



Building solutions, creating economic freedom

With a forecasted loss of close to 250,000 skilled workers over the next decade, employers in industry are looking for impactful, meaningful ways to attract and retain new talent.

By Angela Smith, Women Building Futures

Women Building Futures (WBF) knows that women will be a big part of the solution. There are approximately 6.2 million women in Canada between the ages of 20 and 44 – an estimated 47 percent of the Canadian labour force. But these women represent less than four percent of the on-site construction and maintenance workforce across Canada.

“If we were to attract and hire just one percent of these women, this would result in 62,000 new skilled workers and address 25 percent of the current workforce shortage,” says Women Building Futures President and CEO, Kathy Kimpton. “Simply put, women are Canada’s largest untapped labour resource.”

WBF, an Edmonton-based non-profit, is valued for empowering women to enter and succeed in careers where they have been underrepresented.

“Our mission is to provide economic freedom for women through assessment, training, job placement and job retention support,” continues Kimpton, citing the average annual income of a woman working in Canada is just over \$36,000. “Many of the women we work with aren’t necessarily unemployed, but underemployed – working hard at multiple jobs, accessing social programs, and still barely making ends meet. What the women we serve all have in

Photo courtesy of
Women Building Futures.

common is they are looking for a change and want to build their own future.”

Kimpton knows that women come to WBF because of its exceptional hands-on training, workplace preparedness and ongoing support services that ensure a high employment rate for graduates.

“Bottom line: they’re looking for jobs, and with the support of our industry partners, that’s what we have to offer.”

Indigenous relations

Engaging with Indigenous women and their communities is an important focus for WBF.

“Last year, 2017, marked a significant growth in our Indigenous Relations strategy, from a focus on tactical initiatives to a holistic approach that encompasses engagement, barrier reduction, foundational learning, hands-on skills training, and partnerships with Indigenous communities and organizations,” says Kimpton. “This fundamental shift in approach, combined with the incredible work of our Indigenous Relations team, has resulted in our highest Indigenous engagement yet, with 1,157 Indigenous women and 48 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) communities and organizations engaging with WBF in 2017.”

Addressing workforce needs, creating social impact

WBF’s partnerships allow the organization to fill a training gap that drives the economy and expands online and face-to-face learning options.

“Our partnerships enable us to reach more women, in more ways, and provide more workforce solutions for industry,” says Kimpton.

When it comes to the 76 Employers of Choice working with WBF, there are both business and social reasons for these valued partnerships. The business case is accessing a local labour pool with an unrivalled level of preparedness.

“We all know the ‘cost’ of turnover. Hiring and retaining skilled workers is a business case every organization understands and is something that WBF can help address,” Kimpton explains.

A WBF grad walks onto the job site-ready to work with the skills to succeed, including work ethic, drive, determination and resiliency. WBF’s programs are created collaboratively with its industry partners and are continually evolving to reflect the industry’s workforce demands.

The social case is the resulting 90 percent or better employment rate for WBF graduates, who see an average

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157 percent increase in income on their first day of hire. For the 190 women who graduated from a WBF program in 2017, that economic opportunity and prosperity has been life-changing, improving their lives, their families’ lives, their communities and the economy as a whole.

What WBF does throughout Alberta is having a significant impact. The model clearly works, so expansion is a natural next step for the organization. Going forward, Kimpton says her goal for WBF is a larger impact through strategic growth, specifically with expansion through British Columbia, with an eye on other provinces in the near future.

The meaning of economic freedom

Kimpton recalls a graduate from a WBF program delivered in partnership with the Northwest Redwater Project, Ironworkers Local 720 and Insulators 110.

“This woman began working immediately as an ironworker,” explains Kimpton. “She was able to tackle issues with the knowledge and confidence gained through her training with us.”

“When I asked her what the WBF opportunity meant for her, she held up a set of keys for her new home – something that represented economic freedom and stability for her children. Her new career allowed her to break the cycle of poverty – forever. This is the type of story we want to spread across the country.”

Respectful and inclusive workplaces

Building respectful and inclusive workplaces is critical for the industry’s pursuit of attracting and retaining talent for the future. While this is often the topic of conversation for WBF with its many employer partners, the organization will be bringing that conversation to the masses through its upcoming WORK PROUD Summit, taking place in Edmonton, Alberta, October 2-4, 2018.

“We’re excited to host a diverse audience of men and women from various positions and sectors, including industry, training partners, community partners and government, all of whom have a stake in creating the workplaces of the future,” says Kimpton.

Trade Perspectives is the theme of the summit, and the significance of that phrase highlights the current challenges facing industry and governments across the country.

“The Summit’s focus is on ensuring future success when we strive to create diverse, respectful workplaces where everyone is empowered to succeed. Our Summit isn’t just about ideas; we are going to talk about concrete solutions, successes and best practices,” says Kimpton.

More information on the Summit can be found at www.workproudsummit.ca.

To learn more about Women Building Futures, visit womenbuildingfutures.com and follow us on social media. ■

As President & CEO of Women Building Futures, Kathy Kimpton leads a dynamic and passionate team who train women for a career in the skilled trades – creating a positive impact on women, their families, our communities; and are forever changing the face of industry!
Angela Smith is a senior writer for Women Building Futures.

Women Building Futures – 2017 at a glance

- 190 graduates from WBF programs
- 95 percent of graduates employed in the industry within six months of graduating
- 76 Employers of Choice hired program graduates
- 157 percent average increase in earned income on first day of hire
- 48 Indigenous communities actively engaged