

APPRENTICESHIP IT WORKS!



New Research Study: *Creating Diversity and Career Opportunities in the Skilled Trades*

Research Highlights

Eight organizations that connect visible minorities/racialized¹ individuals to employers in the skilled trades were examined. The goal was to identify effective practices. Based on these case studies, partnerships, opportunities for work experience, taking a holistic view of an individual's needs, addressing personal issues as well as skills gaps, and, finally, offering services and incentives to encourage employer participation were all identified as promising practices.

The Challenge:

Despite the benefits of apprenticeship training, many visible minorities/racialized people are underrepresented in this form of post-secondary education.

¹ To acknowledge the existing legislative terminology, but at the same time acknowledge the newer terminology that is considered more appropriate among human rights stakeholders, the term visible minority / racialized was used throughout this report.

EMPLOYERS ON THE PROGRAM BENEFITS

"The Workforce Specialist was astounding! If I had any difficulties or questions I would call her. I had one placement that was showing up late, so I talked to her, and she handled it, and the worker started showing-up on time. The Workforce Specialist was a key component — I will be going back to JVS because of her."
— Employer JVS

Visible minorities² represent between 5 and 7 per cent of apprentices compared to 16 per cent of the Canadian population.³

In the 2007 National Apprenticeship Survey, visible minority respondents who said they struggled to find employer sponsors were more likely than non-visible minorities to identify "lack of work experience/employer wanted licensed or qualified apprentice or journey person/employer unwilling to train or pay apprentice" as a reason for difficulty. When trying to find an employer sponsor, "discrimination" was more of an issue for visible minority respondents than for their reference group.

² The term visible minorities is used by Statistics Canada. When referring to statistics from this organization only the official term is used. In the Statistics Canada definition, the term visible minority applies to persons who are identified according to the *Employment Equity Act* as being non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour. Under the Act, Aboriginal persons are not considered to be members of visible minority groups. The groups included in this definition are listed below:

- Chinese
- South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Punjabi, Sri Lankan)
- Black (e.g., African, Haitian, Jamaican, Somali)
- Arab/West Asian (e.g., Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese, Moroccan)
- Filipino
- South East Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Indonesian, Laotian, Vietnamese)
- Latin American
- Japanese
- Korean
- Other

³ It is understood that visible minorities/racialized workers are a very heterogeneous group that could include recent immigrants, permanent immigrants, and second or third generation individuals from immigrant families. All these groups have very different needs, depending on how long they have been in Canada and their educational qualifications and work experiences.

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The Opportunity:

Employers are facing skills shortages and need skilled workers, but do not necessarily know the best way to connect with visible minority/racialized candidates.

EMPLOYERS ON THE PROGRAM BENEFITS

“We always use COSTI. Last week we registered an apprentice as a mechanic. COSTI has helped us quite a lot, we get individuals, and if they prove themselves, then they get hired – about 90 per cent get hired.”

— Employer, COSTI

“Once the employer is happy with our services, then they come back, and they also tell other employers... COSTI puts everything in writing, and we comply 100 per cent”

— COSTI Representative

What is Currently Out There?

Through internet searches and network contacts,⁴ sixteen programs⁵ were identified that connect visible minorities/racialized individuals to employers in the skilled trades. Eight organizations agreed to be featured as case studies:

- Momentum Trades Training Program
- COSTI-Job Connect Internationally Trained Individuals
- Women Unlimited

⁴ The following sources were examined for potential organizations:

- Internet list of over 500 Key Immigrant Serving Agencies Across Canada.
- Requests for information were also made via CAF-FCA's networks and the CAF-FCA database with over 6,000 stakeholder contacts.

⁵ In addition to the eight programs examined in the report, the following relevant programs were contacted so they could be included as case studies. These organizations did not have the time to participate:

- Multicultural Helping House Society, Bamboo Network Skills Connect Program for Construction, Vancouver, British Columbia,
- ISTEP, British Columbia,
- MTI Community College, Immigrants in Trades Program, Vancouver, British Columbia,
- Internationally Trained Professionals and Skilled Trades Persons in finding employment in the Niagara Region, Ontario,
- Council of Agencies Serving South Asians, Toronto, Ontario
- PTP - Adult Learning and Employment Programs, Toronto, Ontario and
- Camara Skills Training Network, Toronto, Ontario.

