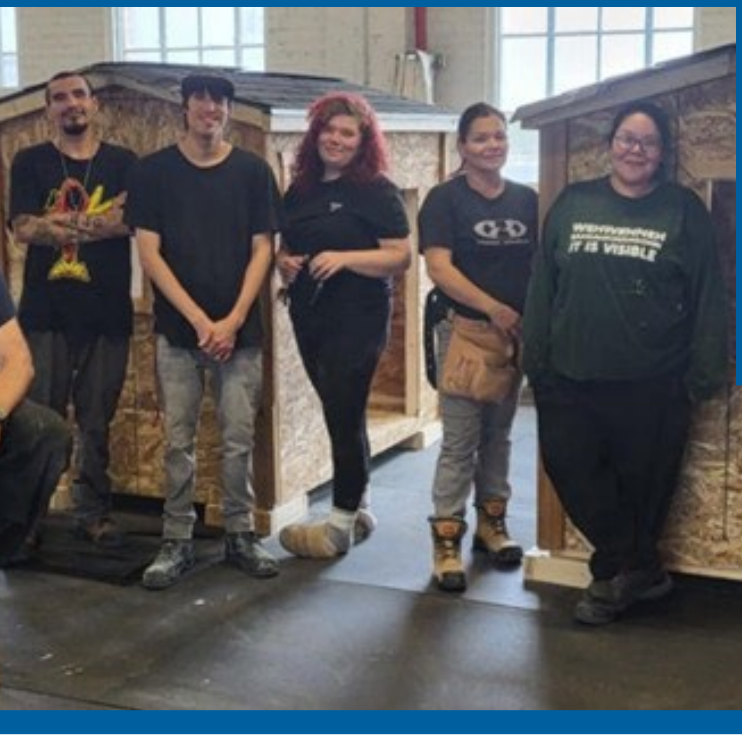






# Scaling Purpose Homes

## Photovoice report

**December 2025**

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This report was produced as part of a project funded by the Future Skills Centre (FSC), with financial support from the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

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# BACKGROUND

Purpose Construction is a Winnipeg-based social enterprise dedicated to providing hands-on trades training and meaningful employment in one of the city's most underserved areas. They prioritize addressing systemic barriers to employment in the community, such as providing training opportunities for justice-involved individuals and those facing barriers to stable housing.

As a part of the evaluation for this project, we connected with training participants from two Purpose cohorts to capture their reflections. The training program provides 8 weeks of hands-on training to prepare learners for entry-level roles in the skilled trades, and 12 weeks of work placements on Purpose construction and renovation projects. The photovoice activity was completed during the work-placement portion of the program, after learners had completed the training and had begun applying their skills on worksites.

## Participant Overview

The first cohort, which was predominantly newcomer learners, completed a survey at the end of the in-class portion of their training. The second cohort, which was predominantly justice-involved Indigenous learners, completed a photovoice activity (described below) and group reflections. Ten participants from the first cohort completed the survey. Eight participants from the second cohort completed the photovoice activity.

**Photovoice**

Photovoice is a participatory research method where individuals are asked to take two photographs in response to prompts developed by the evaluation team. These include prompts such as" "illustrate a change in your life as a result of this program" or "show an example of your strength, skills, or something you are proud of." In addition to the photo reflection sheets, participants engaged in group discussions and shared reflections about their time in the program.

Participants feedback is summarized in the report below. The highlighted quotes are from participants' photo reflection sheets and survey responses. Photographs are from participants' photo submissions.

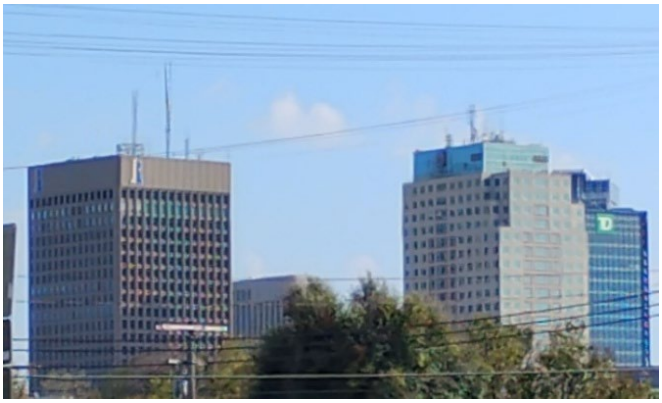
# PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS

## ENTERING THE PROGRAM

Training participants entered the program with a range of backgrounds, strengths, skills, and personal challenges. The program served some participants with construction experience who were interested in re-entering the sector; others were exploring construction work for the first time. For many, the training program was a turning point in their lives, when they made a choice to dedicate themselves to working towards their goals. The program offered the structure that provided them the opportunity and support to rebuild.

*"Everyone joined the program with different stories".*

For example, one participant shared: *"Coming into this program my life was unstable, I was struggling finding my purpose and struggling to maintain sobriety and stop giving up on myself. This photo represents exactly what I looked like when I joined the program "a mess". The program gave me motivation and something to rely on everyday."*



Another participant took a picture of the Winnipeg skyline, sharing: *"I went to jail for ten years, and I constantly watched Winnipeg news just to see this beautiful skyline, hoping, wishing, and praying I go home soon. This picture was my HOPE for a long, long time and is now within my reach. Today I feel very blessed for another chance at life and to be a better person and mother to my five daughters and now my two grandbabies, with many more to come."*

While participants were all focused on and eager to (re-)enter the workforce and find full-time employment, their specific goals varied. Some participants were interested in exploring trades training to find out what type of work interested them; others were looking to refresh or build skills to re-enter the sector; and a minority saw this as the first step towards a formal Red Seal apprenticeship path. Many participants additionally saw the program as a way to build community, make friends, and work on their social emotional skills (e.g., teamwork, communication).

*"Starting this training, I was really excited... My goals were to learn new skills, become better at talking to people, learning about the tools, the dangers/safety and more."*

Although participants' motivations and goals for entering the training varied, one common thread for many parents in the program was the importance of family, especially children and grandchildren. As one participant expressed: *"my children, my biggest support, one of my new favorite memor[ies]. Even though I made my changes for me, they were my biggest reason… my children are who makes me."* During group reflection and site visit discussions, other participants also disclosed how a central motivation to improve their lives was to better support their families.

While the program provided structure and support, it was the participants themselves that brought the open-mindedness, courage, and perseverance to show up and put in the work every day. In their reflections, participants indicated that this effort had paid off. One participant shared the value they got from building skills and community: *"I was so nervous to join the program. However, I would do it again if I had the chance to"*. Other participants emphasized the importance of a growth mindset: *"keep an open mind and good things may just happen to you!"*.

*"If you try new things, you would be surprised by what you can accomplish"*

## TRAINING ENVIRONMENT

To achieve the successful outcomes described below, many participants cited the supports and learning culture provided by the program. One reported that the program provided the "*proper training and experience*" they needed to build skills and find employment. Other participants emphasized the program provided opportunities to learn, but it was up to participants to put in the time and practice to the full benefits of the program, sharing: *"practicing your skills improves your experience in the training program"* and *"be willing to learn and never stop learning. Show up everyday with an open mind"*.

Purpose staff created a supportive environment that facilitated learning. For example, mornings started with a participant-led smudge for those who wished to cleanse, as well as stretching together as a group, showcasing the importance of self-care and connection. Participants talked about how their instructors and their co-learners provided support and helped them keep going each day. For example, one participant shared the growth mindset and safe learning environment, writing "*I felt supported even when I did make mistakes on my cuts, building, even measurement and blueprints."*

*"I felt supported even when I did make mistakes"*

For many, the hands-on aspect of the program was received positively. Participants said that they were happy to get the hands-on experience. The active nature of the work created an accessible learning environment for those that didn't gravitate towards "book learning". Even participants with previous trades experience provided positive feedback on the training environment, praising the content, delivery, and length of the course.

