

Shift Change – Working with Employers and Male Supervisors to Shift Workplace Culture

The YWCA Halifax Shift Change project started with a question of *how to further women's economic security in the field of skilled trades work*, where family sustaining jobs existed in abundance. After three years of project work, we feel we are making some progress.

To give you some context, in 2018, there were only 4.5% female apprenticeship registrations in the construction, manufacturing and transportation sectors¹. There are several local organizations such as [Women Unlimited](#), the [Office to Advance Women Apprentices](#) and the [Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency](#) (NSAA) who support, advocate, and create pathways for more women to enter and succeed in skilled trades work. NSAA estimates that Nova Scotia will require approximately 11,179 new certified tradespeople to meet sector demand requirements over the next ten years, accounting for both growth recovery and retirements.

The bottom line for Nova Scotia is we need more tradespeople and there are many women, particularly those with intersectional identities, and gender diverse people who would benefit from employment in skilled trades. We already know there is a strong [business case](#) for more diversity in the sector and the benefit this will bring to

"I feel like I am much more prepared to have an uncomfortable conversation with others to help promote a positive workplace culture"

the companies who do this. Our project was interested in how we help and contribute to the change.

We are excited to share a milestone in some of the important work underway towards increasing the inclusion of women in skilled trades. At the end of May 2021, the second pilot of our Gender Inclusive Leadership Certificate concluded, with a plan to continue offering it through our partner, the [Nova Scotia Community College](#) (NSCC). There are now 28 male supervisors from 11 companies who have been through this training. All of them have created

inclusion actions and most of them have told us this course has helped them gain the skills and confidence to be being better allies in the workplace.

"Being an Ally in the workplace seems to be the best way to help change the trades for women and can be done right away"

We are confident this work will help accelerate the culture change needed to include more women, gender diverse people and those with intersectional identities into the skilled trades. An exciting part of the course was for men to see themselves as a powerful part of the gender movement and to watch them step up and recognize their power as allies towards supporting culture change.

It will take time and continued effort by many of us to increase the number of women who access, retain, and grow in this kind of employment. Several women have told us that it starts with one person at a time, and we believe with more people joining this movement of change, we can make a difference.

Project Background

The 3-year project is funded by [Women and Gender Equality Canada](#). In 2019 we conducted a Gender Based Needs Assessment, examining work in the sector to support the inclusion of women and where the Shift Change

¹ The baseline figure (4.5%) represents total female apprenticeship registrations as of 2018 based on information from the Statistics Canada Registered Apprenticeship Information System. The figure includes trades in the construction, manufacturing and transportation sectors.

project would have complementary impact to other groups in this work. Our assessments identified a group of people who have influence on inclusion efforts that can reach the ground floor - male supervisors.

In the second year of this project, several companies participated in focus groups with women in skilled trades and male supervisors inquiring about the existing challenges hindering diversity and inclusion. The narratives from women are well known and documented, and women continue to offer solutions and work towards change. Programs and initiatives exist and must continue to support and empower women.

Our project focused on training for male supervisors to be active allies in transforming workplace culture and addressing the harmful gender norms that make it difficult for women to access, retain and grow in the workplace. We learned about the challenges and needs male supervisors have around increasing inclusion. Focus group conversations derived six themes male supervisors experienced around inclusion from fear of job loss to having no time to reflect and learn about inclusion. These issues are preventing many supervisors from understanding how they can be champions for inclusion and allies in the workplace. The information from male supervisors led to the design of the leadership course pilot in partnership with NSCC.

The pilot was designed, reviewed, and launched in January 2021 with input from NSCC staff and feedback from sector partners and employers. Women's perspectives and voices were included in curriculum review, as interviewees and guest speakers in the course. The course required participants to give 30 hours of their time to this learning over 6 weeks to provide space for reflection and action learning to support the process and outcomes. The training focused on providing social and emotional learning, giving men space to dialogue with one another in a safe group format, learning directly from Women in Trades guest speakers and through action-learning assignments.

We would like to thank all the partner organizations, stakeholders and companies who are collaborating with us around this change, it takes all of us to move the needle!

"Woman just want to be treated the same and be heard and validated"

"Treat them with respect. Give credit where credit is due. Do not underestimate them"

"It was eye opening, some of the things we talked about I would not think about or realize happens"

"There is still a lot of bigotry and chauvinistic views"

Some comments from the course by male supervisors:

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