

YWCA Halifax Shift Change Backgrounder

The YWCA Halifax's Shift Change is a women's economic security project addressing barriers for women to access careers in the skilled trades in Nova Scotia. It is a three-year project funded by the Department for Women and Gender Equality that started in 2019.

Our approach over the course of this project has been to collaborate and connect with a broad range of stakeholders including large and small employers, government, industry leaders, educational institutions and other non-profits.

Project Start up: Needs Assessment

The start of this work involved building relationships, conducting a gender-based needs assessment and doing some primary scoping research. Based on the belief that both men and women in skilled trades have a role to play in gender equality, we engaged both men and women through focus group work.

In 2019/20, five focus groups were conducted engaging 71 male supervisors from over 20 companies to learn more about the challenges men face including more women and increasing diversity in the workplace. There was strong turnout from a range of sectors including construction, industrial, and manufacturing. Participants spoke freely and there was positive feedback on the value of the sessions.

Given the number of groups in the sector that are currently representing and advocating for women in skilled trades, including Women Unlimited, the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency and the Office to Advance Women Apprentices, the Shift Change project team decided to focus immediate change efforts on supporting change in the workplace culture by targeting and working with male supervisors.

The Shift Change team put together a Learning Report to summarize the feedback from male supervisors and share this learning with employers and sector partners as well as explore a potential response that would also meet the needs of women in skilled trades.

The Learning Report: Themes for male supervisors

The focus on men and understanding these themes has been a key part of next steps in the Shift Change project.

Key themes for male supervisors:

- **More women in the workplace is a difficult adjustment for men. There are challenges that come with this change, time is needed to adapt.** Comments like "It's going too fast" and a sense of precariousness arose.
- **Men feel undervalued.** They have a sense that their work isn't recognized and respected either by the companies or society in general. This makes it hard for them to empathize with others.
- **It's difficult to be a champion for this change.** The challenges of increased diversity are varied and complex. This makes it difficult for any one individual to stand out amongst their peers to support the change.
- With some exceptions, **the struggles that are most "acute" are around sexual harassment, sexuality in the workplace and language.** Support is needed to manage these struggles individually and for their crew.

- **Fear of repercussions.** Companies expect change and responses can be punitive. Men want to do the right thing but aren't always sure what that is. They fear if they do something wrong they could lose their job.
- **Individuals need time and space to be self-reflective as to their own role in creating the conditions of a better workplace culture.** Increased understanding must happen to change perceptions on both an individual and collective level.

The learning report was circulated broadly and during this time, the Shift Change team met with NSCC representatives to discuss and explore creating a training pilot that could help respond to feedback from men and women in skilled trades.

Leadership for Today's World: A Gender Inclusive Leadership course

The Shift Change team conducted interviews with both employers and sector partners. These interviews explored existing inclusion training and obtained feedback about the concept of a course that would respond to the feedback male supervisors and women in skilled trades shared in the focus groups.

In January 2021, in partnership with NSCC, Shift Change started a male supervisor training pilot course called "Leadership for Today's World". The course focuses on providing experiential, social/emotional learning for up to 20 male supervisors. Participants cover 6 modules over 6 weeks of in-person and homework/action learning for a total of 30 hours. Modules include learning about:

- Setting the stage - Understanding gender in the workplace
- Awareness of gender
- Power and gender
- Communication & Gender-based violence in the workplace
- Conflict resolution
- Leadership & fostering welcoming and inclusive worksites

At the completion of the course, the pilot will be evaluated and the learning shared with employers and partners. NSCC has formally agreed to take over this course and continue to offer it in association with the School of Trades and Transportation.

This course has been identified as innovative and unique training to the skilled trades field and there are ongoing conversations about other kinds of opportunities to do more in depth and experiential learning to increase and support equity, diversity and inclusion efforts.

Emerging Opportunities

Over the course of this project, the Shift Change team has identified emerging opportunities where culture change work could continue. In conversations with employers and partners, we have discovered that there is a need for more coordinated and aligned partner action around learning and implementing more initiatives that increase equity, diversity and inclusion in skilled trades.

To address culture change issues, systems level leadership around supporting change for women and diverse, underrepresented groups is required. There is a need and opportunity to form a partner and employer network with a vision around inclusion efforts. Ideally, this network would include project funding to support learning and change initiatives over the course of a few

years. Evaluation and measurement would contribute to learning how we can increase and accelerate change for women and underrepresented groups in skilled trades.

Contact Us

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The YWCA Halifax is a non-profit dedicated to improving the lives of women, girls and their families. We have been promoting women's leadership for more than 140 years. You can learn more [here](#).