*"I really liked the physical side of things, like working in the shop, and working on projects… I learned new skills. The work space overall was friendly, it was clean, safe. We had access to all the tools and opportunities."*

Another participant described how the support provided in the program helped them develop personally: *"I grew as a person, during the sharing circle I was going through a loss in my life and I felt supported and heard… I felt supported"*. The wraparound supports provided in the program were designed to create this sense of support, including cultural activities, mental health support, pre-employment supports (e.g., resume writing, interview coaching), and other practical supports (e.g., help getting documents or drivers licences, legal clinics, help finding housing). The supports and the responsive training approach created an environment where participants made progress towards their personal, life, and career goals.

*"I believe everyone should experience the joys, laughs, opens, and supports that purpose offers while being in the program. Not only do we learn the carpentry trade we were supported in our home lives, next steps for schooling, resume building, sharing circles, and much more. "*

# PROGRAM OUTCOMES

## Technical skills and confidence

In their program reflections, many participants shared photos of projects that they completed during the program. Several participants gave examples of how their confidence developed as they gained new technical skills. The hands-on approach to training provided tangible evidence of how their hard work led to results, whether it was making straighter cuts, finding interest or aptitude in a new skill, or creating something they had never made before. As an example, one participant included a photo of something they constructed, writing: *"Two days ago, I didn't know how to do this. This was my first attempt at it and I think it went well…"*.

*"Hard work pays off…trust the process."*

Participants could see their work improve week by week, and these improvements resulted in new confidence. For example, one participant provided both a before and an after picture of a window that they repaired, writing: "*hard work pays off*" and *"trust the process*". Another participant presented photos of their carpentry, describing the pride they felt in their new skills: *"it shows my ability to use power tools, measuring & etc. … it's something to be proud of"*.



In addition to gaining skills and confidence, participants discussed how their work in the program helped them step into a new headspace, where they felt ready to work and learn. For example, one participant took a photo of their boots, sharing: *"Steel toe boots. Every time I put 'em on I learn and make money…every paint drop has a story of a hard worker"*.

The program was an opportunity for participants to remind themselves of their own strengths, such as their resilience or dedication to getting a job done. Several participants shared positive beliefs and values that were affirmed during the program. For example, several emphasized feelings of empowerment, and their ability to shape their lives through effort and persistence: *"we can do anything we set our minds to"* and *"If ever in life you're up shits creek, [make] a paddle, steer your own direction."*

For many, seeing the program through to the end and earning their Purpose training completion certificate was a point of pride and a symbol of what they achieved during the program.

## Skills for work and life

As well as new technical skills, participants spoke about leaving the program with new perspectives on work and life. One participant recounted a story that showcased the lessons they learned in the program around perseverance and adapting to "what life throws at you". The participant provided a photo of one of their construction sites (Figure 3), sharing the following story:



*"This photo was taken when one of our homes were broken into and stripped of copper, we had just finished installing the insulation and poly. It was hard work and we came back after a long weekend and everything was destroyed…Although all our hard work felt worthless, our supervisors and coworkers flipped the awful situation into a learning experience and also gave us a taste of real life situations that may arise. We as a team fixed the mess. We also had chances to fix mistakes that we may not have seen prior."*

The participant also related this experience back to their own life and growth journey through the program: *"This photo represents exactly what I looked like when I joined the program 'a mess'. The program gave me motivation and something to rely on everyday."*

The Purpose approach to training and work emphasizes building not only technical skills, but also the mindset and adaptability required to address the challenges that "life throws at you". Through building these skills, participants are better equipped for the job site, and to move through challenges in their personal lives.

## Finding creativity and meaning

*"The creations you make are creations inside oneself"*

Participants talked about how the training program allowed them to reconnect with a sense of creativity and purpose. During the program, participants had opportunities to build projects for family and community members, and to create items that had personal or cultural significance. Some participants linked this creative expression to their own healing journey; others described pride in being able to make gifts for loved ones.

For example, one participant included a carpentry project of a circle made of four types of wood, in the spirit of a medicine wheel, and titled their photo "Purpose". In their words: *"This is something I made as gift for someone that I am very proud of… I thought it was pretty cool to share because I made it with my own two hands."*



Another described a paddle they created during the project, decorated with the logo of their new employer: "Other than the pride of my company that I personally etched in, shows my awakening spirit and the creative mind that I have forgotten…from there, I knew possibilities were endless."

