

SUPPORTING WORKING PARENTS

SOLUTIONS TO CHILDCARE BARRIERS IN THE SKILLED TRADES



Photo: Melissa Visentin Photography



Building Trades of Alberta
in participation with:
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Supporting Working Parents

Solutions to Childcare Barriers in the Skilled Trades

What is the Problem?

"I love my trade, but having to choose between having a family or having a career is a reality." Tradesperson – Female, 24

Careers in the skilled trades drive the economy, build and maintain the essential services we rely on every day, and create a better quality of life for everyone. But, with the skilled trades shortage at our doorstep, we need to take action to not only recruit tradespeople, but we need to keep them. Retention is key, and one of those hurdles is accessible and affordable high-quality childcare.

With a growing number of initiatives from both the provincial and federal government aimed at recruiting people to work in the skilled trades – we must look at ways to retain them. Why bring someone on board if we can't keep them working?

Accessible, affordable and quality childcare is an obstacle faced by tradespeople currently in the industry, and it's one we face when it comes to attracting people to pursue a career in the skilled trades.

Accessibility:

Securing a great childcare centre can be difficult for working parents, but pair that with long hours, long commutes and unexpected overtime, parents in the skilled trades have a particularly difficult time finding childcare that suits their needs. Finding accessible childcare is one of the largest barriers tradespeople face when it comes to juggling childcare and work hours. In consultation with tradespeople from across the country, we frequently hear about difficulties finding childcare that's open early enough or late enough. This struggle can result in lost opportunities for working parents not able to commit to overtime hours and can have a negative effect on their employment if they frequently miss time due to childcare obligations. This also has an impact on the industries they operate in and on the economy as a whole.

Having childcare centres that open earlier, close later, and are readily available does not just benefit tradespeople, but all working Canadians.

"It's hard to find childcare that is open early enough for an hour commute, plus the time it takes to get ready for work." Tradesperson – Gender Diverse,

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"If we start at 7am and job is an hour away, I have to find other arrangements for someone to drop my kid off and pick them up because daycare doesn't open until 6:30 or 7am." Tradesperson - Male, 33

"Finding someone to look after my child before 5am is a huge issue. I have my mom live with me, it's the only way I can still work. My mom has agreed to watch my child." Tradesperson - Female, 40

Skilled trades occupations are demanding:

- Long hours
 - Sometimes 10-12 hour days
- Long shifts
 - 6 or 7 days a week
 - Overtime
 - Up to 21 days on and 7 days off
- Long Commutes
 - Some worksites are 1 hour + commutes

Stats Canada stated:

"In 1976, stay-at-home fathers accounted for approximately 1 in 70 of all Canadian families with a stay-at-home parent. By 2015, the proportion had risen to about 1 in 10".¹

Even though there has been a significant jump in stay-at-home fathers over the years, 9 times out of 10, childcare falls to the mother. Typically speaking, it is usually the mother who puts her career on hold to raise children. This is not a bad thing but tends to be the trend for many different reasons. This can result in loss of job opportunities for mothers. That being said, the issue of childcare is not a women's only issue. Accessible childcare is a family issue. From single fathers working the trades, to dual income families, shift work partners and almost anyone who works with young children in the skilled trades can face this issue.

"Working out of town, juggling unscheduled overtime and night shift/day shift, with lack of notice on changes, is a huge issue for accessible childcare." Tradesperson - Male, 37

"I love my trade, but I often think about other careers to improve my family's quality of life." Tradesperson - Female, 34

¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016007-eng.htm>

"My wife had to quit her job to stay home with child, as neither of us could get modified hours." Tradesperson – Male, 34

Having to juggle children between school, childcare and family help, takes a toll on the child too. Children thrive on routine, and when they are being juggled from place to place, during random hours, it can be hard on them as well. It is imperative we look at the implications that the lack of adequate childcare takes on our little ones. Accessible, trusted and quality childcare is crucial.

"Our hours are too early. It's hard to find early-start childcare. Also, for members that are separated, this is an instant loss of custody in a parenting negotiation. If this issue could be solved more members would have a chance for at least equal custody of their children." Tradesperson – Female, 42

Quality:

Not only is accessible childcare so important, but so is the quality that goes with it. Many childcare centres that operate outside of typical business hours are not accredited. The health and safety of our children is number one. As a parent in the trades, it is hard enough leaving our kids in care for such long hours – but if there is concern for a child's well-being while in care, it makes it so much harder to focus on your job. If working parents are stressed and anxious about the environment their children are in while they are at work, that stress and anxiety can divert a parents attention from their job – not only negatively effecting productivity on the job site, but in construction, that can have an effect on safety as well.

Children can be in childcare centres for up to 10 hours or more some days. Having a centre where the children are happy, well cared for and educated is so important, not just for the child, but for the ease of mind on the parents that require the childcare. Parents want to be sure their children are in good hands. They need to know their children are safe.

"I had no choice but to leave my child in an unlicensed day home, and after some time I learned it was not a healthy environment for my child. I felt so much guilt as a parent having to leave her there, but I had no other options at the time." Tradesperson – Female, 30

The Hanen Centre², a non-profit global-reaching organization that specializes in language, social and early literacy skills for children states:

Children who attend high quality childcare have better outcomes than children who attend lower quality childcare.

TRUE

We know a child's family and home environment influence their development more than childcare does. However, the reality is that many children attend childcare. The NICHD [1] compared the outcomes of children in high-quality childcare with children in lower quality care. They found that the children in higher quality childcare centres demonstrated [1]: better cognitive, language, and social development, plus better school readiness (e.g., reading, writing, number skills)

Therefore, when choosing a childcare centre, quality does make a difference.³

"All parents in Canada have the right to choose quality care for their children. This is especially important for children with special needs. We, as tradespeople, should not have to consider leaving our careers in the trades, along with all the medical benefits, pensions, and job security, due to the unavailability of quality childcare." Tradesperson – Female, 50

Affordability:

Trades union workers do receive better than average wages, but even considering this, many young families still struggle to pay for childcare services due to astronomical cost in some areas. When trades workers are required to work overtime, extended hours, and long commutes, and out of school care, the childcare costs go above and beyond the average rate. Many families have been paying more for childcare per month than they are for their rent or mortgage. This is unsustainable. In addition to that, the construction industry in some areas can be quite seasonal, with periods of unemployment. If parents are laid-off for a month or two at a time, typically they are still required to pay for childcare during that time to ensure the spot is held – or they risk losing childcare at that chosen centre. With the lack of accessible childcare, many parents are obligated to pay for childcare, when they don't need it, just to ensure they have a spot.

We are in full support of the Government of Alberta entering into agreement with the Federal Government for a Federal-Provincial Childcare agreement that will see licenced childcare centres available to parents for \$10/day in the next 5 years for pre-kindergarten children.⁴ This historic agreement will benefit families across Alberta and all of Canada. Not only will this help families, but it will help the entire economy, getting more parents into the workforce, and opening the labour pool to bring many more individuals into the skilled trades. Since

² <http://www.hanen.org/Home.aspx>

³ <http://www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Articles/Does-child-care-make-a-difference-to-childrens-de.aspx>

⁴ <https://www.alberta.ca/child-care-subsidy.aspx>

childcare can cause such a significant barrier, more affordable childcare will lend way for more parents to enter and return to the workforce.

However – as incredible as this new program is intended to be, **it is crucial we do not lose sight of the accessibility of this affordable childcare.** It's imperative that if parents in the skilled trades can utilize this \$10/day care, there must be licenced spaces available and able to accommodate extended hours, and available for children that are 6 and up. This new plan does not include out of school care for children Grade 1 and up⁵. OSC (out of school care) still runs an average price of \$475 - \$900 a month⁶ for part-time care. Affordable daycare is an incredible step forward for our society, but if skilled trades parents still do not have access to it, these parents may still be required to pay for additional childcare to accommodate for early mornings, late nights and 24-hour care. With this new agreement, **we must ensure these high-quality spaces are open and able to accommodate the hours of a skilled trades workforce for it to be truly effective, and it should include children over the age of 6.** Children at this age are still not able to care for themselves before and after school. Adequate childcare is still required.

Finding accessible, affordable and quality childcare is a barrier faced by so many families in construction. This new agreement will help toward creating more affordable childcare, but we must keep in mind the accessibility of these licenced centres. Helping to eliminate this barrier can ensure we have a workforce that is dedicated and productive.

- Skilled trades occupations have higher pay than many occupations, yet affordable childcare is still out of reach for many reasons:
 - Long hours / Extended shifts
 - Extended day care costs
 - Nannies
 - Babysitters
 - Relying on family members for additional help
 - Unexpected overtime
 - Unable to work overtime, miss out on pay
 - Stressful to find care for children with last minute schedule changes, high cost for last minute childcare
 - Missed work opportunities
 - Unable to work overtime, miss out on opportunities for furthering their career
 - Family obligations can hinder one's chance for promotions
 - One spouse unable to work, or must modify work to accommodate for partner in the trades.
 - Retention of women in the skilled trades has been an ongoing issue, and with the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been even tougher for women to continue working in the skilled trades.
 - Periods of unemployment contribute to the costly burden of childcare, where even though parents are unemployed at times, they must still pay for childcare to hold their spot for when they return to work. Before the announcement of the Federal-Provincial childcare agreement, so many families were faced with financial burden over childcare.

⁵ <https://www.alberta.ca/federal-provincial-child-care-agreement.aspx>

⁶ <https://globalnews.ca/news/4895081/before-after-school-care-alberta/>

- As of Nov 2021, the maximum amount that someone can receive for Federal EI is \$595 per week, or about \$2,380 per month.
 - Average cost of full-time childcare for 1 child in Canada is \$815 /month. For 2 children, that's over \$1,600 per month, leaving less than \$800 per month for the remainder of monthly bills.
 - For pre-kindergarten children, this new plan will be lifechanging for families.
 - The average cost of Out of School Care still costs \$475-\$900 / month
 - This is not included in the new plan, and families still pay this high cost.

The new agreement between the federal and provincial governments will help alleviate the financial cost on Canadian families with children under 6. Based on these quotes below, affordable childcare has been a major barrier for families in the workforce – even for skilled trades parents making a higher-than-average wage. We applaud the federal government for their initiative, as well as the provincial government for successfully negotiating an agreement. It will be life changing for many families while their children are young.

"My childcare cost more than my mortgage and it is extremely difficult to find anyone that will work with a tradespersons' hours."
Tradesperson –Female, 34

"Childcare is expensive. Especially during lay off periods of unemployment. Tough paying for a service that's already expensive when you're not working."
Tradesperson – Male, 37

"The cost of daycare is outrageous and finding daycares that open early enough so I can drop my kids off before work and stay open late enough so I can pick them up is difficult." Tradesperson - Male, 39

Without accessible and affordable childcare, Canadian parents cannot work. To keep our economy moving, childcare is absolutely essential. The skilled trades build Canada. They maintain the systems we rely on every day. It's crucial that skilled trades workers in Canada are able to access high-quality childcare so they can protect the health of the nation by providing sanitation systems, warming our homes, keeping lights on and more. The \$10/day childcare plan is a big step in the right direction – and ensuring these centres are available to skilled trades workers and can accommodate extended hours, and will be extended to children over the age of 6, will be another key to success. Parents that save money on childcare will be able to invest in more aspects of the economy!

Why does childcare matter?

Childcare matters to parents, it matters to children and it matters to employers. To have a dedicated, productive and skilled workforce, it is imperative we work toward an environment where industry understands how truly important it is to ensure the children of the workforce are well cared for so parents can fully focus on their career, knowing their child is in good hands.

Economic recovery, and the success of our industry depends on childcare. The face of labour is changing, more women than ever before are entering the workforce, and more families than ever before require dual income.

In 1997, the average wage for Canadians was \$17.65/hr⁷ and the average family home cost \$160,000⁸. In 2021, the average wage was \$32.98/hr⁹ and the average home was \$618,000.¹⁰ Over the years, wages nearly doubled, however the cost of housing has nearly quadrupled! (3.8 times higher) Today, families pay a significant amount more for their mortgage than they did 24 years ago. This isn't taking account the increase in food cost, insurance, family vehicles and utilities. With these numbers, it should be no surprise that **more and more families are required to have two incomes in order to be stable and keep up with the increased cost of living.** The number of stay at home parents has been on a steady decline since 1976¹¹ – and with the cost of living being so high, it's not always a choice, but a necessity. Because of this, childcare is not just a mothers issue, it's a family issue. With more mothers in the labour force, they rely on childcare, but so does the father – since now their partner is working too. The workload of raising children is shared when both parents need/have to work.

Stats Canada stated in 2020: *"Difficulty finding childcare can result in one or more negative consequences for parents, including their ability to work. For parents using childcare who reported having had difficulties finding it, the most common consequences included changing their work schedule (36%), working fewer hours (31%), or having to use multiple or temporary arrangements (29%). Among parents who had difficulties finding childcare and who were not currently using it, 41% had postponed their return to work."*¹²

Childcare matters in more ways than one, and having accessible, affordable high-quality childcare supports our workforce now, and sets the foundation for children who attend these centres. High-quality regulated childcare sets children up for success, as they are the future labour force.

Stats Canada also concluded that: *"According to findings from the Canadian Labour Force Survey, in 2015, 74% of couples with at least one child under the age of 6 had two parents who participated in the labour force (Bernard, 2018). However, parents' participation in the labour market is dependent on the accessibility, availability, and affordability of non-parental childcare (Lefebvre & Merrigan, 2008). Furthermore, childcare options may contribute to the 'motherhood*

⁷<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410013401&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.1&pickMembers%5B1%5D=4.2&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=1997&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2021&referencePeriods=19970101%2C20210101>

⁸ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/64-507-x/64-507-x2000001-eng.pdf?st=PkFqJ4xU>

⁹<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410013401&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.1&pickMembers%5B1%5D=4.2&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=1997&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2021&referencePeriods=19970101%2C20210101>

¹⁰ <https://www.crea.ca/housing-market-stats/national-price-map/>

¹¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016007-eng.htm>

¹² <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210407/dq210407b-eng.htm>

wage penalty' whereby women with children may be more apt to reduce work hours and be less likely to travel or move for work or to prioritize their career due to (unpaid) family obligations or the non-availability of high-quality childcare arrangements (Weeden, Cha, & Bucca, 2016). Thus, supply and demand for childcare are important considerations for labour market participation and decisions among parents of young children."¹³

Here are just a few reasons why childcare is so crucial for skilled trades workers:

- Tradespeople, particularly women, unable to continue working in the skilled trades because of lack of appropriate childcare
- Missed job opportunities, and difficulty working overtime hours
- Lack of promotions and advancement with careers
- Difficult to attract and recruit new workers who are parents or would like to become parents
- Securing employment - early dismissals or lay-offs due to childcare issues

"I felt I had to hide the fact that I am a parent in fears that if my employer knows I have necessary obligations to my kids, it might affect my employment." Tradesperson – Female, 25

"I was once told by my supervisor, that if he knew I was never going to have children, he would have promoted me to Foreman a long time ago. I didn't even have children and just being in childbearing age I missed out on a great work opportunity. It just put into perspective for me, that no matter how hard you work, if you're capable of having a child, you're not capable to lead a crew." Tradesperson – Female, 30

Why does the union care?

