



Podcast Transcript | *The Fix*

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Guests: Jennifer Green, Skills Ontario

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Questions or Feedback: thefix@oatey.com

00:00:06 **Katherine**

Welcome to The Fix, the podcast made for the trades, where we sit down with inspiring individuals across the trades to discuss their unique take on the industry, including career paths, job site stories, overcoming challenges, and everything in between. I'm your host, Catherine, a marketer here at Oatey with my co host and friend Doug, one of Oatey's resident experts in all things trades. The Fix is more than a podcast, it's a community. A community built to support tradespeople and inspire the next generation of essential pros. Let's start the conversation.

00:00:44 **Katherine**

Well, Doug, we have another spectacular guest today from our country up north doing some amazing things, but on a worldwide know worldwide.

00:00:55 **Doug**

But I didn't realize that Canada had a superhero.

00:00:58 **Katherine**

I know.

00:00:58 **Doug**

Okay, today's guest is actually a superhero. I mean, she's a crusader of non traditional trades and she stamps out stigmas, so I love that.

00:01:09 **Katherine**

Well, welcome Jennifer Green, the Director of Competition Skills Ontario.

00:01:14 **Jennifer**

Thank you so much for having me.

00:01:16 **Katherine**

You've got it. I really appreciate you taking some time to tell us a little bit about the work that you're doing and a little bit about skills. And can you take us through your journey in skilled trades and how you became involved with skilled Ontario?

00:01:29 **Jennifer**

Of course. So I started in high school and I was actually taking advanced courses and university courses to go into forensic criminology. That was my love at the time, but I was also a techie and a jock and a nerd, you name it, and I belonged to all those traditional groups. There's three generations of tradespeople before me, heavily in my family, but because I was a 4.0 GPA student and I did good in those courses and I enjoyed them, it was never pitched to me as an opportunity to go into the skilled trades. Even though I was taking tech, I was taking manufacturing course and I enjoyed it, but I used it as a bird course to get my grades up even higher for my university application. In grade eleven, an opportunity for cooperative education came aboard and I was like, well, that sounds like fun. It sounds like a break from hard studies because I enjoy that. So I decided to go and do it and I had no idea what I wanted to go and try co op for. And I read through my college's, my local college's

00:02:23 **Jennifer**

course guidebook, Conestoga College, and I read through all the descriptions of trades and I was like, that one sounds like me, let's try that one. And it was on a whim and I ended up loving it and completely did a 360 in what my choice was in high school and changed all of my courses for grade twelve and applied for and was accepted into what's called the OYAP Program, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program. Meaning that you actually become a registered apprentice while still in high school and you can earn hours towards your apprenticeship while also earning your OSSD, your Ontario Secondary School diploma up here. And I got my registration in grade twelve earning hours.

Immediately started my first year of apprenticeship after graduating and have my license by the age of 21 as a licensed Red Seal Industrial Mechanic millwright.

00:03:17 **Katherine**

Wow, that is quite spectacular.

00:03:19 **Doug**

That really is.

00:03:21 **Katherine**

So can you talk to us then a little bit about how you become involved in the Skills Ontario?

00:03:27 **Jennifer**

Yeah, so, another unique story. So as a woman in one of the most male dominated trades, especially starting co op at 16 and being registered at 17, I stuck out like a sore thumb, to say the least. And so, as a woman in that trade, skills Ontario heard about me as a grade twelve student and actually invited me to one of their young women's networking dinners to come be the keynote. And I actually got started with the organization almost 20 years ago because of that option. I then volunteered with them as many years as I could, year after year, between their summer camps and their young women's programs. And in my third year of apprenticeship, my college Conestoga asked me to represent them in the millwright competition at Provincials for post secondary. I at first said, no, I'm not doing that, I'm not putting myself out there. I'm already out there enough as it is. I already stick out like a sore thumb, and I said, what if I do poorly? I don't exactly want to put women in trades on the map

00:04:27 **Jennifer**

even lower than what we might already be for stereotypes and stigmas. And I'm really glad that they saw something in me that I definitely didn't at the time. And I made them a deal and said, if you help build my confidence and help train me further to feel like I could actually go and do this, then I'll do it. So they volunteered their time, additional outside of hours, to help train me, and they really did see something in me that I didn't because I ended up winning Gold Provincially in Ontario, and I moved on to nationals and got Silver, and I'm the second woman ever to compete at the Canadian national level. So my experience really came about. So I was not only a volunteer, I became an alumni, and I continued to volunteer with them. And the CEO at the time had approached me and said, hey, I've always wanted to start an alumni association and I want you to do it.