Yet another took a photo of a deck they painted to "show my skills of painting" and "to show painting is [an] art form". The opportunity to express pride and artistry gave program participants a renewed sense of inspiration and ownership over their accomplishments.

## Building community

While many entered the program hoping to gain technical experience and trade knowledge, they found themselves also building friendships, confidence, and meaningful memories along the way. Participants reported that they made friendships during the program, connections that may continue to support them as this group of learners moves into employment in the trades.

Many discussed feeling inspired and interested in supporting other community members to follow this path. One participant said that they shared their reflections and pictures to, *"help others get into the trades"* and *"to inspire others that anything is possible…To motivate people and to show hard work pays"*. Another added the message that they wanted the community to hear: *"if we were able to, why shouldn't you?"*

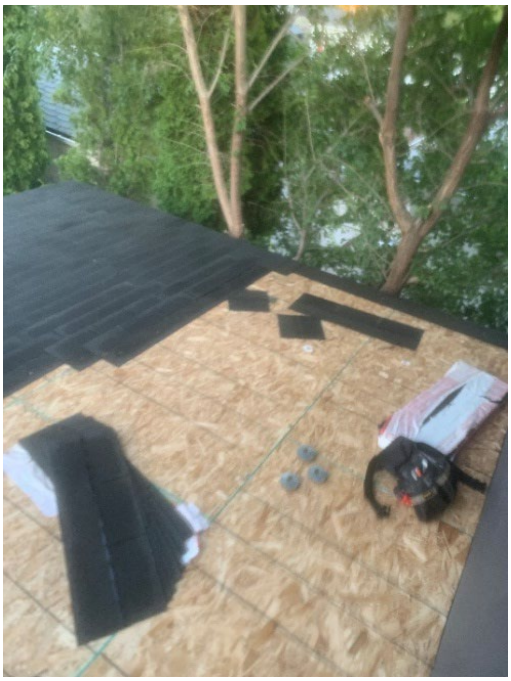
*"I feel a lot of us came into this program with the intentions of just gaining experience and knowledge in the trade. However, I feel we all gained new friends and memories".*

*One participant described their **community** as Purpose Construction, their neighbourhood, and the city of Winnipeg more broadly.*

In addition to building up a sense of community within the training cohort and with Purpose staff, participants spoke about the pride they felt being able to contribute to their local community through their construction work. Through their work with Purpose, participants were able to contribute to housing development and maintenance and repair projects in the North End, specifically in North Point Douglas, a Winnipeg neighbourhood that is underserved and has many buildings with poor living conditions. Participants highlighted pride in being able to – quite literally – help build this neighbourhood back up.

## Employment outcomes

During the program, participants gained technical and life skills, confidence, found opportunities for meaning and purpose, and began building a community of peers and instructors in the skilled trades. These achievements laid the foundation for participants to transition into employment or bring new skills to their existing work. For many, it was their first time working in several years and marked a new chapter in their lives. For example, one participant included a photo of a roof they built over the summer, using skills they learned in the program. They titled the photo "*getting my bearings back*" and disclosed that they would not have done this if they had not signed up for the training. They reflected: *"This picture means something to me. This is the first time in years I've been working, I am in recovery."*



Another participant reported that because of the training, they are now working as a safety supervisor within Purpose's Homes division and have achieved more stability in their life. Overall, participants expressed the message that the program was an opportunity to re-enter employment. In addition to the classroom training, Purpose offers workshops and coaching to help participants refine resumes and interview skills and helps participants connect with local employers. Purpose also prioritizes hiring in-house, hiring training graduates onto Purpose teams and projects when possible.

*"Training program really works. I am stable now, got my own place, I have a job with the homes division. Hard work pays".*

*"Employment at Purpose has made it possible to be happy."*

The training program gave participants a sense of stability and responsibility, which contributed to improvements in both their professional and personal lives. Across the reflections, participants emphasized the role that Purpose Construction played in their journey towards personal development and employment. Through persistence and effort, and with the support of Purpose staff and their fellow learners, participants are working towards next steps in their lives. The photo below, which one participant titled *"We Made It!",* captures the final day of in-class training and symbolizes how far participants have come together.



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