The aspirations of Building Trades of Alberta unions are to create a lifestyle that works for working people and families. The building trades fully understands the importance of affordable, accessible and quality childcare. It takes a village to raise children, and as a collective organization that looks out for the greater good, we know we have a responsibility to look out for our members and their families. The health and welfare of our labour force depends greatly on access to childcare. Childcare means family support – without it, parents cannot go to work.

The labour movement has always fought for the rights of workers, social programs and public services. Childcare is no different. Having affordable and accessible childcare will benefit every Canadian, and as a labour organization, we stand behind affordable, accessible and high-quality childcare for working parents and our children.

¹³ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-626-x/11-626-x2019013-eng.htm>

"Industry is already facing a shortage of skilled tradespeople, therefore we must do all that we can to retain our current young tradespeople. Showing our support for families would be monumental in the recruitment of people to the skilled trades, especially to those with young children." Tradesperson – Female, 50

What's the solution?

To keep our economy thriving and to help fill the skilled trades gap, it's imperative we find solutions to help with the accessibility and affordability of childcare for people working in the skilled trades. The recruitment of tradespeople is incredibly important, as so many individuals in the skilled trades are hitting retirement age. But what happens when we are unable to retain them? All the funding, grants, incentives, and training is wasted if the skills are not put to use. Retaining skilled trades workers will be critical to filling the skilled labour shortage, and one of the common retention hurdles for the younger generation is having sustainable access to childcare.

When we lose skilled tradespeople, their knowledge, talent and dedication leave with them. As an industry, we invest in our apprentices and journeypeople. We need to ensure we can keep them working and give them the quality of life they desire and deserve, or they will find other careers that better suit their needs.

Skilled labour is essential, and having a family is a human right. Workers should not have to choose between the two. Work/life balance creates a better environment for everyone. It is critical to support all trades workers in order to retain this highly skilled workforce.

"I greatly considered not having children, just because I knew it would hinder my career in the trades." Tradesperson – Female, 27

There are several solutions that can help address this issue.

Government solutions:

We believe that with the support of the government of Canada and provincial governments, we can push for better childcare hours that coincide with all tradespeople and essential worker's schedules. **We are advocating for accessible childcare facilities to extend their hours, by offering programs to support earlier opening hours, later closing times, as well as drop in's, 24-hour, or "overnight", accredited childcare facilities in order to accommodate our critical nightshift workforce. It's imperative that we have centres to accommodate for children in out of school care and along with all of this, it is of utmost importance to have quality childcare.** Not only do we need to ensure working parents are supported, but we must always take into account the needs of the child. Our children can spend a majority of their time in childcare centres – we must ensure they are in an environment where they are happy and thriving. Quality childcare is key.

The Building Trades of Alberta is dedicated to helping push for better childcare availability so skilled tradespeople can continue to work in the trades they love; so they can continue to support their families, and still have available the important benefits our unions provide. With the assistance of the federal government, we can work with childcare facilities to extend their hours to meet their work schedules, and build an inclusive environment for everyone in Canada.

Government of Canada stated:

“For every dollar invested in early childhood education, the broader economy receives between \$1.50 and \$2.80 in return.”¹⁴

It makes economic sense to support working families. We all need to show our support for young tradespeople across Canada. They are the building blocks of our future. Skilled tradespeople are constantly supporting the economy and ensuring our quality of life, but they may leave for jobs in other industries in order to be able to access adequate childcare. We should be doing everything we can to keep these young people working in the skilled trades. They will continue adding to our economy, supporting businesses and keeping the world as we know, running smoothly.

We call upon both the federal and provincial governments to:

- Continue their participation in the Federal-Provincial Government \$10/day childcare agreement.
- Extend the Federal-Provincial Government \$10/day childcare agreement to children from Kindergarten to Grade 6
- Work with daycare facilities to secure extended hours, drop-in options and establish more 24/hr quality daycare centres for all Canadians
- Ensure skilled trades families are able to utilize the \$10/day daycare facilities by ensuring licenced facilities are able to accommodate extended hours and 24/7 childcare centres
- Provide employer subsidies to those who assist their employees with childcare – such as modified hours, on-site or near site daycares, childcare funding
- Standardization and accreditation for childcare centers across the nation

“Balancing childcare between daycare centres, family members, and school was extremely difficult while my children were young. I don’t know how parents that don’t have family close to help out do it. I had lots of family to help me, and it was still so difficult to manage.” Tradesperson – Female, 40

¹⁴ <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2021/04/21/10-day-child-care-canadian-families>

Industry solutions:

Buildforce Canada has stated in their 2021-2030 National Summary Highlights that:

“Anticipated retirements remain a key driver of industry labour needs, even in provinces where construction activity has slowed. Over the long term, industry faces the challenge of an aging workforce and the expected retirement of almost 259,100 workers, or almost 22% of the current labour force. This represents a significant loss of skills and experience that is unmatched by new workers entering the labour force.

The task of attracting new workers to construction may become increasingly more difficult, as many industries face similar challenges related to replacing an aging labour force. Meeting near- and long-term labour demands will require a combination of industry strategies that include increased recruitment and training of youth, women, Indigenous people, new Canadians, and workers from other industries.”¹⁵

In order to attract new workers to construction, we must support an environment that will allow them to work. Childcare is a huge barrier for young families – especially women.

One size does not fit all when it comes to the retention and recruitment of new tradespeople. As an industry, if we truly want to access some of the hardest working, most skilled and most dedicated workforce, it's crucial to start looking outside the box. Flexibility is key. Not only does this help with barriers set up from childcare, but flexibility in the industry will serve to recruit individuals from all walks of life. Mothers, fathers, single parents, youth, dual trade or dual income families, semi-retired and more. In order to recruit outside the box, we need to operate outside the box.

In an industry that has been so male dominated for so many years, childcare has seemed to be overlooked. Stats Canada stated, *“in 1976, stay-at-home fathers accounted for approximately 1 in 70 of all Canadian families with a stay-at-home parent. By 2015, the proportion had risen to about 1 in 10”*.¹⁶ The workforce is changing. More men are staying home to raise children, and more women are entering the workforce. Our industry must work with the trends and create an environment where both mothers and fathers are able to look after their families in the best way possible; and ensure that no matter what your family situation is, that it does not hinder your career. It is possible to have both

“I was a red seal journeyman in my trade for 15 years and had to make a career change when my husband and I decided to have children. I knew working 6 days a week and up to 14 hours a day some days would not be sustainable with children due to limited childcare options.” Tradesperson – Female, 35

¹⁵https://www.buildforce.ca/system/files/forecast_summary_reports/2021%20National%20Summary%20Constr%20Maint%20Looking%20Forward_0.pdf

¹⁶ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016007-eng.htm>

There are plenty of solutions that the construction industry can incorporate to create an environment where family life and childcare barriers are accommodated for, without sacrificing our skilled labour force:

- Job sharing capability
- Flexible working hours
- On-site daycare or near site daycare
- Employee subsidies
- Flexible hours (FAA Flexible Averaging Agreement)
- Special leave accommodations
 - Paid days for employees that require time off to care for sick immediate family members
 - Paid personal days
 - Bereavement days
 - Domestic violence leave

Union solutions:

Construction trade unions represent workers from all walks of life in the residential, commercial and industrial industries. They provide the best skills training in the industry. The trades unions within Canada provide health, pension and other benefits to our members.

Working cohesively with clients, contractors, industry and government, trade unions continually strive for a better work environment for everyone. Trade unions are the backbone behind workers' rights, and have fought to secure a better, safer, and more reliable workforce in Canada. As trade unions, we are fundamentally built upon fair representation of all workers. As our world changes, so do we. Our unions, though diverse, have the opportunity and the responsibility to become even more inclusive.

The industry as an entirety plays a role in diversifying the workforce, and there are a few steps that we can take at the local union levels to do our part.

In order to recruit and retain the best skilled tradespeople, we must ensure we are able access candidates from an entire collective of people. This means we must look outside the status quo, or we may miss out on individuals who are dedicated, knowledgeable and capable. By providing flexibility, we will be able to better recruit individuals who may have otherwise been overlooked, or who are not interested in pursuing a career in the skilled trades simply because it does not fit with their work/life commitments. We miss out on skilled talent when access to childcare is an obstacle.

To reach a broader labour pool and ensure we have enough tradespeople to meet the demands of the industry, there are a few steps that can be taken to create an environment that better suits individual needs, yet will still ensure we have capable, talented, accessible and qualified tradespeople on our jobsites.

Accommodating the needs of our workforce doesn't have to come at a significant cost. There are ways to ensure we still have the most highly skilled and available workforce, and finding ways to accommodate that workforce, has the potential to create and even safer, more progressive and more productive workforce.

Some examples include:

- Collective agreement clauses
- Job sharing options
- Health and welfare plans
 - Wellness spending account for childcare
- Member benefit programs

"How can I stay in the trades I love, that provides for me and my family, when I need to start work at 6am, but daycare doesn't open until 7am?"
Tradesperson – Female, 50

Breakdown of solutions

Collective agreement clauses:

As we can see, childcare presents a barrier for many individuals in the trades. As an entire industry, there are ways we can help to overcome the barriers that are currently in place.

Since trade unions do not have direct control over the accessibility and affordability of childcare centres, we can work around available schedules and accommodate those parents that need help. Collective agreement clauses that allow for different start and quit times, protection for those who are absent due to childcare issues, and flexible break times. Here are a few sample clauses that could be incorporated into collective agreements to help deal with these barriers:

Sample Collective Agreement Clauses

Duty to Accommodate:

1. The Company must practice their duty to accommodate under the Canadian Human Rights act up until the point of undue hardship. To demonstrate that the duty to accommodate has been fulfilled, the Company must be able to document the process that was observed in considering and acting on the employees request for accommodation. (Family status is considered a protected ground under the Human Rights Act)
2. Whereas an employer has a Duty to Accommodate under the Canadian Human Rights act, the employer therefor shall, up until the point of undue hardship, have an obligation to adjust practices, polices and rules in order for all employees to fairly participate according to their protected needs.

Lay-Offs:

1. When terminating or laying-off employees that fall into groups that are protected by the Canadian Human Rights Act, proper documentation must be available to prove that the employee has been terminated/laid-off for reasons other than those recognized by the 13 grounds for discrimination, this includes termination due to missed time because of essential family needs and childcare issues.

Start and Quit Times:

1. Employees shall be given an opportunity to adjust start times and quitting times of a shift to accommodate for essential family care/duties up until the point of undue hardship. The company shall deduct wages for the amount of time missed, but shall not issue a warning, suspension or termination in this case. Prior to allowing the change in start time and quitting time, a written contract shall be signed by both parties (employer and union member) in understanding the arrangement. This agreement shall not cause undue hardship for the company but shall provide flexibility for the employee for essential family needs.
2. The employer at a worksite may propose in writing a flexible work schedule to the employer and the union if required. If the schedule is consistent with the terms of the collective agreement, approval if granted by the employer shall be in writing. Employer shall grant permission to the employee provided services are not adversely affected and that work productivity is not operationally hindered.

Work- Family Balance:

1. When possible, an employer shall allow an employee who has childcare obligations to move the start or end of his work shift if the schedule of the daycare services that he uses does not allow him to follow the planned work schedule. The employee in question must provide proof of such situation if requested by the employer.¹⁷

Break Times:

1. Employees shall be given an opportunity to use varied break times if deemed essential for reasons that fall under the Canadian Human Rights Act grounds for discrimination – until in which this accommodation causes undue hardship for the company.

Special Leave / Sick Leave

1. An employee that requires time off from work, may be granted special leave without loss of pay for acceptable reasons. These reasons include but are not limited to:
 - a. Illness / sick leave for the employee or their immediate family members – up to X number of days (10)
 - b. Bereavement – up to X number of days surrounding the date of the death of a loved one, or the funeral (5)
 - c. Personal Leave – up to X number of days (3)
 - d. Domestic Violence Leave – up to X number of days (5)

Domestic Violence Leave for individuals fleeing a violent relationship and are needing assistance of a victim services organizing, attend counselling because of domestic violence, relocation, or any legal proceedings related to being the victim of violence

Job sharing:

Another alternative to accommodating the needs of working parents in the skilled trades is utilizing a job-sharing option where it would be beneficial for employees, and not negatively impact the employer. Not only does job sharing assist with childcare barriers, but it helps people of all backgrounds. Those that need to provide eldercare, those looking to further

¹⁷ https://cpqmci.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Convention_Industrial.pdf page 85 Conseil Provincial International Construction

their education, family commitments, semi-retired and so forth. Having a job share option could potentially benefit the lives of many.

Job sharing is an employee, member, contractor or client-initiated arrangement where two part time employees/members (the job sharers) can share a full-time position. All job share arrangements shall be subject to the approval of the employer and the union and must be confirmed in writing to the employee prior to the commencement of such an arrangement. The aim of job sharing is to provide a more flexible approach to work practices to assist employees/members to address family commitments or work/life balance including but not limited to: transition to retirement, parental duties, family matters, continuing education, recruitment of skilled tradespeople, means of attracting workers from a shrinking or changing labour pool and so on. It is not the intention of this provision to increase or decrease the employer's costs or responsibilities or to increase the number of precarious jobs. The employee must agree to the arrangement.

Job share arrangements should provide flexibility for a) the job-sharers b) the contractor c) the clients. An agreement between these parties should reflect the needs of all those involved and can be customized depending on each scenario.

The combined hours worked by the job share employees/members shall be the same as those worked by a full-time employee, with the option from the contractor/client to adjust. The combination of hours and the roster worked shall be agreed in writing at the commencement of the job share arrangement. A copy of the arrangement shall be kept on each employee's personnel file. Any changes agreed to the job share arrangement shall be committed to writing and help on the job sharers personnel file. Any disputes in relations to the agreed hours will be adjudicated in reference to the latest roster on the job shares personnel file. Vacation time, public holidays and sick days shall be distributed proportionately to each job sharer in the same ratio as the hours per week are worked.

Sample Job Sharing Agreement

Job sharing is an employee, member, contractor or client-initiated arrangement where two part time employees/members (the job sharers) can share a full-time position. The parties make no commitment that job share arrangements will be renewed. The union agrees not to unreasonably withhold its approval so long as it adheres to collective agreements in place. Employees must have the qualifications and ability to perform the duties of the job they are to share. The job left open as a result of the job-sharing arrangement shall be advertised and filled in accordance with the provisions of the collective agreement. Job sharing employees and all other transferred, promoted or acting shall return to their former positions upon expiration of the agreement. The parties make no commitment to accumulate service-related benefits without adjustments. Where a party to a job share arrangement wishes to terminate the arrangement prior to the expiration date, the employee/member shall provide his/her job share partner, the employer and the union with as much advance notice as possible but not less than two weeks' notice. The employer may terminate any job share during the term on the basis of undue hardship with two weeks' notice to the employees affected and the union.

Where an employee is sick or taking annual leave the remaining employee is not expected to relieve. Should they be requested by the employer to relieve the absent partner and agree to relieve, and it is for less than one full week, the extra hours will be paid at overtime rates. Overtime will be paid for all time worked outside of the rostered hours. Job share employees will not be treated less favorably than full time employees.

A job share partner may indicate their intention to terminate a job-sharing arrangement by giving two weeks' notice in writing to the employer. Following termination of the job share arrangement, a job share partner or both partners may return to a position(s) for which they have the demonstrated ability to perform at the same classification level.

Where the employer has concerns about the continuity of the arrangement and a satisfactory resolution has not been reached through consultation the job share may be terminated by the giving of two weeks' notice in writing.¹⁸

Second shift:

"Second shift" is a scheduled work shift that has a later starting time than a regular shift. For example, the "second shift" could start at 9am, instead of 7am. This would allow tradespeople with young children to work on a jobsite while still being able to drop their children off at childcare facilities. Tradespeople working the "second shift" could work an eight-hour workday, if possible. If working later hours is not available, these workers would be required to end their workday at the regularly scheduled time and accept a reduction in hours worked.

The "second shift" would allow tradespeople the opportunity to remain working within their trade, and receive their rate of pay including all of the benefits of union membership, like health and welfare benefits, pension hours, etc. Apprentices would have the opportunity to continue in their trade with hours worked going towards the completion of their apprenticeship. This would also support tradespeople in the advancement of their careers as supervisors, general forepersons, and higher positions within their unions.

Statistics have shown that some of the barriers that occur when tradespeople start a family, push them to discontinue their career in the trades. The "second shift" program would support the retention of these skilled tradespeople, within their trades and their unions. This program would also encourage others to join the trades due to the support of the family unit. Support for young families, and those considering starting a family, could work towards reducing the predicted shortage of skilled tradespeople in the near future.

Union and employer health and welfare benefits:

Employee subsidies or union benefits that include funds to use for childcare.

Offering employer childcare subsidies can increase an employee's satisfaction, eliminate financial stress due to the high cost of quality childcare, and help to increase employee engagement. Employers have the option to create flexible spending accounts to use for their employees.

But what about employees without children? There is potential for them to utilize the funds for eldercare, personal health or other personal commitments that may need to be taken care of during business hours. There are always ways to ensure everyone is included.

¹⁸ Resources used for Job Sharing:

<https://www.lawinsider.com/contracts/62uwp2Q60aY#job-share>
https://www.lawinsider.com/contract/62uwp2Q60aY#job-share_2

Flexible hours / flexible work policy or agreements: (information from CCOHS) ¹⁹

Flexible work arrangements are alternate arrangements or schedules from the traditional working day and week. Employees may choose a different work schedule to meet personal or family needs. Alternatively, employers may initiate various schedules to meet their customer needs. Having the ability to create a flexible work week will allow parents to meet their childcare needs, and still be productive and efficient employees. Unions have the ability to work such provisions into collective agreements, as employers can support this initiative, as there are multiple benefits to a flexible work week, including:

- Increased ability to attract, retain and motivate high-performing and experienced employees
- Reduced absenteeism
- Helps employees manage their responsibilities outside of work
- Increased job satisfaction, energy, creativity, and ability to handle stress
- Increased diversity and inclusivity
- Lower office overhead costs

No matter which program or how many options are available, the duties, expectations, and deadlines should be clearly outlined by the supervisor and agreed upon by both the supervisor, the employee and the union. Supportive organizational culture, clear communication, teamwork and reciprocal support between management and employees will help ensure the success of these initiatives.

Whether formally written into company policy or an agreement between the employee and employer, common arrangements include:

- **Flex time**

Flex time is an arrangement where employees work a full day but they can vary their working hours. These arrangements may include specific guidelines so that a "core" working day exists. Flex time is usually arranged in advance with the employee and employer or supervisor and a set range of start and finish times are established. The total hours of work are not usually affected by this arrangement.

