

## Blue Door's Construct set to go national on fifth anniversary: 'When we invest in people, we transform communities?'

Aurora-based Construct, an initiative of Blue Door, is set to go national as the employment social enterprise marks its fifth anniversary in York, Peel, and Durham Regions.

The national expansion was announced at their fifth-anniversary celebrations held Tuesday afternoon at their Earl Stewart Drive headquarters.

Construct provides in-class training, on-the-job work experience, and wraparound supports to vulnerable members of the community, helping them find long-term, well-paying jobs in the trades.

The foundations for Construct were first laid by Emmy Kelly, now Interim CEO of Blue Door, as part of her dissertation while pursuing her MBA. Looking back over the last five years, she says the program 'was born from a bold idea that meaningful, well-paid work can be one of the most powerful ways to prevent homelessness.'

'Five years later, what that means to us is we are seeing more than 750 lives that have been changed, that have been supported, to move from survival to stability, and from exclusion to contribution,' she says. 'What I'm personally very excited about, too, is that this celebration isn't just about what we've built so far, but it's about what comes next.'

'We're going to be bringing this now-proven model to communities across Canada as Construct Canada. With the cross-sector partnerships we've built, we are planning to scale that impact to create a national blueprint for change. The team has already built out the digital portal and the partnerships to replicate this model across our nation.'

Going national, she says, was a goal for Construct as soon as they got off the ground.

'We have direct service delivery now in York, Durham, and Peel, and then the replicable parts have been to build out a curriculum and training elements and partnerships that can be replicated,' she explains. 'We have a training portal that has access for both facilitators and participants.'

Building on such partnerships Construct has built locally, such as those with LiUNA, Habitat for Humanity, and the YMCA, similar partnerships can be leveraged by other charities and organizations aiming to replicate the Construct model.

'We have an expansion team in place and we've run a pilot in both Niagara and Halifax, which have been super-successful, and this year we're going to do two more and continue to expand that reach.'

While Construct is something of a local success story, regardless of how far they expand across Canada, the core measures of success will remain the same: the people they serve.

'Construct has a 95 per cent graduation rate and an 85 per cent success rate into long-term and stable careers,' says Kelly. 'The whole basis of this trades-based employment social enterprise is to improve housing stability through increased incomes. Those will always be our baselines. Essentially those who have been detached from the labour market are detached for a reason, and so we provide the wraparound and individualized supports that are needed to move past those barriers and to connect to careers.'

'When you're benefiting from one of these programs, like emergency housing, you're in your very most vulnerable state and it's not generally a point of pride; you're working hard to get out of those circumstances whereas with the Construct program, we find that participants are really proud of the work that they do and what they create with their hands, and it does feel like a successful step forward.'

?When people like Matt, who once faced closed doors due to incarceration, I mean a lot of closed doors; after he came out he was able to find Construct and the team worked with him. He graduated from Construct, he gained employment, he studied for his degree, he's a manager now, and he comes back to Construct to mentor our participants ? and that's just proof that when we invest in people, we transform communities.

?With this program, because of its very intentional work, it does really feel like we're starting to build fences at the top of the cliff rather than hospitals at the bottom.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter