

## **OCCA shifts focus amid pandemic to encourage students to pursue construction industry careers**

Angela Gismondi August 20, 2020



Like many other groups, the Ontario Construction Careers Alliance (OCCA) has had to get creative to engage students during the coronavirus pandemic.

The mandate of the alliance is to promote construction as a first-choice career pathway in high schools, job fairs and other events, but COVID-19 has made that task challenging.

As the OCCA's career co-ordinator, Nicole Stoikos has been focusing on social media since she started in the role almost a year ago.

“At first my role was mainly to attend schools, events, job fairs and trade shows and I would do a presentation on the construction industry and overall why it's a great pathway to choose,” Stoikos said.

“With COVID, schools shut down, events shut down, so what I did was I focused a lot more on social media and posted a lot of informational things out there for people to see. On top of that,

OCCA did create a short, two-minute video about the industry as well that I sent to school boards and all the teacher contacts I had to send out to students.”

[The video can be found here.](#)

“It was a very quick turnaround video,” said **Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario and president of the OCCA**, adding it was released at the end of May with just a few weeks of school left.

“We were waiting for reopening and it became clear to us sometime in May that it wasn’t happening. When the schools were shut down we thought what are ways that we can continue to have a presence?”

When COVID-19 hit, promoting and educating students on construction careers through social media became even more important.

“Social media is the number one thing because students are always on social media — not only students, everyone is on social media, so we thought that would be the best way to connect,” Stoikos explained. “Since COVID I think a lot more people realize how essential of a service the trades are and the trades and all the other essential workers have gotten a lot more attention.”

She revamped all the OCCA’s social media platforms, focusing on the Instagram account first.

“My goal was to make it look like an actual business platform with a theme and informational posts,” said Stoikos. “Since I started, I’ve almost doubled the followers just from consistent posts.”

The key is consistency, she added.

“If I only post once a week or every few weeks I’m not going to grow the page so I post either every day or every other day,” she noted. “As well I add a lot of hashtags and that’s really important too.”

More recently, Stoikos started focusing on Tik Tok.

“That’s the biggest platform right now that all students and young people are on,” she said. “An idea that we had was to create Tik Toks and I’m actually in them. The good thing about Tik Tok is you can see the amount of views it has and the likes.”

Moving forward, she hopes to start attending jobsites to film Tik Toks.

“It’s a quick, one-minute video, with action shots, so that way they have all that information in front of them,” said Stoikos.

It’s also really important to make sure the videos are trending.

“On the main page you will hear songs over and over again because those songs are trending,” she added. “I hop onto the trend, I use that and alter it to put in cool facts about the construction industry and talk about safety. I adjust it to make it informational but still fun.”

Before COVID, the OCCA was getting ready to use virtual reality headsets in the classroom to provide virtual tours of construction jobsites. When the pandemic hit, the real estate industry began using virtual house tours instead of going to houses in person and the team thought they could use the same concept.

“We wanted to bring that into the classroom for the students so they can see what it’s like on the actual jobsite and look around and move around,” Stoikos explained. “An idea I had was instead of a house, show a construction site and put it on our website so that way either way, COVID or not, students can log on anytime and walk through different sites to see what it’s like.”

She also hopes to start hosting Zoom presentations for students in the fall, when the OCCA also hopes to review its strategic plan.

The OCCA provides information about the resources available to pursue construction careers at [www.constructu.ca](http://www.constructu.ca).