



Terry Murphy, Landscape Ontario; Amy Parps, co-op student, White Oaks Secondary School; Wendy Peters, co-op teacher and Andy Weiss, Sheridan Nurseries, work together in landscape technology



Gerlinde Herrmann, President, HRPAAO

School-Work Experiences: A Win-Win for Employers and Students

As a small business owner, Gerlinde Herrmann sees the benefits of offering school-work experience opportunities to high school students. "I am personally committed to having students in my workplace. The students benefit and so does my business. I believe all employers have a role to play in helping to shape the workforce of tomorrow."

Ms. Herrmann is also President of the Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario (HRPAO) and a member of the Provincial Partnership Council.

On November 12, 2004, approximately 200 employers, HR professionals, educators and students met at the Sheraton Centre Hotel in Toronto for the forum "Who is Going to Work for You in the Next Ten Years?" Attendees discussed the important role that organizations can play in providing high school students with work experiences. "We are expecting serious labour shortages in the future, especially in the skilled trades. Employers must get involved," says Ms. Herrmann.

"Jobs are becoming more technically-based, which requires more hands-on work experience. Our members are looking for new employees who have that experience," says Bob Hutchison, Vice Chair and Honourary Treasurer with the Toronto Board of Trade.

Len Crispino, President and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, highlighted that many students are finishing university and then going to community colleges to get practical training. School-work opportunities can give high school students a head start on focusing their interests and developing the skills they will need to enter the workforce.

SIGN UP NOW for the next forum for HR professionals on Tuesday, April 26, 2005 at the Sheraton Centre Hotel in Toronto. The forum is free and will offer practical tips on establishing school-work opportunities. To register for the forum or to share a school-work success story, please contact Claire DeVeale at 416-644-2910.

Wednesdays at the Zoo: A Co-op Placement

Every Wednesday, Melanie Croydon-Sugarman from Ursula Franklin Academy arrives at the Toronto Zoo for a busy day of work. Huge bins full of food are distributed each morning to feed the animals. There are separate bags for each animal, with varying amounts of fruits and vegetables to be chopped. While Melanie had to read the instructions when she first started her placement, by now she is confident in arranging the morning meal.

"I love working with the animals and didn't realize how much I would," says Melanie. "It's neat to be able to interact with animals that you only see on television, in the wild, or behind glass at a zoo." She says she had no idea what really went on behind-the-scenes. She is also responsible for cleaning the exhibits, taking away dirty dishes, changing the water and flipping over the substrate (the wood chips on the floor) – all part of the behind-the-scenes action.

Melanie had to interview for her co-op placement, competing against several other students and is grateful to have been chosen. She says she is always learning, and everyone around her is really patient and approachable. She has been lucky to absorb tips about different kinds of animals from her co-workers.

Her placement is over and above what she expected. Before the holidays, there was a staff shortage in the Australasia section. She was prepped the week before and cleaned the area all on her own – something she had never done before. Her responsibilities included the lorikeets, kookaburras, the swamp wallaby, and Peter, the giant rabbit. "It was a challenge. I think I took longer than other people, but I was proud of having accomplished that."



Melanie Croydon-Sugarman, co-op student from Ursula Franklin Academy, feeds a tree kangaroo

"I would hire someone who had work experience in a heart beat with a 70% average rather than someone with a higher average with no work skills."

**Passport to Prosperity
Employer Focus
Group Comment,
November 2004**

Finding the Answers to Questions on Workplace Safety

Workplace safety for young workers remains a big concern for educators and employers alike. There are two excellent resources for those who want to learn more about young worker safety.

The *Passport to Safety* website contains an online certification program that gives employers, teachers and students valuable information about health and safety in the workplace. For more information, visit www.passporttosafety.com/.

The philosophy of the *Passport to Safety* program is: "The antidote to injury is attitude: an injection of awareness, caring, and learning into the hearts and minds of everyone around us."

The WorkSmartOntario website, maintained by the Ontario Ministry of Labour, is another excellent source of information. The site contains tip sheets for students, employers and teachers, as well as numerous links for other sites on occupational health and safety. The site can be accessed at www.worksmartontario.gov.on.ca. Another useful website on young worker safety is www.youngworker.ca.



"Students can be great ambassadors if you can give them the right experience."

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What's in a Fingerprint? A Co-op Placement at the Ontario Science Centre

It is fierce competition trying to land a co-op placement at the Ontario Science Centre, but Joyce Cheng – who was a grade 12 student at St. Roberts Catholic High School in York region last year – managed to do just that. Joyce loved the television show CSI and thought it would be pretty cool to try her hand at investigating.

As a biology student, Joyce was impressed with the opportunity to work in a DNA finger-testing lab and in the educational centre; she had hands-on lab experience, as well as a chance to do some teaching. Joyce wanted to explore forensic science, but thought that teaching might be interesting as well. Her co-op placement allowed her to test the waters and reinforced the idea of combining her interests.



Joyce Cheng, co-op student from St. Roberts Catholic High School, demonstrates a lab technique to students as part of her co-op placement at the Ontario Science Centre

"I learned more about how the DNA process works – there's a lot more to it than what you read in a biology text book," says Joyce.

Joyce was responsible for setting up and cleaning the lab, and gathering and preparing lab materials. Because the lab is also used as part of the curriculum in the educational programs at the Science Centre, Joyce had the opportunity to help science educators with the program and take part in science demonstrations. As a bonus, Joyce created new handouts for younger students to use. Her supervisor noticed when she needed to be challenged and pushed her to try new things.