For example, the employee may choose to start between 7:30 and 9:30am, and finish between 3:30 and 5:30pm. This arrangement establishes that core hours are between 9:30am and 3:30pm when all employees will be at work. Lunch periods are usually required by law and for a set length (30 minutes or more). Employees may wish to maintain their start/finish times so that a routine is established and co-workers can become accustomed to each other's' schedules.

- **Reduced hours/part-time**

Employees may choose to work fewer than the standard 37.5 or 40-hour work week. These arrangements may be on a temporary or permanent basis depending on individual circumstances. It may also be considered in some cases for employees with health problems or disabilities. Work hours may be negotiated, or they may be chosen to coincide with peak workload hours depending on the type of business. However, employee benefits and qualification for government programs (such as employment insurance or pension plans) may

¹⁹ <https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/flexible.html>

be affected and should be examined thoroughly before starting a reduced hour or part-time arrangement.

- **Compressed work week**

Compressed work week occurs when an employee works for longer periods of time per day or shift in exchange for a day off. Employees may start earlier or finish later than the standard work day. Compressed work weeks are often initiated by the employee, but sometimes the employer may initiate the option to improve operational efficiency, to maximize production (lower daily start-up costs) or to establish longer business hours, which can enhance customer service.

Common arrangements for a 40-hour work week are working 10 hours per day, 4 days a week; working an extra hour a day with 1 day off every 2 weeks; or working an extra half hour a day and having one day every 3 or 4 weeks off.

Flexible Work Arrangements (information from CCOHS) ²⁰

Childcare fund:

Develop a fund that is able to support union members who are having a particularly difficult time securing and affording quality childcare. The fund could be financially supported by clients/ contractors and administered by the union affiliates such as the BTA.

CUPW is the only union in North America that has negotiated a childcare fund to help its members with their childcare needs. They have eight childcare projects that the fund supports, as well as two national projects for members who have children or adult sons and daughters with disabilities. ²¹

The BTA could connect with CUPW regarding their childcare fund and develop a plan similar to theirs that would suit the needs of BTA members.

CUPW's childcare fund helps members who have the most difficulty finding and affording good childcare:

- early morning, night and evening shift workers
- part-timers
- workers with older children or children with special needs

The objectives of the plan are:

- To help members who have the most difficulty finding or affording high quality childcare. This includes members who work irregular hours, need infant care, have children with special needs or require summer care for school age children.
- To create high quality, affordable childcare. This includes creating innovative childcare services, such as services that meet the needs of shift workers and making existing quality services available and affordable.
- To work with our allies in the childcare community to create high quality, non-profit childcare services for postal workers.²²

The BTA could work with its partners, contractors, and clients within to develop a fund through collective bargaining and negotiations to establish a childcare fund where BTA has the right to control and administer the childcare fund to ensure the program properly represents the membership within the BTA and is best utilized to create a lifestyle that allows

²⁰ <https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/flexible.html>

²¹ <https://www.cupw.ca/en/member-resources/cupw-child-care-fund>

²² <https://www.cupw.ca/en/member-resources/cupw-child-care-fund/about-cupw-child-care-fund>

tradespeople the opportunity to look after their families while still being active and productive workers on jobsites.

On-site daycare or near-site daycare:

Depending on the jobsite, there is potential that an on-site or near-site daycare could be beneficial for both the employer and the employees. This solution would have to be based on a per jobsite basis and would work around the needs of those involved. Having open conversations about the potential of these types of programs and benefits would help to steer the industry toward a more inclusive workforce. BTA would remain open to the potential of developing such a pilot project.

Conclusion:

It is evident that childcare poses an obstacle for many tradespeople, as well as plays a role in the recruitment and retention of new tradespeople and apprentices. Accommodating the needs of our workforce doesn't have to come at a significant cost. There are many ways to ensure we still have the most highly skilled and available workforce. We miss out on talent when childcare is an obstacle.

As an industry, we have the opportunity to develop work environments that allow for accommodation for working parents. From job sharing, to flexible work hours, and ensuring that employment is not negatively effected because of necessary childcare obligations. Our collective voice can lobby government to create more accredited daycare spaces, with longer working hours, 24/7 care and keep the momentum moving on \$10/day childcare for all Canadians.

If we can work towards lifting the barrier of childcare issues for working parents, we can continue what we do best – and that, is putting people to work by providing great jobs, fair wages, safe environments, health and welfare benefits, and lifelong fulfilling careers for people who want and need to work to support their families. This is our business – providing a labour force that is dedicated, skilled, capable, and talented – we just need to ensure we can accommodate the best tradespeople out there without sacrificing our skills and quality of work.

It is possible to build a better Canada, with affordable, accessible, high-quality childcare.

Unless someone like you, cares a whole lot. Nothing's going to get better. It's not. – Dr. Seuss



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**Quotes throughout are based upon real experiences from tradespeople from across Canada, and one from a tradesperson in the USA. They all work in construction trades industries. Though they remain anonymous, these tradespeople understand and support the need for affordable, accessible and high-quality childcare in Canada for parents working in the skilled trades and beyond.*