00:05:21 Katherine

Oh wow.

00:05:21 Jennifer

I was like, oh really? And this is not a lady you say no to? She definitely same thing. She saw something in me that I hadn't at the time and ended up kickstarting the inaugural alumni association as president, which then led me into spearheading an initiative at the national level for what's called NAC, the National Alumni committee where I rallied and worked with each provincial and territorial office on coming up with an alumni and bringing together a committee of one person from every province and territory so that we could have a national alumni option to help spearhead and promote skilled trades and technologies. And then I became an employee. I had a really full circle opportunity where my passion in my role, I think, is definitely unique because I know exactly what this competition did for me as an apprentice. I know what it did for my entire career. I know what it did for me as a woman, as an underrepresented group in skilled trades. So my passion is definitely very gallant, to

00:06:27 Jennifer

say the least, because I know that every step that I take will do the same or hopefully similar for other students today.

00:06:36 Katherine

And I would imagine too, for you, it gives you the opportunity to give back to maybe those that thinking about those that put their time and effort into you to help build your confidence that when you see other women or other people in the trades, you're like, you can do this. I would imagine it definitely resonates.

00:06:53 Jennifer

Exactly. Yeah. I've personally mentored over 50 people, both identifying as men and women, as a personal give back as my career grew as an industrial mill. Right. I also did all this volunteering and advocating and public speaking on the side, which basically grew these two careers at the same time. And I never said no. I always give that message out, and I would say it's probably only really this year that I've actually had to finally start saying no to things.

00:07:21 Katherine

Sure.

00:07:22 Jennifer

Just due to how busy, and no matter what, I always tried to cram it in. I would do podcasts at like nine and 10:00 at night. I'm like, if you can fit me, I'm like, if that works for you, I'm like, I'll make it work. And I've never said no in that option to make sure that that message can go out. To continue to be an advocate. There's another advocate up here. Jamie McMillan, the founder of Kick Ass careers. She is fantastic, highly recommend. You have her on your podcast as well. And her and I are in the same boat. We both started approximately 20 years ago, and we're both in, I'll call it older school methods of how we advocated and how we got started comparatively to today.

00:08:03 Katherine

Can you give us then an overview of Skills Ontario and then more specifically about what's your role entail as the Director of competitions?

00:08:11 Jennifer

So, Skills Ontario is a not for profit organization. We are part of a worldwide organization called World Skills that has over 80 member countries involved. So each of those countries has a national level. So in our case, it's Skills Canada. And then each province and territory has its own member organization, and we are Skills Ontario. Same with the states. There is a Skills USA, there's a Skills Ohio, there is a Skills organization for each of the different states in the US. As well. In our organization, we are the leader in Ontario in promoting skilled trades and technologies to youth in the province, and providing experiential hands on activities to learn what those careers are. Ontario currently has 144 different registered skilled trades across the four sectors, and trying to promote what those are can be difficult sometimes, especially when you don't realize what some of the trades actually are within the service sector. One of my most fun ones to promote is Horse harness maker,

00:09:12 Jennifer

early childhood educator. Our registered skilled trades in Ontario, there's, I think, six different kinds of crane operators within the construction industry. So there's all these unique opportunities to learn about and promote. We are most well known for the Skills Ontario competition, which I run, but we also have Summer Camps camps. We do DEI, diversity, equity and inclusion programming and conferences. We have FNMI, which is First Nations, Métis and Inuit conferences and programming

women in trades. We have our Trade and Tech Truck, which travels the province of almost 500 hands on activities, and state of the art simulators for students to be able to learn about skilled trades.

00:09:55 **Katherine**

Awesome.

00:09:56 **Jennifer**

We have a podcast. Our programming goes on. We offer quite a bit, which leads me into my role of director of competitions and more recently, Business Development, and I run with my Team Canada's largest skilled trade event. The event is most well known in metaphorically like the Olympics. It is the best of the best. They are students and apprentices competing against one another of their top skill sets within their chosen skilled trade or technology to try to win gold, silver, and bronze. Some of these contests are also accompanied by prize packs from sponsors. They're accompanied by job offers from sponsors. It can go on their LinkedIn resume. They attribute a huge amount of soft skills that go into their career as well. We are a recognized organization in the level of commitment and training and skill set it takes to be able to compete in this contest. That industry recognizes what that means, and when it's seen on a resume, they understand what that student or apprentice has gone through

00:10:58 **Jennifer**

or been to be able to achieve that. And for select contests, they could move on and compete nationally against the other gold medal winners from the other member organizations of provinces and territories in Canada and then every other year. So Olympics is every four years, world Skills is every two years. So if you are one of the contests that continue, you now have a chance to be part of Team Canada and go on and compete against the other gold medal winners from other countries across the globe for a chance to win gold, silver, and bronze. So that is our biggest flagship event. And when I say large, I mean the contest runs over two days. We're currently scheduled to be May 6 and 7th in 2024 in Toronto, and over two days we bring in almost 40,000 spectators in pre COVID years.

00:11:46 **Katherine**

Wow.

00:11:46 **Jennifer**

We run over 70 different skilled trades and tech contests and we operate with almost 700 volunteers in 500,000 sqft.

00:11:54 Katherine

Wow. That's impressive. Can you imagine?

00:11:57 Doug

No, I can't. I mean, I'm trying to figure out all this in my head.

00:12:01 Katherine

Yeah. How big of a space?

00:12:02 Doug

That is overwhelming.

00:12:03 Jennifer

Yeah, it is huge. It is what we call the wow factor that I can talk about it till I'm blue in the face, I bet in that door and really see what it is like. If you are up in Toronto at the beginning of May, highly recommend it's free and open to the public. Come and see what it's like. Because at this competition, you can not only just view those 70 plus contests, we also have showcase booths from our sponsors, all with mandatory hands on components. So as a spectator, you get to go to hundreds of booths and do hands on activities. You get to watch the contest. We also do, in conjunction with the competition, elementary workshops for grades seven and eight. We do Canada's largest Young Women in Trades conference. We do a first nation. Mattian inuance conference. We did our first ever Guidance Educator Conference as a new mandate from the government to have a half day mandatory PA Day for guidance educators on skilled trades. We host several different other things in conjunction with the competition

00:13:04 Jennifer

that make it a very well rounded, large opportunity to come and visit.

00:13:07 Katherine

I love it. Well, you know, Doug, I love to commit to stuff.

00:13:11 Doug

I see it coming.

00:13:12 Katherine

I know, right? You know exactly. We will be there May 6 and 7th of 2024. I already have it written down and obviously if there is opportunity for Oatey to help support with some donation or sponsorship, I would love to continue to have that conversation.

00:13:27 Jennifer

Yes, please. Let's connect.

00:13:29 Katherine

All right, that sounds great.

00:13:30 Doug

Yeah, absolutely. Jennifer, I have a question. So could you explain to us like okay, so these events, these Olympics basically I understand all them. What about the age groups? What age groups do you start with? Do you break them up into different age groups and then give them different opportunities? Could you explain that to us?

00:13:51 Jennifer

Yes, sir. So we are all about grassroots and making sure to get that education out early and understanding of what's available. So at our provincial level, we actually offer competitions in age groups for grades four to six, other competitions in grades seven to eight. And then we have a very full range of competitions for secondary school of grades nine through twelve and post secondary and apprenticeships. We are an organization dedicated to youth and youth here is classified as up to the age of 29. So our post secondary students can go up to the age of 29 and apprentices to compete in these competitions. So we also have programming. One of our largest programs that I forgot to mention earlier is that we do in school presentations both in person and virtually, and we go as far down as kindergarten doing skilled trades presentations all the way up to grade twelve. And we also offer them for newcomers and parents, you name it. And we do in school presentations for that. So really focusing

00:14:46 Jennifer

on grassroots and at that grade four to six level, there's everything from Lego robotics and Lego engineering to construction and workplace safety up to grade eight. We offer a total of, I think 14 between the two different age ranges within the elementary level.

00:15:03 **Katherine**

Wow, that's pretty cool.

00:15:05 **Jennifer**

Yeah.

00:15:05 **Doug**

Definitely impressive.

00:15:06 **Katherine**

Yeah, and definitely I love thinking about it on all the different age spectrums. Right. Because it's so important for us to continue to talk when they're at the elementary school and all the way up. So I think it's excellent.

00:15:17 **Doug**

Yeah.

