



# The kids are alright – now that they know about careers in construction

By Tom Miller | Training PLUS Administrator

**M**y high school self didn't think much about the construction trades.

For one thing, the career counsellors at my school never mentioned any. And that didn't matter anyway because I was planning to port my B-average over to the University of the Fraser Valley and start a two-year diploma in Business Administration.

It's what my parents wanted – even though my dad worked in the unionized construction sector and supported our family just fine, thank-you very much.

I joined him there the summer between my first and second semesters in order to pay off a few bills, including my tuition. A year later, after another semester at university and just four courses short of earning my diploma, I joined him again. This time, however, I stayed.

And why not? The job and the money were both great. There was lots of work. And unlike a lot of my university friends, I wasn't facing a future of crushing student debt. Fun fact: Statistics Canada estimates the average tuition for a four-year bachelor's degree at \$6,693 per year, for a total cost of \$26,772.

Now you'd think my dad would be happy working with me, but it took a little while for him to come around. Construction can be exhausting, physical work and it's fraught with factors that are entirely out of your control, like the weather and the company's success at bidding for jobs. I think he saw business administration as a pathway to a management position where my exposure to the elements would be limited to the view from my office window.

There was also the stigma of being a construction worker;

construction and the skilled trades were seen as options for students whose grades weren't good enough for university. Maybe it's the six-figure salary that many construction workers earn these days, or perhaps it's the plethora of work on the horizon. Whatever the reason(s), things have changed!

In July, Training PLUS welcomed 10 incredible graduates from the Surrey School District into our Level 1 Construction Craft Worker apprenticeship program. This first-time partnership between the district, Training PLUS and **B&B Contracting** could not have been more successful.

The students absolutely crushed it during the four weeks they spent with us before joining the amazing B&B team. Credit goes to the district's Youth Work in Trades Co-ordinator Brad Edmondson and B&B's Peter and Tara Mihalech for their commitment to this new generation of construction workers. They are helping high school students realize that working in the unionized construction sector – particularly with Local 1611 – means a lifelong career with great wages, benefits and pensions.

There are also countless opportunities for advancement within the sector. After my first couple of years as a general labourer, the company recognized my aptitude for numbers and made me a surveyor, a position I held for more than a decade. I joined Training PLUS as an instructor in 2014 and became the program administrator in 2019.

Ironically, in a roundabout way, I did end up with that management position my dad wanted for me. I just took a different road there.

Read more about the Surrey School District and B&B Contracting partnership program on page 14.

## SHOW ME THE MONEY

It pays to have a trade! These are some of the grants available to students who opt for a career in the skilled construction trades.

**Youth Work in Trades Award:** \$1,000 from Skilled Trades BC and the Ministry of Education and Child Care is given to registered youth apprentices who have completed the prescribed course work and reported a total of at least 900 hours by Jan. 31 of the year they turn 19.

**Apprenticeship Incentive Grant:** \$4,000 is given to registered apprentices in 40 Red Seal trades who complete Level 1, Level 2 and progress to certification.

Learn more at <https://skilledtradesbc.ca/grants>



Instructor Andy Smith (left) with the Construction Craft Worker apprentices from the Surrey School District. The students are now in the field with B&B Contracting.

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