



# The construction industry needs new young workers. How will we find them?

By Richard Lyall Contributor  
Wed., March 4, 2020

If you don't know a job exists, how could you possibly choose a career in that line of work?

That is the problem facing many young people who could fill some of the 100,000 Ontario skilled trades jobs that will open up in the next 10 years. That is because information about these diverse, satisfying jobs hasn't been readily accessible to students.

Toronto is in a building boom that is destined to continue at least until [2030](#). The construction industry needs a steady stream of new young workers and it needs high schools to get that message out to young people who are at the stage in life when they are deciding on a career.

To do this, we first need to build the "third wall" in guidance counsellor offices across Ontario to help potential elevator operators, tower crane operators and highrise forming workers — the three trades that are currently suffering the greatest shortages in the GTA — find their careers.

The first two walls are already in place to help students choose their next step: one is for university, the other for college. The third would highlight the trades.

For too long, young people have been encouraged by parents, educators and their peers to pursue university or college educations. These pathways are great for many people, but there are others who prefer to work with their hands and who take pleasure in seeing the tangible fruits of their labour — for example, the completion of a 50-storey highrise. Too often, these intelligent people are shepherded into university or college education tracks only to fall into the trades much later in their lives when they realize their work is not fulfilling.

It's not a coincidence that the average age of registration for an apprentice in Canada is 27 years old. By that age, a skilled worker has potentially lost a decade of wages and benefits, not to mention opportunities.

**The Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON)** commissioned a study published last year that used a behavioural economics lens on recruiting young people to the trades. Key recommendations included making career information easy to access, attractive to look at, social (shareable on social media) and timely. We can help young people acquire the career information they need to make the right career choices for them. They need access to information that presents job possibilities, as well as the satisfaction and rewards different trades

have to offer. For example, that third wall could show short video profiles of engaged workers talking about why they chose the trades.

RESCON and seven other construction groups collaborated with Toronto-based marketers Job Talks Canada to produce the video series [JobTalksConstruction.ca](http://JobTalksConstruction.ca). It profiles dozens of workers, of different genders, explaining their jobs including a bulldozer operator, project manager, trim carpenter and bricklayer.

A Job Talks survey of GTA construction workers found that these careers had higher than average job satisfaction rates. Among the findings, 81 per cent of those polled said they enjoyed their financial security, while 65 per cent said they would strongly recommend their job to a young person.

Secondly, we need to build programs to steer young people — especially women, who make up less than four per cent of all skilled trades jobs — into these exciting careers.

The Toronto District School Board has implemented one such program called the Specialized Trades Exploration Program (STEP). It provides hands-on experience and on-site job shadowing with the Toronto construction industry and has proven to be successful.

Over the years, I've heard so many STEP students tell me that after struggling to get to school for an 8:30 a.m. start, they had no trouble showing up at building sites where the shift begins at 6 a.m. because they were excited to start the day. Imagine if we had programs like STEP across the province.

My third recommendation is to get government and industry working together to bring skilled trade immigrants — long the backbone of this country — here to help build the homes and infrastructure the province desperately needs.

The government should be applauded for its focus on immigration including its Ontario Immigration Nomination Program update which is creating new pathways for immigrants into rural Ontario.

To ensure the program successfully contributes a steady flow of qualified workers, we recommend it develops a customized approach to recruitment for each sector of the construction industry — industrial, commercial and institutional; sewer and water main; roads; heavy engineering; pipelines; electrical power systems; and residential.

Such efforts require collaboration between the Ontario government, the construction industry, educators, the media and the public. Together, we can ensure young people get the information they need to make informed choices on work that interests them when they are in high school, before they launch into careers.

One Toronto. Two possible futures. Ten years to get it right. Toronto has never been bigger, bolder and more successful – or faced so many serious problems. To attract talent and grow

sustainably, we need to address the city's transportation, affordability and infrastructure needs. If we ignore these threats, the inner city buckles. It's time to start thinking about solutions.

Richard Lyall is the president of the Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON).