

My name is Cara Flannery, and I am the Outreach & Pre-apprenticeship Coordinator for the Augusta Electrical JATC. I'm also the mother of a daughter in a rural community and am a former high school teacher and ELO Coordinator. As a mother, and as a former public educator, I am concerned about the number of career exploration and training opportunities available in rural communities, and I believe so strongly in pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs that I left my career as a high school educator to dedicate my work to strengthening and growing these training programs.

Through a partnership with Nokomis Regional High, we run an all-trades pre-apprenticeship program. Last year, we had 16 students complete the program, and currently have 7 students enrolled. The goal of the program is to help students explore careers in the construction trades and apprenticeship opportunities—neither of which are spoken of frequently in their school when discussing post-secondary options. The program utilizes the Multi-Core Craft curriculum (which was developed and approved by the Building Trades National Apprenticeship and Training Committee) and involves hands-on learning in the same learning labs our electrical apprentices use. Professionals from different trades visit our students as guest speakers or as guest trainers for hands-on labs. Just last week, UA716 (Maine Plumbers & Pipefitters) visited to teach students how to measure, cut, and solder copper piping. They also spoke to students about their apprenticeship program: the ins and outs of how their program works, the expectations, and how to apply.

Without pre-apprenticeship programs, young adults in rural communities might not have opportunities to explore careers, build career-ready skills, or learn industry-specific skills. Rural Maine—though beautiful—can be isolated, and young adults living in these communities are limited to what they can see around them. Job opportunities are also limited. Pre-apprenticeships allow students to see and imagine more opportunities, test-drive careers before fully committing, and help students develop the confidence to apply for apprenticeship programs. Going into anything “blind” can be frightening for anyone, and pre-apprenticeship programs are an engaging preview of what to expect in the world of work—not just as an apprentice.

Pre-apprenticeship is a great means of recruiting and keeping qualified candidates. Of our 16 students in last year's group, 5 were seniors. Of the 5 seniors, 4 applied for our program, and 3 are still enrolled. In February, the one senior who had applied and decided to go to college contacted us asking whether there would be work available for him this summer.

I frequently hear discussions regarding how to get more women into the trades. Pre-apprenticeship is an effective means of attracting and retaining more underserved populations. I'll share a brief story about a young lady I met while I was the ELO Coordinator at Nokomis. She was working at Wendy's at the time and was still uncertain about which path to take after high school. She didn't have a specific career in mind, only mentioning childcare. Looking at her transcripts, it was clear math and science were strengths, but she was unable to identify careers she could best utilize them. When I started my work with the Augusta Electrical JATC, I was thrilled to see her name on the roster. Construction trades were not a career she had mentioned, and she ended up being one of the top students in our first pre-apprenticeship group. She applied for our electrical apprenticeship program, started work the Monday after high school graduation, and will be completing her first year of the apprenticeship program in a few months. Without the pre-apprenticeship program, she likely would not have considered a career in the trades or had the confidence to apply for an apprenticeship—especially as a female.

Thank you for listening to my testimony, and I hope to see pre-apprentice programs in Maine continue to enrich lives and strengthen our workforce.

Cara Flannery
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