

RECIDIVISM TO REVITALIZATION

The Skilled Trades Development Program (STDP)
Building Ontario Together

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

About The Skilled Trades Development Program (STDP)	3
The Vision For Socio-Economic Growth In Ontario	4
Mentorship Unlocks Infinite Potential	5
Twelve Weeks of Skills Transformation	6
The Future	7
Breaking Down Barriers – Rebuilding Hope	8
Spotlight: The NorthStar Program	10
STDP A Beacon of Systems Change, Community Impact, and Personal Transformation	11
Expanding The STDP Across Ontario	12
Program Partnerships - The Keys To Success	13

ABOUT THE SKILLED TRADES DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (STDP)

Based in the Lawrence West community and serving youth in underserved communities across Toronto, the Oaks Revitalization Association (ORA) Skilled Trades Development Program (STDP) serves justice-involved, justice-affected, and marginalized young people across Ontario. The program delivers personalized life-skills and mentorship alongside hands-on career training and employment in the skilled trades. The STDP is designed to achieve three core outcomes:



Reduce rates of recidivism by preparing marginalized young people in Ontario to pursue and sustain meaningful careers in the skilled trades industry.

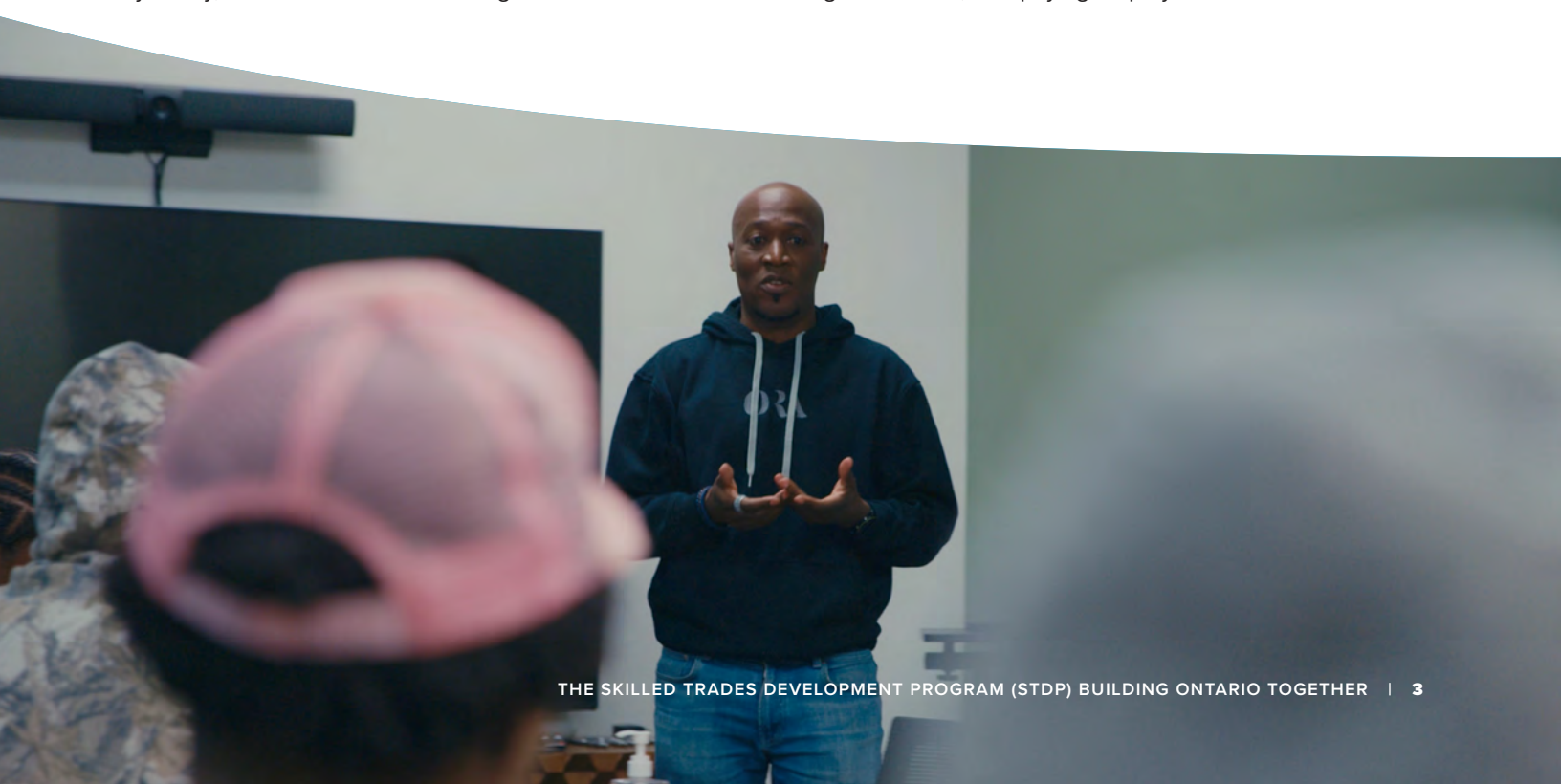


Fill the gap in Ontario's significant skilled labour shortage by developing a capable and work-ready talent pipeline.



Support Ontario's economic and social outcomes by enabling unemployed and underemployed young people to transition into stable, tax-contributing employment and establish their financial well-being.

The program offers a gateway to renewed opportunity for young people facing barriers to community re-entry and advancement. Regardless of past challenges, STDP participants are supported at every stage of their rehabilitation journey, with a focus on overcoming historic obstacles and securing sustainable, well-paying employment for the future.



THE VISION FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROWTH IN ONTARIO

As Ontario continues to grow into a socio-economic hub in Canada, the ORA aims to contribute to the province's success by ensuring all people in Ontario, especially the most marginalized and those left behind, can join-in and enjoy the socio-economic growth that our province aims to create. While Ontario's planned infrastructure spending of \$210 billion over 10-years is ambitious, it requires the skilled trades industries in sectors including transit, highway construction, healthcare, and housing to be fully resourced with skilled and talented construction workers, plumbers, dry wall experts, electricians, masonry workers, and carpenters.

For justice affected and justice involved youth, the journey of reintegration into society once they have been released from incarceration is an important yet arduous one. These youth are often the most underemployed and least engaged, facing significant hurdles to belong in society and community. Their continued marginalization not only leads to isolation, it vastly increases the probability of re-entry into the criminal justice system, and ultimately in increased levels of recidivism in our province.

The STDP is a social innovation that addresses shortages within Ontario's skilled trades sector by significantly bolstering the skilled trades talent supply chain. We disrupt the vicious cycle of recidivism in the criminal justice system through a tried and tested program that focuses on the humanity, skills, and potential of young justice affected people, empowering them to learn, gain employment, establish a successful career, and build their financial strength and well-being.





MENTORSHIP UNLOCKS INFINITE POTENTIAL

At the centre of the STDP is our robust personalized mentorship initiative, which serves as the cornerstone of our approach. Through trust building approaches including open discussion, story-telling, and individual counselling, we offer guidance, support, and encouragement to young people. Our aim is to equip young people with the tools and the mindset to rebuild their confidence, overcome the situations that led to involvement in the judicial system, and set new aspirational goals for their future.

We have seen amazing transformations in the way justice affected youth embrace a new hope and a level of optimism that underscores their deep-rooted ambitions to be healthy, responsible, and productive people in their respective communities. The STDP Group Mentorship module is specifically designed to draw on life-lessons, recognize mistakes, and create a renewed hope for success in young people.

Career aspirations are an important bedrock to envisaging a bright future. To address the complex and evolving challenges faced by today's youth, the STDP employs a suite of direct engagement tools. Over the span of 12 weeks, the STDP immerses young participants in a structured program designed to instigate profound changes in their lives.

The program commences with mentorship, offering guidance and support, which serves as the initial stepping stone on their journey of personal growth. Subsequently, we progress to encompass employment training,

equipping youth with vital skills and practical knowledge. Ultimately, the culmination of this transformative process is the assurance of gainful employment in various trades, a guarantee extended to all program graduates.

Once young people complete our 12- week program, they are ready to embrace the next stage; identifying a skilled trade career path and learning hands-on skills and training to literally rebuild themselves and build Ontario.

The skilled trades offer one of the quickest paths to skills building, financial security, and ongoing generational financial stability. The program emphasises career development and vocation building over mere minimum wage job placement, equipping young people in our program with the skills and knowledge needed for sustainable, fulfilling, and rewarding employment opportunities. By focusing on long-term career development rather than temporary contract work, we ensure the opportunity for financial safety and security is constant throughout our program.

TWELVE WEEKS OF SKILLS TRANSFORMATION

Over a 12-week period, the STDP program guides justice-affected youth through a structured, four-stage journey. It begins by helping participants reimagine what is possible for their lives, then supports them in developing new ways of thinking about themselves, their communities, and their future. Building on this foundation, the program cultivates confidence while strengthening essential life and professional skills. As a result, participants are equipped with the tools, mindset, and readiness needed to secure meaningful employment and pursue healthy, productive, and successful lives.

Week 1- 3 Interview

The initial phase of the STDP commences with a preliminary phone interview. This is followed by a comprehensive in-person interview designed to explore the candidate's qualifications and compatibility in greater detail. Concurrently, we perform thorough background checks and reference verifications to ensure the candidate's reliability and integrity. Additionally, we conduct risk assessments to evaluate potential security or compliance issues associated with the candidate. This multi-tiered approach ensures a robust evaluation process, essential for maintaining high standards within our program.

Week 4 - 5

Revolutionary coaching and immersive mentorship program, harnessing time-tested strategies from the realms of entrepreneurship and the lessons passed down through generations of successful trades people. Our approach draws inspiration from ancient wisdom, which serves as the cornerstone of our program, guiding participants on a transformative journey toward securing their place within the Canadian middle class through opportunities in the skilled trades.

Week 6 - 8

The Skills Training segment of our program is conducted in collaboration with a renowned skilled trade training facility. Through this partnership, our clients receive specialized training that equips them with valuable skills necessary for the workforce. Upon completion of this training, participants are awarded certifications or "tickets," which serve as recognized credentials across the industry. These certifications enable our clients to work safely and with confidence on various job sites throughout the country. This component of the program not only enhances the employability of our clients but also ensures they meet national safety and performance standards, preparing them for successful careers in their chosen trades.

