



Opening the Door to Trades

PATHWAYS TO INCLUSIVE APPRENTICESHIP OPPORTUNITIES



Who we are

The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) is a non-profit research organization.

We work on projects to learn what works for supporting people getting jobs, going to school, and accessing other services.

Opening the Door to Trades

This project aimed to understand how to support people living with disabilities to discover, learn, and work in the skilled trades in BC.

- Project initiated by Community Living BC, Inclusion Langley Society, and SkilledTradesBC to explore inclusive pathways in skilled trades for job seekers with disabilities.
- Funded by the Canadian Association for Supported Employment's Innovation Lab to establish groundwork for inclusive apprenticeship pathways.
- Explored interest, preparedness, and awareness of job seekers with disabilities for skilled trades careers.
- Identified the needs, opportunities, and gaps within the supported employment sector for training and job access in skilled trades.
- Explored employer and training provider capacity to support inclusive apprenticeship pathways.

Project Overview (continued)



DISCOVER

Gain a deep understanding of what's needed for inclusive apprenticeships, promising practices and service delivery needs.



DEFINE

Validate research findings through in-depth consultation with job seekers, service providers, trainers, and employers.



DEVELOP

Explore and generate solutions through design workshops, each focusing on a specific design challenge identified in the research.



DELIVER

Communicate findings and recommendations for inclusive apprenticeship pathways.

Existing Supports and Promising Practices

Provincial government supports

- **WorkBC:** Employment, training, and financial supports, including Assistive Technology and Apprenticeship Services for apprentices.
- **SkilledTradesBC:** Equity programs for women, Indigenous people, newcomers, and Youth in Trades. Programs for people with disabilities ended March 2023.
- **CLBC:** Supported and customized employment for individuals in community living, coordinated with WorkBC and other services.
- **National Supports:** Federal tax credits, financial aid; CCRW Supporting Red Seal Trades program for registered apprentices (e.g., accommodations, customized supports).

Training providers and supports

- **Public Colleges & Universities:** Adult education, career exploration, and vocational training for people with disabilities (non-trades programs).
- **KPU Including All Citizens Pathway:** Inclusive, for-credit Arts Certificate, exploring expansion into Trades and Technology.
- **STEPS Forward:** Facilitates inclusive, non-credit student experiences; supports trades access at partnering PSE institutions.
- **SkillPlan:** Private training focused on foundational skills and industry-specific training for unionized construction trades; piloting model of support for apprentices with learning disabilities (with SRDC).

Apprenticeship Pathway

Upstream factors for inclusion:

- Expectations about work
- Awareness of the skilled trades
- Exposure to work experiences in the trades
- High school credential/academic requirements
- Transition supports to employment and training

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Midstream factors for inclusion:

- Inclusive “onramps” to apprenticeship (e.g., pre-apprenticeship, PSE trades programs, or direct employment)
- Employer capacity for inclusive apprenticeships (e.g., mentors, supervisors, ratios)
- Inclusive on the job training and classroom technical training
- Level certification
- Need for “offramps” (e.g., recognition of learning to a certain point)

