



Youth Trades Explorer Sampler at Okanagan College's fall class. (Photo contributed)

## Tolko Industries supports Youth Trades Explorer Sampler

The program gives high school students an opportunity to discover trades as a career.

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Vernon Secondary School student Nemo Des Mazes, 16, said she prefers working with her hands and building things rather than sitting in a classroom.

So, when the chance came to take part in the Youth Trades Explorer Sampler at Okanagan College, she eagerly signed up. The program gives high school students an opportunity to discover the trades as a career with hands-on technical training in six fields including plumbing, carpentry and electrical.

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The innovative program is a partnership between School District 22 and the College. But it's not only attracting students, but it's also garnered the interest and support of a local employer: Tolko Industries.

Tolko Industries has donated \$11,000 plus in-kind support toward the training at Okanagan College.

"We are passionate about youth and this fits with our long-term strategy to build our workforce and our communities," said Tanya Wick, Tolko's Vice President, People and Services. "This program is helping young people gain the skills and experience that can help set them up for success."

While this year's student cohort is only in their second week of trades training, they've already progressed from building a deck chair to picnic tables. The lumber for their projects was also donated from Tolko's Armstrong mill.

"It's always very meaningful for us at the College to see an employer in the region invest in the training of our students," said Teresa Kisilevich, Okanagan College's Associate Dean of Trades and Apprenticeship. "Students see that local businesses want them to succeed."

Both School District 22 and Okanagan College are interested in elevating trades training as a career choice for students earlier on in their education.

"The program can be a game changer for students who aren't always successful in academics by empowering them to dive and explore a variety of trades at a full-time level for 10 weeks," said Joe Rogers, Superintendent of Schools at School District 22. "This gives kids an opportunity to go towards their passion. If you put a kid where they are happy they will do good work. It's also a win-win for our community as there is a shortage of trades workers."

Patrick Kenny, who is participating in the current program, agreed. He said he's always known that he's wanted to get into the trades.

"I am really liking the program, and the College is welcoming."

In addition to lumber, Tolko is exploring how else it can support the Youth Trades Sampler program, including having the students take a tour of their Armstrong mill.

The students are working in Okanagan College's new Trades Training Centre, which opened in August. The \$6.2-million, 1,250 square-metre (13,450 square-foot) facility can accommodate approximately 150 students per year and features a dedicated welding shop and multi-use spaces in which the College can deliver training in carpentry, electrical, and plumbing and pipefitting, along with specialized training like the Youth Trades Sampler.

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