Week 9 - 12

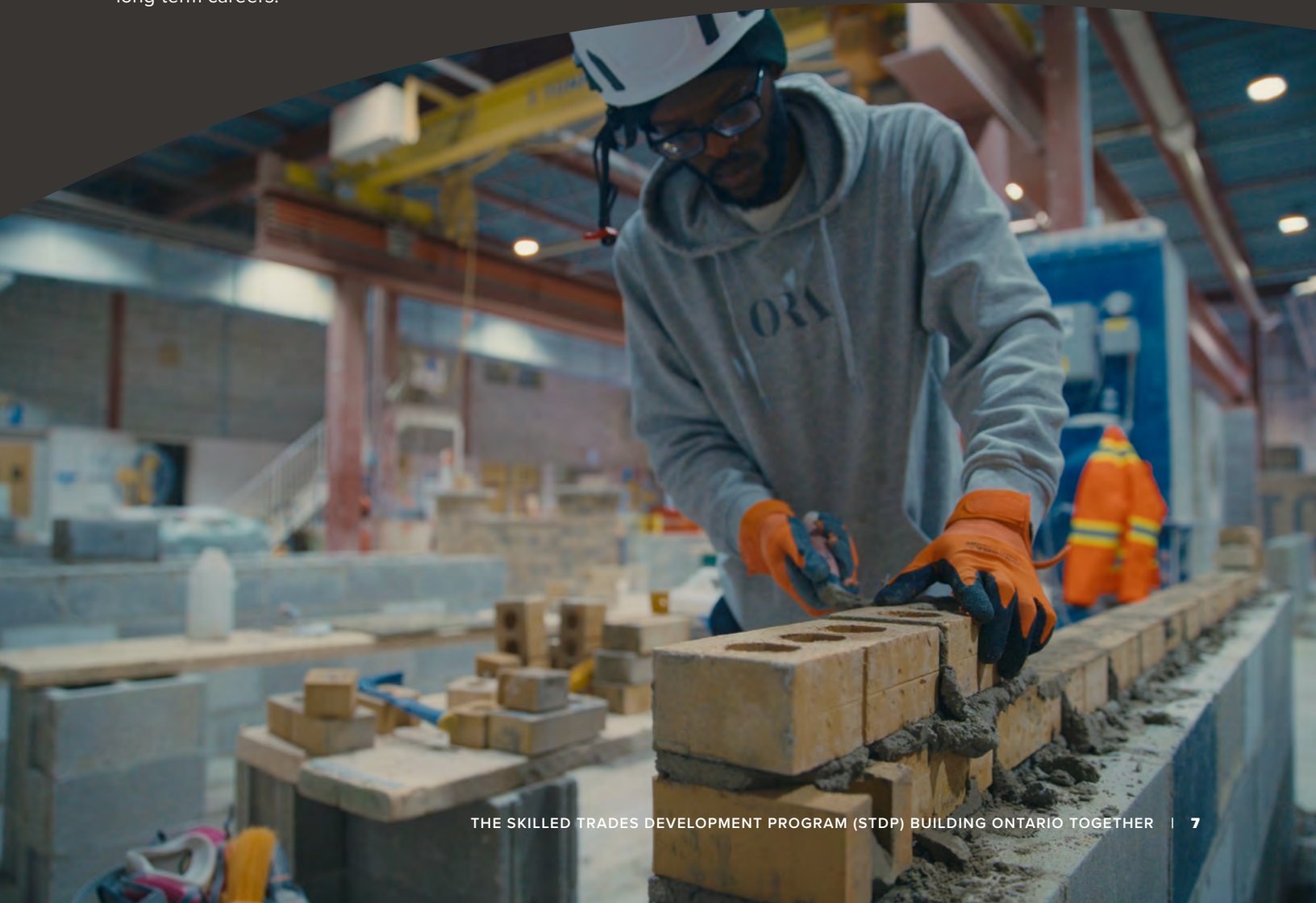
Upon completion of the skills training portion of our program, we transition our focus towards preparing our clients for the workforce. This next phase involves continuous mentoring, where we offer personalized guidance and support to ensure clients are fully prepared for job searches and employment challenges. Additionally, we provide comprehensive assistance with resume writing, helping clients to effectively showcase their new skills and experiences in a professional format. We also conduct interview preparation sessions, which include mock interviews and feedback, equipping our clients with the confidence and techniques needed to excel during real job interviews. These efforts are aimed at smoothing the pathway to employment, enhancing job prospects, and ultimately supporting our clients in securing meaningful employment in their trained fields.

THE FUTURE

After the skilled trades training segment is completed, the collaboration between our training partners and the STDP shifts toward assisting participants in pursuing employment opportunities. Using our broad network of recruitment partners and industry connections, we support participants to create their CV'S, teach them how to look for work, and prepare them for job interviews and construction site visits. This is an important step as they explore opportunities for employment that reflect their newly acquired skills, interests, and long-term career goals.

While the STDP provides strong support, employment is not guaranteed. Many factors, such as job availability, individual readiness, labour-market conditions, and employer requirements, play a role in each participant's employment journey. Our role is to guide, advocate, and prepare participants to the best of our ability so they can confidently enter the workforce and pursue sustainable, long-term careers.

Despite these variables, the STDP has demonstrated a high success rate in securing meaningful employment placements for participants who complete the program and remain engaged in the process. Our structured approach, strong partnerships, and commitment to mentorship all contribute to these positive outcomes.





BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS – REBUILDING HOPE

More than one million Canadian youth live in poverty¹. Time and again, this becomes their story:

Growing up in Ontario's immigrant communities, their caretakers or parents were focused on survival. This meant caretakers worked up to three minimum wage jobs in a day and cared for younger or senior members of their family. It meant that caretakers were simply overwhelmed with managing the lack of opportunities afforded to them, such as affordable housing, earning liveable wages, finding employment, or managing their personal health. The impact of these scenarios also meant that few adults had the time or opportunity to provide guidance to the youth

that they cared for, and this was especially true of male role models who were often absent in young people's lives.

These are only some of the realities that confront young people in Canada's equity-denied communities, where systemic poverty has a devastating effect on their potential to succeed. We know that high school graduation rates in Canada are at their lowest in some of our most deprived neighbourhoods. Unifor, Canada's largest private sector union, acknowledges that:

“Across Canada, the average high school dropout rate ranges from 7-13%. However, in low-income communities across the country the average high school dropout rate dramatically increases to 30-50%.”