00:15:18 **Jennifer**

And it's very unique. I was going to say, when I say we run over 70 contests, I mean, we do everything from plumbing, steam fitting and sprinkler fitting, to concrete, to butchery, culinary, hairstyling, fashion. We bring in power line technician and we actually drill holes into the boulevards and install power line poles. We do heavy service, we do auto service, we do construction and home build. We do aircraft maintenance. There's a very wide range of different trades that we offer contests for.

00:15:49 **Katherine**

What did you say? 188? Is that how many trades?

00:15:53 **Jennifer**

There's 144 registered trades in the province of Ontario that they offer for registered apprenticeships. 144 currently.

00:16:00 Katherine

That's impressive.

00:16:03 Doug

I was born a few generations too early because we never had this kind of stuff. I mean, this is truly amazing for these young people to have this opportunity to experience this.

00:16:13 Katherine

Absolutely. And to show that many of the different trades happening. And I love the fact that you have even the competition, that it's free to the public to be able to come in and then everyone has to at their booth who's sponsoring has to have a hands on because it's important for everyone to get their hands on it, no matter what their age. Plus, I love the fact that, listen, a lot of people don't know what they want to be when they grow up. They get exposure to stuff, but the fact that you still stay with them and help them up to the age of 29, a lot of people figure out new careers, mid 20s or even mid 40s, they can figure things out. But I think it's great that you're continuing to give them an opportunity to come and learn and be a part of the competition. And also the opportunity to be a part to learn.

00:16:59 Doug

Yeah, to have that much opportunity under one roof, I mean, it's like a trades buffet. I'm just going to sample a little bit of everything till I find something.

00:17:09 Katherine

I like for sure.

00:17:11 Jennifer

Yeah. We are all about experiential and what makes the competition great. And unique is that the colleges and union TDAs training delivery agents and schools will also host sometimes their own internal regionals to determine who is going to go represent them for the spot they may have won to come to provincials. So it provides additional layers outside of us as well. While we host the provincial level and qualifying for a few secondary contests, each of them will do their own regional. So it really expands beyond us on the opportunities that are being offered if those institutions are able to provide a regional level as well.

00:17:46 Katherine

Yeah, that's awesome. Well, you talked about it a little bit in the beginning about being a woman in the trades and kind of being a little bit of that trailblazer that wasn't a lot of people that looked like you. The representation of women in the trades has been historically low. And so what are some of the efforts being made to encourage more women to pursue careers in the skilled trades? And how can we further promote gender diversity in the industry?

00:18:13 Jennifer

Perfect timing on this question because there was quite a very large announcement in Ontario last week, I think around the 13 June. So our Ministry of Labor, Immigration and Skills Training Development, MLI TSD, has worked very hard on the promotion of skilled trades as being viable careers. And I was actually the chair of an advisory committee working for the Minister back in 2000 and 22,021 on working with stakeholders and the public in coming up with a report and recommendations on what changes we needed to make in the province to be able to fulfill these goals. And that final report yielded \$90 million investment over three years.

00:18:58 Katherine

Wow.

00:18:58 Jennifer

And a lot of those recommendations from our report and all my committee along with me was Adam Melnick and Andrew Paraser. And with those recommendations, quite a few of them have been put in place from the government. And just last week they announced we have a historically high record number of uptick and apprentices. I believe the uptick was 24, 28% higher in one year of registered apprentices. And of that, I believe 28% was women.

00:19:31 Katherine

Wow. That's awesome.

00:19:33 Jennifer

Huge uptick in numbers and on women in trades. As far as those new registered apprentices.

00:19:42 **Katherine**

That is truly remarkable. And kudos to you guys and even all the work that's being done, because a lot of times it's hard to see all that work and then finally some success by it. But that's pretty amazing.

00:19:55 **Jennifer**

Yeah, it was a very exciting announcement last week. I was unfortunately camping with zero cell reception. No idea it was even announced, and all of a sudden got reception a week later on my phone and all these messages, and I read it and I was like, oh my God, this is great. I'm like, this is great news. And I was like, I missed it last week.

00:20:13 **Katherine**

Well, it's good you were taking time for yourself and I'm sure as you got that what I can imagine, just a ding ding, ding ding all of a sudden coming through as all this you're getting into.

00:20:21 **Jennifer**

So the work of our Ministry of labor and our Minister of labor as well as our new Crown Agency, Stowe Skilled Trades, Ontario as being the regulatory body for registered apprentices, a lot of work has gone into skilled trades and apprentices and recruitment and retention over the last couple of years up here. And obviously that dedication has shown across all bOateys and all members and organizations and companies involved who have helped push for this and funding because the numbers speak for themselves.

