

The Big Deal About Skills

There's no escaping the fact that it's a tough job market for the most part here in Renfrew County. Agriculture and forestry served us well in the past, and while they're still very critical, times have changed. The most recent employment information available says that the number of employers in the county is down 7.3%, and the shift is away from resource-based jobs to jobs in public administration, health care, social support and retail. There are also great opportunities to be had in the tourism industry, and for other entrepreneurs of all kinds. We also know that Renfrew County has a greater-than-typical share of people older than 50, and that more than one-third of us in that age group are either still working, or seeking a better job, or wanting to re-enter the workforce after an absence.

How does this link to skills? Well, we all have skills that we use on a daily basis, whether it be in the workforce, at home or in our community. When they're working well, we hardly give them a second thought. But when something changes in our life, like finishing school and looking for work, being laid off from a job we relied on, dealing with our children's increasingly complicated homework, needing a better-paying job, or even wanting to volunteer to keep our local community vibrant – that's when skill gaps appear.

What might they look like? Here are just a few examples. You thought your high school math and English would be good enough for anything you wanted to do by way of work, but all of a sudden new machinery has arrived in your workplace and the manual you need to use is very complex. Or you've got a real opportunity to take on different, even better paying work but you know that you'll have to write a lot more in the new job, be very comfortable using a computer and maybe even speak in public. Or you've been out of the workforce for awhile and every job posting you look at seems to require skills you're pretty sure you don't have ... or maybe you did have them a while back, but you haven't used them.

If your life is changing, and you're curious about how your current skills measure up, the Training and Learning Centre of Renfrew County offers free, customized and confidential ways for you to confirm the skills you have, identify the ones that might need some work, and develop a plan to get where you want to go.

Coming next time:

Why improving your skills is a great thing to do, regardless of your current employment situation.

Cathy Lyons