulsory. While all apprentices in the province must register with the Ontario College of Trades, only journeypersons with the compulsory trades are required to register.

That leaves a gap in the data, and makes it more difficult for organizations like Workplace Planning Sudbury and Manitoulin to paint a clear picture of what trades employment looks like in the region.

But even with an incomplete picture, Caverson said a number of factors have made it difficult to fill the gap for tradespeople in the region.

One problem, she said, is that Ontario's apprenticeship system is broken.

Provinces like Alberta have ratios of apprentices to journeypersons that are less onerous for companies, and make it easier for them to take on apprentices.

Caverson said many local employers are also hesitant to take on apprentices.

Through Workplace Planning Sudbury and Manitoulin's annual survey of employers, smaller companies have said they hesitate to invest in apprentice training, only to have those people poached by larger competitors once they are trained.

Some larger employers have said when they're busy they don't have the time to train apprentices, and when business is slow they don't have the money to train.

“It's this real Catch-22 that's happening all over the place,” Caverson said.

The stigma against the trades also pushes away many talented and intelligent young people away from those jobs, Caverson said.

Many parents, she said, would rather see their children go to university.

Elementary and secondary schools – where teachers have university educations – are often ill-equipped to provide a basic understanding of the trades, or introductory experiences with many of the most in-demand jobs, she added.

Caverson said many people who choose to enter the trades, often have unrealistic expectations after they graduate from high school.

Many people starting college, she said, believe they can become an electrician after two years of schooling.

But in reality it takes many thousands of hours of experience as an apprentice after the initial college training, and more schooling afterwards for certification.

Women are also under-represented in the vast majority of trades, Caverson said.

She said some employers hesitate to hire women because it would require them to build co-ed facilities, or there is the stereotype they might not be able to do physically demanding work.

She added some women enter the trades expecting others to do the heavy lifting for them, which doesn't help matters.

[In a related blog post](#), the Northern Policy Institute said there is a gap between local labour market demand and the availability of workers in certain trades.

“The discrepancy that poses one of the greatest risks to the Northern Ontario labour market exists in the trades, transport, equipment operators and related occupations,” the post said. “In the northeast, there were over 100 more vacancies than graduates, and in the northwest this gap is over 200.”

Charles Cirtwell, the Northern Policy Institute's president and CEO, said he wasn't surprised by the mismatch.

“We've spent two generations basically convincing parents every kid should go to university. That's not necessarily true, nor is it a recipe for a balanced economy,” he said.

Despite the growing demand for tradespeople, and the challenges in filling that demand, Caverson said she remains cautiously optimistic. Workplace Planning Sudbury and Manitoulin has been working with Cambrian College and Collège Boréal to reach out to employers and get them engaged in training apprentices.

And the Ontario College of Trades has also been reviewing its ratios for apprentices, to try and make them more feasible for employers.

Source: https://www.sudbury.com/local-news/trades-report-plenty-of-jobs-not-enough-people-and-a-broken-system-373929?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter