

Construct anniversary is milestone for collective hope and determination?



The fifth anniversary of Construct, a social enterprise of Blue Door, last week was not just a celebration of staying power, but recognition for the collective hope and determination that made it possible.

So said Emmy Kelly, Interim CEO of Blue Door, as she welcomed dignitaries to their base on Earl Stewart Drive to celebrate both the anniversary of Construct itself, and the announcement that the initiative is now set to spread across the country.

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 Kelly 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.

Construct was born from the recognition of three urgent challenges: Rising homelessness, a shortage of skilled tradespeople, and a housing market that leaves too many people behind, she told clients, community members and dignitaries including Aurora Councillors John Gallo, Rachel Gilliland, and Ron Weese at last week's ceremony. At Blue Door, we believed we could not only address these issues, but also prove a model that could ripple far beyond York Region. Five years later, that belief has become reality.

The story of Construct began, like many good ideas do, with a cup of coffee and a difficult question: How do we truly break the cycle of homelessness and poverty, not with temporary fixings, but with pathways to lasting housing stability? And that question has set us on a journey. Out of conversations with brilliant peers, and a deep determination to create meaningful, well-paid opportunities for those who have been shut out, Construct was born, not as a program, but as a promise.

Since the program was established in 2020, Kelly says more than 750 people have walked through Construct's doors, with 85 per cent of those individuals leaving not just with training in the trades, but with jobs, stability and hope.

Addressing the range of supporters in the audience, from all three levels of government, to foundations that provided funding, Kelly said you didn't just fund a program, you fuelled possibility.

As The Auroran reported last week, following pilot programs in Niagara Falls, ON, and Halifax, NS, Construct is now ready to spread its program nation-wide, creating a template for community partners to follow.

Kelly said the new Construct Canada offers two ways for organizations to either add to their existing program, or replicate their model from the ground up, and Paul Robertson, Executive Director of their Niagara Falls partner, the West Niagara Employment

Help Centre, outlined why his community jumped at the chance to pilot Construct's expansion.

When I first heard about Construct Canada, I immediately knew it was something we needed to bring to West Niagara. This partnership has opened doors for job seekers across the region, offering not just hands-on training in trades, but also mentorship and wraparound supports that help people truly thrive. Working with Construct Canada has shown us how impactful collaboration can be, he said. From recruitment to curriculum to participant support, this program leaves nothing to chance. In just a year since first meeting with (former Blue Door CEO) Michael Braithwaite, we've turned a vision into reality. Delivering a skilled training program to 16 participants, with our most recent cohort completing last month.

Beyond the numbers, it's the stories that matter most. Individuals who came in uncertain of the future and are now proud, confident in their practices, earning good wages, and building meaningful lives. On behalf of the entire team, I want to extend our gratitude to Construct Canada, to our funders, and to every partner in the room who continues to collaborate, innovate, and invest in people. Together, we're not just constructing careers, we're constructing stronger communities and a brighter future for everyone.

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