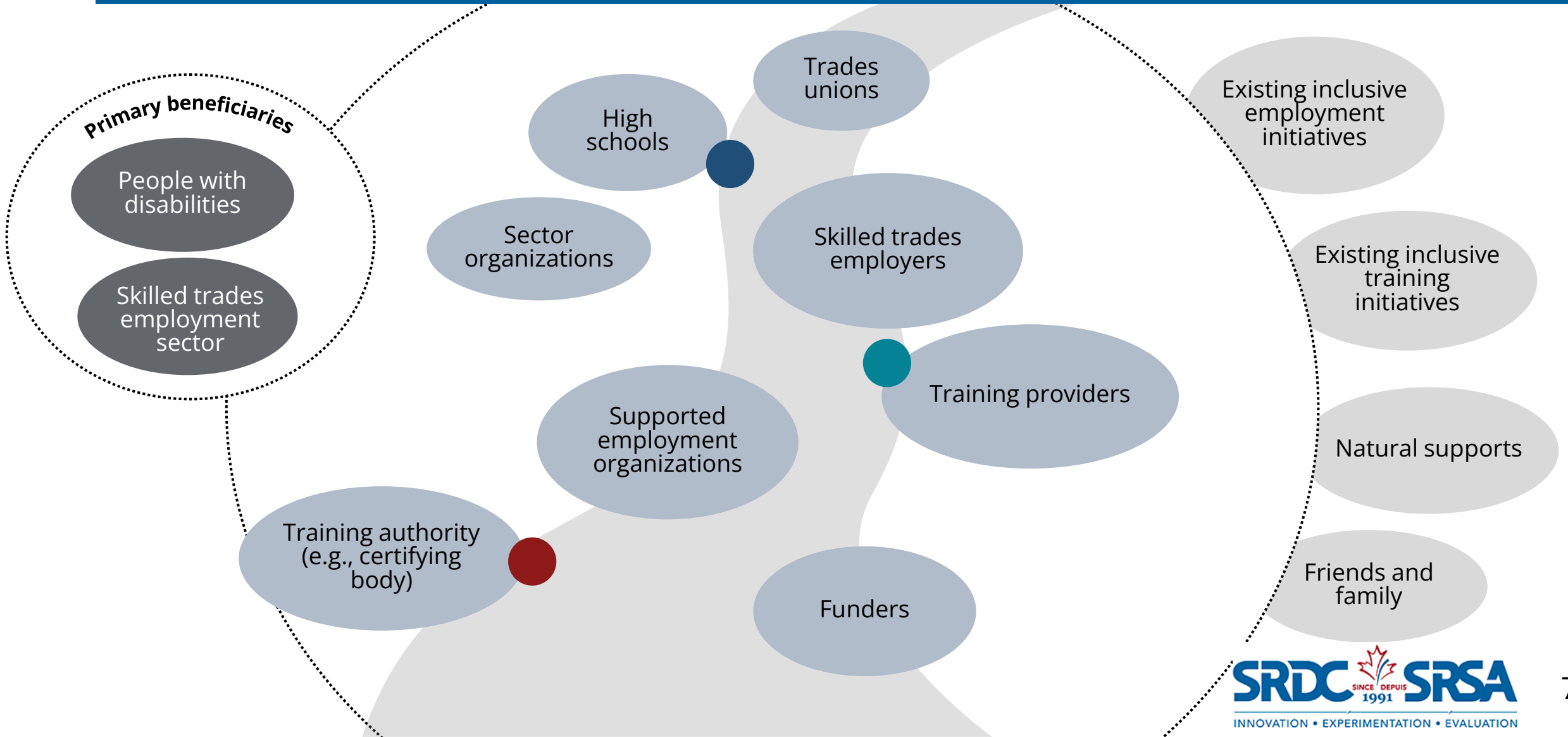
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Downstream factors for inclusion:

- Employer / sectoral recognition of learning beyond Red Seal/full certification
- Inclusive workplaces
- Sustainable employment

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Ecosystem of Actors



Upstream Factors for Inclusion

Awareness and Exposure Amongst Job Seekers with Disabilities

- Many job seekers living with disabilities are currently in the career exploration and skill-building stage of their employment journey. They have not been exposed to, or taken initial steps to prepare for, trades employment.
- A significant 83% of service providers see this lack of awareness and exposure as a key barrier to employment in the skilled trades, with over half identifying it as the top barrier to trades employment.
- Focus group participants were all in employment discovery phase; some were hesitant to commit to longer-term training without knowing if it aligns with interests, or if there are inclusive, accessible employment opportunities.

“I've been trying to lean more about the trades, and I have become more interested in plumbing as my older brother has been plumbing for quite some time and is very promising... I'd love to pursue that, seek that more, but I'm just trying to figure out where to start, how to continue and how to be as successful as I can in that.”

(Focus Group 1 Participant)

Upstream Factors for Inclusion

Career Exploration for Students Living with Disabilities

- Job seekers with on an Evergreen Certificate pathway, rather than a high school diploma (Dogwood Diploma), may have limited opportunities for career exploration.
- Focus group participants' interest in skilled trades fostered through natural supports (e.g., family, friends) or vocational learning in high school (e.g., shop class, cafeteria class); only two had opportunity to participate in skilled trades exploration program.
- Adults with an Evergreen Certificate may face limited opportunities in the skilled trades, where a diploma or equivalent is often required for entry.

“You can't just flick the switch at 19 years old [where] people are going to have that drive for employment and have the skills and abilities and all of that... They should absolutely have the opportunity that we had when we were young.”

(Interview #2 – Service Provider)

Design Workshop: Creating Opportunities for Trades Exploration

Towards an improved discovery process

- Participants emphasized the need for employment specialists to have training, understand options, and cultivate relationships with the apprenticeship training system and employers (e.g., SkilledTradesBC, WorkBC).

Skilled trades exploration and exposure

- Emphasis was on hands-on and real-world opportunities including workplace tours, mentoring programs with trades organizations, to cultivate better understand of job roles and job seeker fit.

From short-term employment outcomes to longer-term milestones

- While career exploration and awareness is crucial, navigating a career in the skilled trades is a long-term proposition with many milestones along the way.
- Often challenging in the current funding structure of programs to support employment for people with disabilities, where the focus is on the job outcome.

“In an ideal state, the job seeker would have opportunities to connect with or observe what types of occupations are in trades, whether that’s in person, through the workplace, or towards connections with employers.”

