



Training Local Women for Local Work

By Angela Smith, Women Building Futures

Reanne Adobas, a lifelong resident of the Town of Stony Plain, Alberta, knew she wanted a career that would allow her to work in her community. When she heard about the Women Building Futures Operator Readiness Program, with Stony Plain as a sponsor, she decided to apply and was accepted into the program. After four weeks of hard work, she graduated and was hired into a temporary position with the town's Public Works Department. She then took a permanent position as a Facility Operator.

Now Reanne has a rewarding career in the community she loves and is

contributing to her hometown in ways she never thought possible.

Reanne wasn't the only one who gained from the program, though. Her employer also benefitted by adding such a passionate and hard worker to the team. "We have a great employee as a result of this partnership," says Tom Goulden, Town Manager of Stony Plain. "I am hugely impressed and am proud that we are a part of the Women Building Futures program."

Women Building Futures (WBF) operates as a non-profit that is valued for empowering women to enter and succeed in careers where they have been under-represented through skilled trades and operator training.

WBF's first step in attracting women into the trades is to build awareness of in-demand construction and maintenance careers and help women determine their level of readiness to work in that industry. "When a municipality sponsors a program, it means we engage with women in their communities and inform them of the opportunity for local work," says WBF's Manager of Industry Relations, Megan Bates. "Even if a woman doesn't attend a program right away, she's still educated about local employment opportunities. The seed is planted that she could work right in her hometown."

WBF works with program sponsors to ensure the program content is relevant to



The 2018 WBF Operator Readiness Program graduates, shown here with their sponsors.

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their workforce demands and will result in graduates who possess the knowledge and skills they need in the workplace, including best practices in construction and maintenance, safety certifications, hands-on skills training and career development. Once the program nears completion, sponsors, like Stony Plain, have the opportunity to interview and hire.

Any graduates not hired by the sponsors work with WBF to find employment among a network of 76 WBF Employers of Choice or through relationships WBF builds with local companies who are also looking to hire from within their community. WBF graduates consistently have a 90 per cent plus employment rate.

This collaborative approach is a key reason why these partnerships are so successful. “What we value most from our program sponsors is that they work with us to make our programs better and better every year,” says Bates. “With their feedback, we can continuously improve our training and ensure that our partnerships are relevant over the long-term.”

Because of this success, the Town of Stony Plain plans to continue sponsoring WBF’s programs, along with other municipalities, including the City of Spruce Grove, the City of St. Albert and Parkland County.

“We feel huge inroads have been made for women taking on non-traditional

occupations through the services offered by Women Building Futures,” says Stuart Houston, Mayor of Spruce Grove.

The impacts of these programs and partnerships with municipalities are significant. The students learn about careers they may not have considered before and gain in-demand skills and rewarding careers. The municipalities tap into a local, diverse workforce. And the entire community benefits.

“Great partnerships make a huge difference in our communities,” says William Choy, Mayor of Stony Plain. “In many cultures, if you teach a woman new skills, she tends to transfer that knowledge to others, thus improving the standard of living for the entire community.”

Reanne agrees, saying the female instructors in the WBF program were invaluable mentors, offering words of encouragement, sharing their own life experiences and inspiring her. “I want to be a similar role model for my daughters,” she says.

As the success of this partnership grows, there’s no doubt more municipalities will want to get involved. “My hope is to have a program that is fully supported by municipalities moving forward,” says Bates. “Engaging the local workforce is important to help our communities thrive. This program is a way to do that and gain strong employees in the process.”

For inquiries about partnering with Women Building Futures, visit www.WomenBuildingFutures.ca or contact Megan Bates at mbates@womenbuildingfutures.ca.

Women Building Futures: 2017 At a Glance

- 190 graduates from WBF programs;
- 95 per cent of graduates employed in industry within six months of graduating;
- 76 Employers of Choice hiring program graduates;
- 157 per cent average increase in earned income on first day of hire; and
- 48 Indigenous communities actively engaged.