

New funding aimed to bring more people into the trades



Hot on the heels of launching a program to help women gain apprenticeships in the trades, Construct ? an initiative of Blue Door that aims to help unhoused or otherwise struggling individuals gain meaningful employment in the trades ? has received Federal funding to support new and ongoing programs.

On Monday, Federal Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour Steven MacKinnon was joined by area MPs at Construct's Aurora base to announce \$14.3 million to help expand 13 ?innovative approaches? organizations like Blue Door spearhead to help more people get into the trades.

?We are living in uncertain times but in order to confront those uncertain times, just like you're doing here with Construct and Blue Door, we have to get working and get going,? said MacKinnon. ?We are going to need people. We're going to need people to do the kind of building that this country requires to ensure that every Canadian who wants a house can get a house, to connect our economies and our trade routes. We need able, ready and skilled tradesmen and women. We need them quickly.?

Noting that 600,000 Canadian skilled trade workers are due to retire by 2031, and 150,000 more by 2023, MacKinnon said there ?could not be a more promising future in this country than that of being a skilled tradeswoman or tradesman.?

?We have a skilled trade crisis. That's a problem for our economy, for our prosperity, for our ability to build the kinds of things that we need. With our neighbour to the south threatening new economic slights at us, it's more than a problem, it is something that calls us all to act. The work that Blue Door is doing is critical.?

It is critical on multiple fronts, said Blue Door Executive Director Michael Braithwaite, who said Construct, which provides myriad contracting services, was developed to address an employment gap seen across Canada.

?One of the reasons we don't have the housing we desperately need, including affordable housing, is we don't actually have the workforce to build that housing,? he said. ?One of the reasons so many people experience homelessness is they don't actually have the income to afford the market housing that is out there. With Construct, this pre-apprenticeship program they go into, it's an eight-week program where people are paid, they have wraparound services like transportation needs, rent needs, childcare needs, psychological needs that are wrapped around them. If they need help with mental health supports or other supports all wrapped around them for success, it gets them prepared to step in and ready to go as an apprentice in the trades where they are desperately needed.

?Here's the great thing going into the trades: they make a living wage right out of the gate. Poverty is stopped in its tracks. If they are

experiencing homelessness? it prevents people from experiencing homelessness. It works for all sorts of different disadvantaged populations. We have youth coming through, we have newcomers, we have women fleeing violence. We have seniors that have come through and have had to change course later on in life, and Construct helps end that cycle of poverty.?

This work, said Noel Baldwin, Executive Director of Future Skills Centre, is important in supporting the skilled trades, ?which Canada needs if we're going to build everything we need to be more self-reliant and resilient.

?It recognizes that people who are facing barriers trying to contribute their skills and talents through our labour force, sometimes need more than just the training to get them there,? he said. ?Canada's economy is facing disruption, maybe on a scale unprecedented in generations as a result of geo-political forces, demographic change and drivers such as technological and climate change. With the country's economy in flux, ensuring workers across sectors in communities across the country have the skills they need to adapt and thrive is a key to building that resilient workforce that Canada and the people who live here need.?

Among the dignitaries at Monday's announcement were Aurora MPs Tony Van Bynen and Leah Taylor Roy, who underscored the importance of Construct and like projects through a different lens.

?Right now, the concept of diversity, equity and inclusion is under threat and when you talk about those words there's nothing about any of those words that is negative. In fact, all of those words are going to help us build the workforce we need,? said MP Taylor Roy. ?I am so grateful we are looking at groups that may not think about getting into the trades and giving them a pathway to enter, as well as those who would consider it and helping all of those people as well.

?We're going to need every person, all the skill and talent we have in Canada engaged and if we start to say we're not concerned about these other groups we're missing a huge pool of talent we can bring to bear their skills and their work and contribute to building the kind of Canada we need in the future.?

By Brock Weir