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TRAINING UPDATE

Skills Shortages and What To Do About Them

It is one of the basic principles of adult education that a program, to be successful, has to fit into the life – the ongoing work and family life – of the adult. The best-designed program ever won't be successful if it's offered at the wrong time or the wrong place or to the wrong people.

We have been told for many years that we are facing a problem, sometimes referred to as a crisis, in recruiting and training workers for construction. Recently, *On-Site*, a construction publication has a lead editorial about the "190,00 new hires" needed in the next ten years. At the same time, there is ongoing concern about the need to find jobs opportunities for various groups – youth in particular, but also immigrants, women, aboriginals, etc. For example, the Toronto Chief of Police expressed the need to find jobs for youth in various communities – as a means of reducing crime.

Some people see an apparently obvious connection between the groups in need and the needs of the construction industry. At a conference on employment for immigrants, the representatives of construction unions were confronted about doing something about this. The unions are: the Electricians, for example, trained a number of Chinese electricians for work in Ontario. At Ambercroft, we have run special apprenticeship training including English as a Second Language, as well as special programs for youth at risk, and residents of disadvantaged communities like Malvern and Regent Park. LIUNA, provincially, has been working to assist and train undocumented workers.

So, if there are groups needing employment and shortages of workers in construction, why is there a problem? Because training for a job – and it may be a real job, a real need – doesn't mean the trainee will be able to fit this job into his or her life. To solve both of these problems, skills shortages and underemployed populations, requires solutions to a whole range of problems.

At one point this fall, every apprentice on the Local 506 out-of-work list could theoretically have had their memberships in the union suspended. They had all received three or more job offers. But, because of lack of transportation, they had been unable to use the opportunities provided. (They weren't suspended; Local 506 does what it can to help apprentices get started on their careers.) We can provide training, but that is a problem beyond our capabilities.

There are other barriers – sometimes language, sometimes basic skills, sometimes daycare, sometimes physical demands requiring adaptation – but transportation is one I emphasize as often as possible when meeting with community groups. Unemployment is higher in the City of Toronto than it is in the surrounding Greater Toronto Area. If we were able to provide better, cheaper transportation we could improve things for individuals and for industry.