

MPPs discuss importance of promoting skilled trades to youth

Angela Gismondi January 30, 2020



ANGELA GISMONDI — Jane McKenna, parliamentary assistant to the minister of labour, training and skills development (left) and Jill Dunlop, associate minister of children and women’s issues (middle), were part of a panel discussion on how government and industry can work together to promote careers in the skilled trades. The panel was held as part of the Residential Construction Council of Ontario’s launch of the Job Talks Construction video series Jan. 16 in Toronto. The moderator was Farah Mohamed of the Toronto Region Board of Trade (right) which is also where the launch took place.

While many parents encourage their children to pursue post-secondary education after high school graduation, there are other options and the skilled trades is one of them.

At the recent Job Talks Construction video launch hosted by the **Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON)** in Toronto, Jane McKenna, parliamentary assistant to the minister of labour training and skills development shared a personal story about when she found out her son wasn’t going to university.

“He said ‘mom you’re getting in the car and we’re going up to Georgian College...I want to get a skilled trade,’” McKenna recalled.

“For myself as a mother I was absolutely mortified. I wanted him to go to university and he was not going to go to university and I was ignorant to the whole path of skilled trades and what it actually offered.”

Today her son is a successful welder and a marine mechanic with his own business.

“He’s 23 years old, opened up his own business and I went up to see him in the summer because he’s absolutely swamped,” she said. “I had tears pouring down my face for numerous reasons but because he knew his path, he knew his passion and as a mother I had to really step back and embrace that passion.”

McKenna, along with Jill Dunlop, associate minister of children and women’s issues, spoke at the event.

Dunlop said she grew up in a family of plumbers.

“My grandparents started a business, my father is a former plumber and after he left politics he’s back as a plumber again and my brother is a plumber,” explained Dunlop, adding one of her first orders of business as an elected MPP was to promote the trades. “I reached out to the Ontario Skilled Trades Alliance and lots of people in this room, RESCON, and I put forward a motion to the government to place emphasis on skilled trades and it passed and here we are talking about skilled trades.”

Dunlop said she is pleased with the Ontario government’s recent ad campaign, Find a Career You Wouldn’t Trade, promoting the trades. Ads will be shown in movie theatres, Tim Hortons and on social media.

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— **Jill Dunlop**

Ontario Associate Minister

“I’m so excited to see a government and a premier on board who know the situation that we’re in and is trying to find a solution, working with the private sector and lots of associations...and across government ministries,” said Dunlop.

Mentorship is an important piece of the puzzle, both MPPs agreed.

“There is a push constantly for college and university and I think we need to get journeypersons into the school to encourage other kids and to let them know what is available,” McKenna stated.

“In the skilled trades sector, knowing there is such a job shortage, we all have to reach out and do our part,” added Dunlop.

“It is interesting because it does work. Do we need to formalize it? Can we incentivize it? Is it something that some people think there is not enough time in the day to do it? That’s the culture shift. We need to ensure people understand if you do want the sector to grow you’ve got to put some time into it. When you see the results of it you know that you have to be doing it.”

Introducing young people to the trades at a younger age is also important, Dunlop pointed out, adding there are 200,000 jobs in the sector now and in the future one in five jobs is going to be in the skilled trades.

“We need to work on getting women into those opportunities,” Dunlop said.

“We have to keep talking, we have to keep working together to bring parents, guidance counsellors and of course our young people on board to see these amazing opportunities.”

When asked about her vision for the sector in the future she said, “I’m hoping 20 years from now we’re not talking about not enough women in the trades that women are just there — they’ve come up through the school system being introduced to trades at an early age and it’s just there as an option for all youth... It’s not a ‘plan B,’ you don’t go to trades because you’re not doing well in school. You can be an A+, valedictorian student and see the value in a trade. I hope that message gets across to all of our students in the coming years.”