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Karen Macfie



Becoming an Apprentice

I'm an apprentice and environmental response trainee for the Canadian Coast Guard. Day to day, I do a wide variety of things, including mechanical maintenance and repairing response equipment. I'm a hard worker and I like the variety in my work, which serves me well in my job.

Prior to entering the trade, I worked for a bank for about 10 years and also at a hog farm before

I had an opportunity to go back to school. My experience at the hog farm made me realize that I like physical, mechanical work and that I don't mind getting dirty. I was ultimately unsatisfied with my previous jobs and an employment counsellor referred me to an Orientation to Trades and Technology (OTT) program for women. Looking back, I think I would have been in the trades earlier if I explored it in high school, which not a lot of girls did back then.

Some of the Challenges

I was very lucky when it came to finding a job as I secured a great opportunity right out of school. I was quite fortunate.... Fortunately, the OTT program and my previous work experience quickly helped me land the perfect job.

Finding an Employer

A part of the requirements for completing my in-school education was to do a work term so that I would have some experience leaving college. I had been speaking to the employer for the Coast Guard who had been looking at hiring apprentices so there was potential there. After completing the work term, I choose to continue working for the Coast Guard because it was a better opportunity for me. I liked the hours and environment I worked in and a lot of the equipment we handle is smaller than other jobs which suited me better. My employer treats me fairly and I don't see myself changing jobs any time soon.

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An ideal employer would be someone that's willing to see you through your entire apprenticeship whether it's three to five years. It can be challenging as an apprentice as you are more precarious until you have achieved your journeyman status. It's also important to have good pay, benefits, and be in a safe working environment. I'm a member of the Coast Guard union and Millwright union, which opens up opportunities that wouldn't be there otherwise, especially training programs related to my trade.

What Worked and What Didn't

Research is key. You need to talk to people doing the job you are considering. Find out who their employers are and how their work will fit into your life. I'm a single mom and being at the Coast Guard meant working a 9 to 5 job versus one that had 12 hour shifts, including night shifts. The Coast Guard opportunity was a very attractive position for me.

There are many types of programs that offer you opportunities to explore different jobs so talk to an employment counsellor while you do your research because they often know of the various programs and professional groups which can help you land a job or give you someone to talk to.

Also, take any opportunities for training. For example, going in and working on the shop floor, cleaning and general labour. A desire to learn and curiosity about how things work and go together in any of the trades is important because things change, codes change, and you have to know what's new and what's coming. This field is very exciting because you're always updating and learning something new.

Trade: Millwright. Location: Mount Pearl, Newfoundland. Year of Apprenticeship: 3rd

