

Project Insights Report

Construct



PARTNERS

Blue Door Support Services
(formerly Blue Door Shelters)



LOCATIONS

Ontario



INVESTMENT

\$1,263,619



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☰ Executive Summary

Durham Region in Ontario has an ongoing housing and skilled trades worker shortage, disproportionately affecting low-income and marginalized populations, further exacerbated by the pandemic. To address this issue, the Blue Door team, which first launched its Construct social enterprise initiative in York Region in 2020, expanded to Durham in the following year with support from the Future Skills Centre. Designed to enhance career prospects and housing stability, Construct offers an eight-week paid program with in-class skills training, hands-on experience, and wraparound supports.

Between August 2021 and March 2023, the Blue Door team served 60 youth trainees over eight cohorts in Durham Region. The program had a graduation rate of 97% and significantly improved both employment and housing outcomes for participants. The program's success came from its wraparound services to reduce barriers to participation, strong local partnerships to understand local needs and resources, as well as its social enterprise model that allowed for employment opportunities for participants. [An award-winning program](#), Construct is a promising model for addressing local need for skilled trades, while improving housing security for participants as they acquire the skills for jobs with living wages. The program's successful expansion to Durham, and then to Peel Region, its effective partnership strategy, curriculum, and programming approach can be replicated by other regions to enhance skills solutions nationwide. Construct's social enterprise model holds potential to address complex skills challenges.

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 97% of participants in Construct completed the program.
- 2 74% of participants were employed post-program, up from 20% pre-program.

► The Issue

Canada has struggled with a shortage of skilled tradespeople for decades, but efforts to increase numbers have mostly fallen short. Women, immigrants, and racialized groups continue to be underrepresented in the skilled trades, making up less than 20% of certified workers in the construction sector. This shortage has wide-ranging impacts that are expected to worsen as tradespeople are necessary in many of the challenges facing the Canadian economy today, including the transition to a net-zero economy and the severe affordable housing shortage.

These nation-wide challenges are acutely felt in Durham Region, where an affordable housing shortage disproportionately affects low-income and marginalized populations. More tradespeople are needed to support the building of housing, and low-income and marginalized populations need more access to good jobs and careers with a living wage in order to improve their own housing stability.



🔧 What We Investigated

To address this complex set of challenges, in 2020, Blue Door Support Services launched Construct in York Region — a social enterprise initiative to provide underrepresented groups with training in the skilled trades in order to pursue a career in the sector, and ultimately transition them to a stable career and stable housing.

The Construct program is a paid, eight-week curriculum with two weeks of in-class skills training and six weeks of hands-on experience working on construction projects and worksites. The training includes soft skills, such as accountability, conflict resolution, and using appropriate body language. Trainees also earn work-relevant credentials like first aid and Workplace Hazardous Materials Information Systems training through an online portal. Construct participants must be 18 years of age or older, not hold temporary status in Canada, and have passed a grade 10 math course or equivalent.

Construct also includes coordinated wraparound support for their trainees, provided by Blue Door Support Services, to reduce barriers to participation and program completion. These supports include childcare, meal allowances, transportation, mental health support,s and career counseling to employment after graduation. Wraparound support is customized for each trainee to address their unique challenges and barriers.

In the fall of 2022, Blue Door also participated in FSC's Accelerator program, with the aim of enhancing its understanding of its participants' needs and service experience to refine its program. As part of the Accelerator, the Blue Door Team developed a service blueprint, researched best practices, and engaged with its participants and delivery partners. Through these activities team members successfully identified training, partnership, and support gaps in its programming that when filled, could improve employment outcomes for trainees.

What We're Learning

Between August 2021 and March 2023, Construct served 60 trainees between the ages of 15 and 19 over eight cohorts in the Durham Region. Recruitment efforts were supported by local partnerships with YMCA Durham, Ontario Works Durham, and Durham Youth Services. Demand for the program was high. By the end of the Future Skills-supported expansion to Durham, Construct had a waitlist of 50 participants. The program achieved many of its targets:

- 58 of 60 participants, or 97%, completed the training, well above the initial program target of 80%.
- 74% of participants were employed post-program, up from 20% pre-program.
- Of those employed post-program, 72% were employed in a construction-related trade and another 7% were pursuing more education.

Alternative pathways into Construct

Many interested participants were referred to alternative resources or deferred because they were ineligible or not ready to commit, often due to substance use or homelessness. Those who did not meet the eligibility criteria were referred to other services that would prepare them for future participation in Construct if they remained interested. For example, Construct staff had discussions with high schools to try to get youth into alternative learning programs where they could transition to Construct when they turned 18. For those needing essential math skills, Construct staff linked individuals to education centers for prior learning assessment and recognition that allowed them to earn high school credits based on life experience. These individuals could then reapply to Construct providing they had the equivalent to grade 10 math.

Wraparound supports are crucial

For participants, the wraparound supports offered were crucial for their participation and completion of the program. A client service coordinator met with each participant prior to training to understand their unique challenges and barriers, allowing Construct to customize the support needed for each participant. Program staff understanding of the local context and collaboration with local partners to coordinate these supports led to improved trainee outcomes.

Partnerships lead to employment

Strong partnerships developed early in the pre-implementation phase with local unions, employers, and organizations were also crucial for connecting graduates with job opportunities post-program. Construct's social enterprise model, through which it offered construction and property services, also provided trainees with valuable local employment opportunities that served as a launch pad for subsequent employment in the sector.

Skills, employment and housing security

The Construct program also had an impact on the housing stability of participants. Of the 57% pre-program who had secure housing, all had improved housing stability and reduced risk of homelessness after the program. For the 12 participants without secure housing prior to the program, just over half felt they had reduced their risk of being homeless after the program, and the remaining had improved their housing situation or secured permanent housing.

★ Why It Matters

Canada needs more skilled tradespeople to make a successful transition to a net-zero economy and to build affordable housing across the country. Meeting the skilled labour shortages in the trades will require greater participation among women, new Canadians, racialized peoples, and Indigenous peoples. Increasing the participation of these groups requires innovative solutions.



Programs like Construct, which use a social enterprise model, combined with strong community partnerships and wraparound support to help participants overcome barriers to program completion offer decision-makers a promising solution to these longstanding challenges. While knowledge about the benefits of these models are well-known in the community services sector, the skills and training ecosystem is lagging behind in leveraging these models. More support is required to spread the promising practice of programs like Construct to other regions across the country, helping to resolve local shortages in the skilled trades, while at the same time contributing to increased housing stability for marginalized groups.

State of Skills:

Innovation in Training, Recruitment and Upskilling for Skilled Trades

Canada needs to address long standing shortages of skilled tradespeople to advance policy priorities around decarbonization, affordable housing and transforming industry to add more value to what we produce.

[Read Thematic Report](#)

► What's Next

Construct continues to operate, and the successful scaling of the program to Durham has led to its expansion to the Peel Region as well. To support this expansion, Blue Door is building partnerships with community organizations and employers in that region. Blue Door has also shared its activities and best practices with other social enterprises and organizations interested in creating and growing the impact of their own social enterprises.

Have questions about our work? Do you need access to a report in English or French? Please contact communications@fsc-ccf.ca.

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