¹ Analysis: Child poverty is on the rise in Canada, putting over 1 million kids at risk

Low educational attainment increases the likelihood of unemployment, which in turn has a compounding effect on rates of poverty, creating multi-generational systemic challenges and barriers that prevent young people from succeeding as they transition into building an independent life as young adults.

With few life experiences and fewer opportunities to prosper, life as a young person in a low-income neighbourhood creates a cycle of disenfranchisement; the opportunities for success become extremely limited. With almost a quarter of young Black people experiencing unemployment, the options for immigrant and diverse communities appear limited. Faced with this reality, young people living with poverty are led to believe that crime is a viable path to financial gain, to keep a roof over your head, to help their family, to find belonging in their community, or simply to survive.

Given these circumstances, a sequence of poor decisions matched with urgent needs, leads some young people to commit crime and be known by the police, become justice involved, and spend time in a youth offenders facility, or experience incarceration in an adult prison.

The STDP has the data to correlate a host of societal challenges that persist in a cycle of pervasive poverty, deficiencies in education, and a conspicuous lack of opportunities. We know that 77% of youth appearing in court had subsequent contact with police two years after their court appearance. Furthermore, after initial contact with the corrections system, 85% of youth had subsequent contact with police within two years².

² [Department of Justice: Evaluation of the Youth Justice Initiative, 2021](#)





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NorthStar

SPOTLIGHT: THE NORTHSTAR PROGRAM

While the STDP primarily supports justice involved youth who are in the community, in 2025 we collaborated with Toronto South Detention Centre to extend our pilot program to include youth who are on pre-release programs, yet still serving their prison sentences.

The ORA's NorthStar Program situated within the Toronto South Detention Centre has now run for two consecutive seasons over the past year, and impacted 72 young people. Through this branch of our program, we deliver a pre-release program providing personalized and group mentorship to young people still in custody. The NorthStar program creates a clear pathway to

our STDP upon young people's custodial release. This unique project has received praise from our young participants and the Ontario Solicitor General's office for instilling vital hope for a better future among young people in custody. Our aim is to continue to expand this trial program, making it a permanent service delivered by our team.

STDP A BEACON OF SYSTEMS CHANGE, COMMUNITY IMPACT, AND PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION



1,168 applicants applied to
join our program



230 joined our program



211 youth have graduated
from the STDP and are
contributing to the strength
of the Canadian economy



**26 youth are in full time
employment** in our first year
of operation our second year
stats are likely to more than
double this figure



200 youth are waiting
to join our program



75% of our youth are
justice-affected or justice-
involved individuals at
risk of reoffending



Our program saved Ontario taxpayers more than **\$3,380,000** in
incarceration costs in our first year of operation. Each incarcerated
individual costs taxpayers **\$130,000 per year**.