(Awareness Workshop Participant)

Midstream Factors for Inclusion

Inclusive Training and Customized Supports

- Employment outcomes improve when people can choose work and training aligned with their interests and strengths, in mainstream settings that are fully inclusive (i.e., without segregating people with disabilities).
- Different views expressed between service providers who advocate for inclusion in mainstream programs while others saw benefits of customized and supported environment designed around needs of job seekers with disabilities.
- Lack of understanding of how intersectional experience of disability impacts inclusion in training and employment; recommendation for culturally-responsive and trauma-informed approaches to training for Indigenous learners with disabilities.

“We tend to have special paths for people with disabilities... That's not inclusive. Inclusion is not creating this parallel path for someone... belonging means that path is the same and then you might make some extra supports or modification, but the path needs to be... coherent, model coherent, and that's what people relate to.”

(Interview #8 – Service Provider)

Midstream Factors for Inclusion

Training Provider Capacity for Inclusion

- Many training providers (both public and private) still adhere to medical model of disability (i.e., access to accommodations and supports provided based on medical diagnosis).
- Institutional support required for instructors or programs to redesign training for inclusion (i.e., changing delivery or duration, content, and other accommodations or adjustments).
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approaches focus on designing entire learning environment for variability, flexibility, and inclusion. However, instructors require resources and investment from training institutions to build their capacity to apply this in skilled trades programming.

“You're working with tradespeople as instructors and they may or may not be coming with any kind of education theory, background, that sort of thing... Also, our collective agreement means that if you're teaching for 25 to 30 hours a week, when does that training happen?”

(Interview #16 – Training Provider)

Midstream Factors for Inclusion

Recognition of Learning

- Apprenticeship pathway characterized as “all-or-nothing” where success is defined as holding a Red Seal Endorsement or Certification of Qualification.
- Journeypersons, employers, and apprenticeship services stressed importance of maintaining high standards and full scope of practice for trades certification but acknowledged situations in which full scope is not required for job roles (often context and employer-specific).
- Many interviewees advocated for “offramps” (i.e., where learning and skills could be recognized up to a point, but not full certification).
- Focus group participants saw value and had positive experiences with vocational certification; emphasized ability to showcase skills with employers.

“You get all these tickets and credentials and then it helps him to demonstrate his capabilities to people better... this idea totally changes their minds. So, it's nice to be able to build those credentials and have those tickets in your wallet to show your capabilities.”

(Focus Group 2 Participant through a support worker as interpreter)

Design Workshop: Inclusive Training and Certification

Supporting learners on a 'normative pathway'

- Workshop participants shared different perspectives on:
 - Full inclusion of learners with IDD in a 'normative pathway' with integrated supports.
 - Specialized programs that are designed for learner needs and opportunity to build skills and confidence in a supported environment.
- Other suggestions included exploring micro-credentialing, recognition of 'non-credit' learners.
- Participants agreed on the need to create culture of inclusion in the trades and in trades training, building on existing mentoring culture and 'non-traditional' entrants into the trades.

“There is this history of including adults that don’t necessarily have some of the academic criteria of high school degrees. And there’s this long history of figuring out how to include adults in trades training, and that culture of including adults and supporting them.”

(Inclusive Training Workshop Participant)

Design Workshop: Extending the Including All Citizens Pathway at KPU

Extending the Including All Citizens Pathway at Kwantlen Polytechnic University

- A second workshop approached the inclusive training design challenge by exploring the potential to extend IACP into the Faculty of Trades and Technology.
- Potential focus on trades foundation programs, which are recognized by employers and lead to apprenticeships.
- The IACP model incorporates teaching release time and mentorship for instructors and has an existing admissions category for IACP students, creating foundation for inclusive educational design.
- Participants explored additional aspects to address funding/student financial assistance and alternative forms of assessment within apprenticeship certification (likely a long-term initiative that would also require national coordination).

“There are no curricular changes. We do not adapt or modify what we are teaching. All learning outcomes remain the same for all students. It's all about transforming the way that we teach... All of the supports are built right into our teaching pedagogy and within the classroom environment.”

(IACP Workshop Participant)

Downstream Factors for Inclusion

Accessible and Inclusive Workplaces

- Previous employment experiences shape job seekers' preferences or interests in employment discovery process (e.g., relationships with co-workers, desire to move beyond routine or repetitive roles).
- Focus group participants highlighted importance of inclusive and supportive work environments; many also shared a preference for lower-stress and slower-paced positions over fast-paced or high-stress roles.
- Focus group participants also emphasized disclosure of disability to an employer is a personal choice, often depending on whether they perceive the employer and co-workers as inclusive.

“Certain employers they can have certain stigma or stereotype about disabilities in general... They may not have this in a manner that's super aggressive, but it can affect how you're treated as an employee... I don't want to have to hide the fact that I have a disability just to have a better chance of getting a job.”