Organizations in Quebec were contacted, but they declined to participate because they felt their organization did not fit the criteria. They were more focused on finding their clients jobs in the professions.

It is possible that other programs also exist that were not identified as a part of the internet searches or network contacts.

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- Working Women Community Centre Pre-Apprenticeship Training Programs for Bakers and Carpenters
- JVS Pre-apprenticeship Horticultural Training Program
- CHOICE
- Hammer Heads
- IBEW Local 353, Foreign Worker Training Centre
- Personalized support through counselling on life skills, money management, specific job placement skills, conflict management, and assistance related to life style barriers like day care for children, etc. was offered.
- Follow-up or contact support to track and to encourage participants as they entered the job market was considered important.

Shared Program Characteristics:

- All programs shared the goal of providing individuals facing multiple social and economic barriers, a chance to gain work experience in the skilled trades and to reduce barriers to entry.
- Aptitude assessments to establish whether participants were strong candidates for work in the trades were completed.
- In general, program staff reported that participants have a limited understanding of apprenticeship. Program staff also noted they struggled to keep track of the most up-to-date and accurate apprenticeship information.
- Most programs are relatively new, starting in 2005 at the earliest.
- Several programs had specific end dates because they were pilots or individual projects.
- Access to upgrade programs for language, specialized math, computer training, and essential skills were a common part of the programs.

Promising Practices:

- **Effective Partnerships with Employers and Industry:** In every case an extensive network of partnerships was required to sustain the programs and make them successful.
- **Allow individuals to gain work experience:** Job placement was often mentioned as the most important feature of the programs.
- **Address Personal Barriers:** Assisting individuals with family issues, housing, language training, and settlement issues helped individuals remove personal barriers and enabled them to focus on upgrading their skills and developing their careers.
- **Offer Individualized Help:** Help specific to the person's situation and access to a councillor were useful services

EMPLOYERS ON THE PROGRAM BENEFITS

"When we hire we are looking for a positive attitude, strong work ethic, and a team player – and Momentum workers show those qualities."

— Employer, Momentum

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■ Offer Services or Incentives to Employers:

- Employers noted that access to prepared candidates was an important advantage in recruiting and contributed to their success in being able to integrate and to retain new workers. Employers appreciated that they received individuals through these programs who had already been exposed to career planning, skills upgrading, and life skills management. The individuals generally had a realistic idea of what it would be like to work in the trade.
- Employers liked having a person at the organization they could contact if they ran into difficulties or needed information.
- Providing wage subsidies or promoting existing tax credits further encouraged employer participation.
- Promotion and communication were also important. The staff members at Hammer Heads actively promoted the benefits of the program to employers.

■ Employers' Experiences: Employers generally spoke positively about the programs.

- One employer interviewed, had three plumbing apprentices from Momentum, and noted that Momentum was as good as their HR Department for finding qualified workers. This same employer mentioned that the retention rate of Momentum participants was higher in comparison to other workers in his 250 person firm. All of Momentum's services were pertinent, but participant workshops on methods for handling workplace conflicts were noted as particularly important.

- An employer at a car dealership with approximately 55 employees accepted five apprentices - all from COSTI. This employer noted that COSTI helped clients obtain employment through practise interviews, providing transportation, uniforms, and offering the subsidy.
- Hammer Heads participants received glowing reviews from employers. The participants' eagerness to learn was among their best traits, according to employers. One employer with over 175 employees, now working with two Hammer Heads apprentices (one in plumbing and the other in refrigeration), noted that their skill sets were above that of a first year apprentice. Another employer noted that their Hammer Head apprentices have the skills sets and commitment for the job.

EMPLOYERS ON THE PROGRAM BENEFITS

"Hammer Heads was appealing because some individuals from the inner city, who maybe did not look towards the trades simply because they lacked exposure, were able to get an opportunity...as an employer you are always trying to get people to pursue the trades, because we need people...."

— Employer Hammer Heads

"By the time they come to us, we know they have the drive...it increases the likelihood that the individuals will be successful in your environment." — Employer Hammer Heads

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