00:20:54 **Katherine**

That's amazing. So how can we, all brands included, manufacturers included, industry professionals, educators and the government work together to ensure longevity and growth for skilled trades industry, I think there's been some things that you guys have definitely done to make an impact, obviously with those type of numbers. But what is it that we can do to ensure that there's this longevity happening in the skilled trades?

00:21:21 **Jennifer**

I think as employers, especially regionally, connect with your schools, come in and be a speaker, volunteer in the class, come and do a special project if you're able to do donations. Like you noted, the classrooms only have so much budget, especially for skilled trades. And the budget for a skilled

trade classroom is vastly different than obviously math and language and science. So they need a lot more to be able to operate and provide those opportunities. So by being able to provide product, for example, will help offset the budget and still be able to provide other opportunities, you have the people with the expertise, hence Doug, you said with his background. So being able to offer what you have on a volunteer basis, for example, if you don't already, maybe your company offers two days a year in volunteer experience that they get off paid, that you go out and volunteer. Whether it be with a school or at an event. If sponsorship opportunities are there, who is a local, maybe not for

00:22:22 [Jennifer](#)

profit that you could go and sponsor and help provide opportunities. Maybe you provide a workshop through them. Or for the example of us, we have a multitude of different sponsorship opportunities, many different tiers for the competition and all of our other programming where we've got some really unique return on investments for our sponsorships that you can't get through anything else. So being able to get more involved, get in front of them. And one of the things that I find with students, especially going into any career is they don't know what companies hire for those roles, right? But by getting out there in front of them, you could be like, hey, we hire for this, this and this and skilled trades or relatable. Or if for example, you started as a skilled trades person and you went into supervisor or estimator or purchaser, but you have the background like here's other secondary roles that we have that could evolve from a skilled trades role. So getting in front of them and just letting

00:23:13 [Jennifer](#)

them know, one, you exist as a company, but two, what you actually hire for, and then three, explaining what those roles are gives you a whole new depth and level of understanding to the students. You also mentioned government. A lot of people are working in Silos, and that's one thing that I'm really impressed about. Our government with a lot of funding that they've put out called SDF. So skills development funding. I believe we're on round three right now from the government and companies, groups, organizations apply for the funding to be able to put forward skilled trades programming, which has also been a huge benefactor to the uptick in apprentices as well. And opportunities like that are also getting companies and organizations working with government to be able to work together closer within the same silos towards the same goals with the same Maybe metrics to look at or attributes, to be able to attain the same goal by having everybody in that same pool where normally they wouldn't.

00:24:11 Jennifer

Another example I would give is that let's say you're a provincial organization with members or a provincial union body with your members underneath you and your chapters. One of the biggest issues is SMEs, small and Medium enterprises. They don't have the labor or the time to put together a big foundational piece, let alone maybe be able to hire an apprentice based on Maybe ratios. Help them out. You're the organizing provincial, I'm saying provincial state.

00:24:41 Katherine

That's okay.

00:24:44 Jennifer

You have the resources, put together a basis, put together a foundational piece that you could offer to those SMEs or to the smaller Maybe mom PA shops that they can then work off of, that you've already done those basics that they can just build off of and then customize within their company or organization. Because that's one of the key pieces that are missing is that it's very hard for them to be able to jump in that same boat when they don't have the staffing or the same resources as a large company. So help them out and build a foundational piece.

00:25:13 Katherine

Right? No, I think that's I, I've learned so much today, and I think that there's so much opportunity not only for OD to help sponsor Skills Ontario as well as know, even worldwide. And I applaud you for all the work that you've done. I applaud the people that saw something in you and really helped because I can see what an impact you're making and it's quite remarkable. So thank you for your time today. Thank you so much for all your insights.

00:25:42 Jennifer

Yeah, thank you so much for having me. It was really a pleasure.

00:25:44 Doug

Yeah. After listening to Jennifer today, I think I have to actually do more with my life because I know I feel like she's like twice the person I am for good.

00:25:55 **Katherine**

It's amazing. It truly is. So thank you.

00:25:58 **Doug**

Thank you.

00:25:59 **Jennifer**

Those are very kind words. Thank you.

00:26:04 **Katherine**

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