The skills that Joyce now uses in her university biology lab are those that she learned at the Science Centre. She encourages all students to try co-op placements, a great way to explore possible career paths.

Ontario Employers Identify Skills for the Workplace

What skills and attributes do high school students need to be successful in the workplace? According to two Ontario employer focus groups who met in November 2004, there are many:

- Confidence
- Creativity
- Communication skills
- People skills
- Initiative/motivation
- A positive attitude
- Willingness to learn
- Decision-making skills
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Resilience
- Reliability
- Ability to deliver, be open, accountable and trusting

Students can enhance their workplace environments by:

- Being problem solvers
- Showing initiative
- Providing creative ideas
- Providing energy and enthusiasm in the workplace

The employers in the focus groups agreed that work experiences help students increase their self-confidence and learn more about workplace norms and practices. They also suggested students can benefit from exposure to a variety of careers, ranging from customer service to manufacturing.

Overall, Ontario employers felt that it is important to provide work experiences to students in communities across the province through *Passport to Prosperity*



Co-op students Joyce Cheng, St. Roberts Catholic High School; Shane McCowan, Maplewood High School and Melanie Croydon-Sugarman, Ursula Franklin Academy, talk about their placements.

School-Work Opportunities Finding the Option that Suits Your Workplace

School-work opportunities can accommodate any employer's busy schedule.

Employers need only commit an hour a day – giving a career talk, attending a career fair or facilitating a workplace tour to promote their line of business as a possible career option. Job-shadowing can take place over one or two days, pairing a student with an employee to observe activities in the workplace.

Employers can also custom-design a placement that lasts from one to four weeks for students to gain hands-on experience as part of their school curriculum. The longer term option of co-op is also available over several months. Two co-op placements are highlighted in this Update.

Ongoing mentoring throughout the year gives employers a chance to act as role models and to advise students on career and life options.

Your local business-education council or training board can provide you with more details about how you can get involved in your community. For more information please visit:
www.olpg.on.ca/en/home.htm

Partner Profile: Junior Achievement

For 50 years Junior Achievement, an international non-profit organization, has provided hands-on experiences to help young people understand the economics of life. In partnership with business and educators, Junior Achievement gives students work exposure through one-day programs, as well as work experience through year-long programs.

Junior Achievement programs help students develop critical thinking and decision making skills, identified by employers as essential for the workplace.

Volunteers are the heart of Junior Achievement. In the 2003/2004 school year, approximately 6,000 trained volunteers delivered JA programs in Ontario. Junior Achievement is endorsed by the business community, in alliance with the school boards and enthusiastically embraced by students!





"I like seeing the students blossom," says teacher Karen Pal, from Downsview Secondary School, pictured here with her co-op student, Dahlia Hunter.

Educator Profile: Karen Pal

Karen Pal believes that it is critical to help students realize their goals in life. A teacher at Downsview Secondary School, Ms. Pal is a curriculum leader for special education. Four years ago, Ms. Pal helped create a co-operative education option for the students in her program, as many of them were headed straight to the workforce after graduation and urgently needed more work experience. The students have gained marketable skills in their co-op placements – skills that have helped them find jobs.

Once Ms. Pal has recruited a willing employer, she then sets up a three-way meeting. She establishes a relationship with the employer and a line of communication. She is there to support both the students and the employers.

"Preparing the students in advance is a must," says Ms. Pal. All of the students are instructed as to the employer's expectations of them in the workplace, since many of them have no previous work experience.

What does she like most about her job? "I like seeing the students become responsible young adults; seeing them blossom," says Ms. Pal. "At school, many students had difficulty demonstrating their skills and talents, and now – in many cases – the employers have come to rely on them."

Matching Students with Employers: Working Together to Reach the Same Goals

There are currently more than 700,000 students attending 830 secondary schools in the public and separate school systems in Ontario. There are approximately 23,000 employers offering work experience opportunities to students, but the numbers just don't add up.

High school teachers have identified specific occupational areas that students want to explore, but which are short on placements. Meanwhile, many employers know they are facing a shortage of workers in specific areas and want to encourage more young people to enter their fields.

Here are just a few of the areas in which student placements are being sought and in which workplace shortages have been identified:

- Social Services
- Mechanical Engineering Technologists
- Tool and Die Makers
- Accounting
- Graphic Design
- Photography

Students are also looking for work experience opportunities in the following employment areas:

- Computer Animation
- Architectural Design
- Interior Design
- Nutrition
- Naturopathy
- Electrician
- Robotics

ATTENTION ALL EMPLOYERS IN ALL SECTORS.

Offering students work experience can be a great way to address anticipated shortages and expose students to dynamic career choices in local communities. Let's bring these interests together.



A student learning new skills in the aviation industry

Get involved!

For more information about Passport to Prosperity, please call 1-800-387-5514 or visit the website at www.edu.gov.on.ca/passport/.

For information on providing work experience to a high school student in your community, please contact the Ontario Business Education Partnership (OBEP). OBEP is a province-wide network of 26 business-education councils and local training boards facilitating partnerships with employers and schools in local communities. For more information call 1-888-672-7996 or visit www.olpg.on.ca/en/home.htm.

"We don't expect young people to have 10 years of work experience. Just do something, get involved. Don't be one of the kids hanging out at the mall with a cell phone attached to your ear."

**Passport to Prosperity
Focus Group Comment,
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