(Focus Group 1 Participant)

Downstream Factors for Inclusion

Awareness and Capacity for Inclusion: Skilled Trades Employers

- There is a perception that skilled trades employers may not disability confident (e.g., worries about accommodation costs, safety concerns, worry about discrimination complaints, or lower productivity).
- There is a low awareness of supported employment models and available resources and supports among skilled trades employers, and potentially a limited capacity for exploring inclusive or customized solutions.
- Many employers lack overall capacity for apprenticeships in general; workforce needs may require fully-certified journeypersons or face pressure to maintain supervising ratios.

“Typically, with apprentices we would be hiring people that have, you know, kind of at least a year in... It's a requirement of us to have in most cases... we need that Red Seal.”

(Interview #5 – Employer)

“You’re like, ‘This is a creative solution to your problem’. They’re like, ‘I don’t have the capacity for a creative solution right now’.”

(Interview #14 – Service Provider)

Downstream Factors for Inclusion

Awareness and Capacity of Skilled Trades Pathways: Service Providers

- Service providers reported uncertainty or lack of awareness of the apprenticeship system, including the types of careers in the skilled trades, skill and ability requirements, job opportunities, and job environments.
- Only half (52%) reported they felt “somewhat confident” supporting job seekers with disabilities in the skilled trades, with the remaining half of respondents reported they felt neutral or unconfident.
- Service providers shared that resources on the skilled trades would be helpful, including understanding of training programs, options, supports, and better understanding of skilled trades employment and apprenticeship models in general.

“Just someone to be able to call who just knows the trades world. Knows the different trades and knows about the different level certifications that you can get.... I don't know someone who has a basic knowledge about all the trades, the schooling involved, funding opportunities... I feel pretty out of my own... I don't know who to talk to... It doesn't seem like there are that many people that have that experience.”

(Interview #11 – Service Provider)

Downstream Factors for Inclusion

Lessons Learned from other Initiatives in the Skilled Trades

- Many interviewees felt that existing programs that serve equity-deserving groups explore, train, and gain work experience in the trades (e.g., Women in Trades, Indigenous people, newcomers) could provide foundation and lessons for inclusion of people with disabilities.
- Community Benefits Agreements and Enhanced Inclusion and Development Agreements support priority hiring of equity-deserving groups for major construction projects, but there are no specific targets for people with disabilities.
- Interviewees noted potential to build on skilled trades culture of worker rehabilitation (e.g., helping injured workers return to work) and mentorship.

“A lot of apprentices don't disclose their disabilities [at work] ... [Many] prefer to deal with that disability, with that information, on their own rather than seek support from the employers. And that would go as well with mental health issues... they felt that in some way, [disclosing] would jeopardize their careers.”

(Interview #9 – Apprenticeship Services)

Design Workshop: Building Bridges Between Employers and Service Providers for Inclusive Employment

Building relationships and awareness

- Participants suggested using the business case for diversity as an entry point, starting with employers that have experience with other inclusion initiatives (e.g., Women, Indigenous people).
- Recommended an incremental approach to work towards milestones, rather than starting with full employment.

“I would like to see some more structured training for the employment specialists, but I would also like to see that the training is being informed by the employers as well.”

Supporting disability inclusion in the skilled trades

- Need to generate connections between sector (unions and employers) and service providers to create a system of supports for apprentices, with two-way learning for both employers and service providers.
- Employer engagement is key, starting with presentations to service providers, site visits, and one-on-one conversations.
- Need to develop resources tailored to regional or local needs (e.g., information on in-demand trades).

(Inclusive Employment Workshop Participant)

Inter-Sectoral Partnerships & Systems Change

Building inter-sectoral partnerships

- Research findings highlight that job seekers, their support networks (i.e., employment specialists, natural supports), employers, and training providers are still in the early stages of understanding one another .
- Workshops emphasized the need for partnership development between key actors to create and successfully run inclusive apprenticeships.

Coordinated effort

- Across workshops, participants emphasized that career exploration, training, and employment initiatives cannot be designed in isolation from one another.

Leadership

- The impetus for this change is likely to come from commitment and leadership from those in the apprenticeship and service provision sectors.

Moving Forward

The Opening the Door to Trades project points to interventions focused on awareness and exposure, pre-employment milestones, and creating inter-sectoral partnerships

- Provide early exposure to youth with disabilities (ensuring learners on Evergreen Certificate pathways have access).
- Balance inclusive education with rigor: ensuring that training programs can accommodate diverse learning needs while upholding provincial and interprovincial standards for skilled trades certification:
 - Potential to build on KPU's IACP model.
- Develop training and resources to promote awareness and capacity among both service providers and employers.
- Formalize connections and promote inter-sectoral partnerships among relevant actors.
- Find champions within skilled trades to engage in further capacity building for disability inclusion.