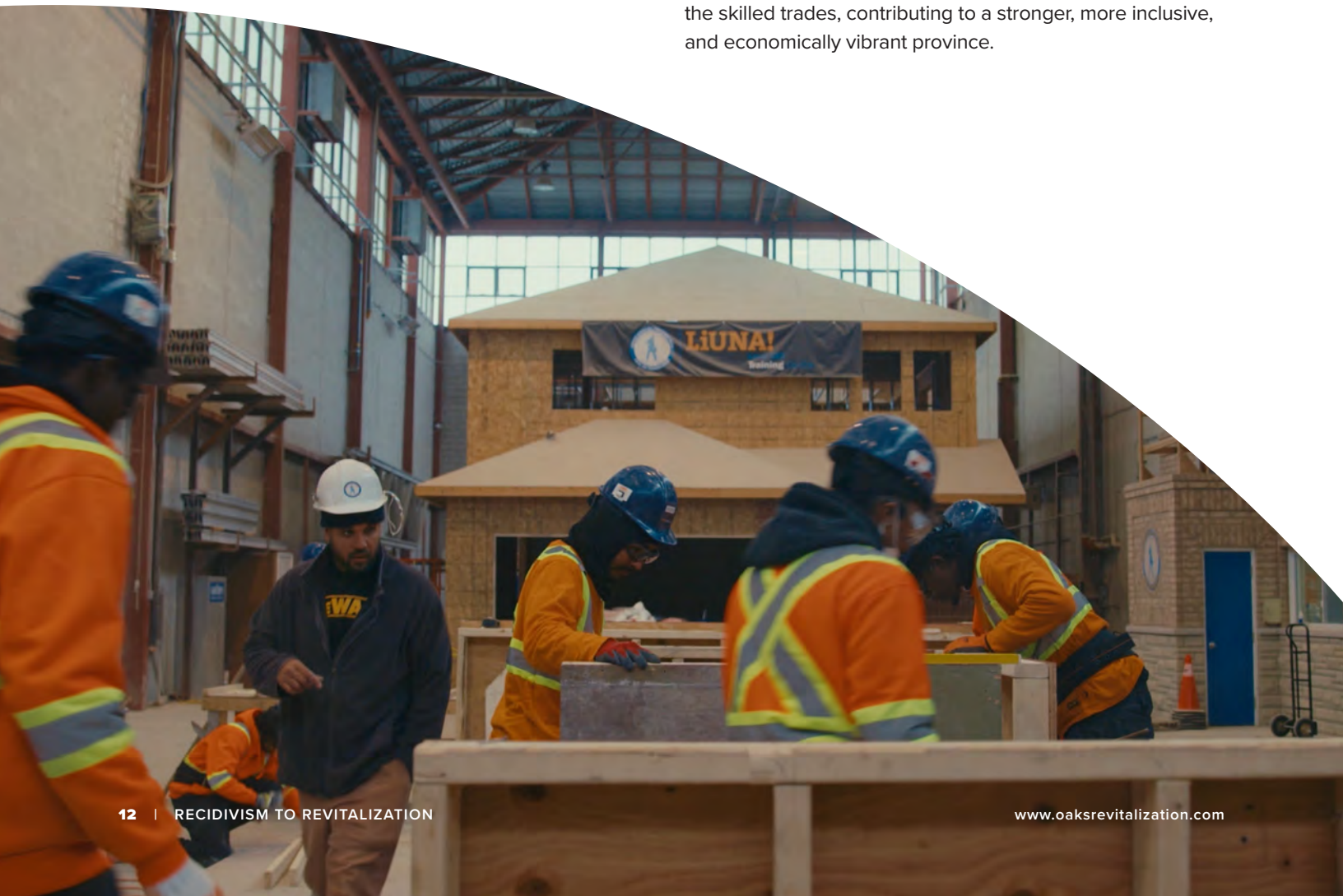
EXPANDING THE STDP ACROSS ONTARIO

Over the next three years, we have a clear and urgent opportunity to expand the impact of the Skilled Trades Development Program (STDP) and reach significantly more justice-affected youth across Ontario.

Demand for the program continues to exceed capacity, with a growing waitlist of young people seeking a second chance. In response, we aim to increase enrollment for additional participants, while expanding beyond Toronto into multiple communities across the province. At the same time, we will strengthen our impact by extending our NorthStar prison program, ensuring that youth still in custody are introduced early to the STDP, and can begin to envision a pathway to employment, stability, and success upon release.

To realize this vision, we are seeking to more than double our existing investments from government and partner with private donors to reach new communities and affect the lives of many more youth. These resources will directly reduce the STDP waitlist, expand access to underserved regions, and sustain critical pre-release programming for youth in custody.

The STDP presents an opportunity for investment in people, communities, and the future of Ontario's workforce. With the right support, and the commitment of our partners, we will equip justice-affected youth with the skills, confidence, and opportunities needed to secure meaningful employment in the skilled trades, contributing to a stronger, more inclusive, and economically vibrant province.



PROGRAM PARTNERSHIPS - THE KEYS TO SUCCESS

The STDP's program partners are organizations that help to refer, train, recruit and certify our young program participants so they can be well prepared on the pathway to their new careers as professionals in the skilled trades. Partners and their roles include:

Consultation and advisory partners who provide strategic guidance and sector expertise in support of the Skilled Trades Development Program.



Training and certification partners provide STDP youth with the essential credentials, practical skills, and industry-recognized qualifications needed to enter the skilled trades and pursue meaningful employment opportunities in the sector.







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THE FUTURE IS IN YOUR HANDS

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