

Scaling Purpose Homes by Purpose Construction

Summary Report - November 2025

Lily Kaufmann | Luxmhina Luxmykanthan| Jasmine Thomas

SRDC SRSA SINCE 1991 DEPUIS
INNOVATION • EXPERIMENTATION • EVALUATION

Purpose Construction

Funded by the Future Skills Centre

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.

FSC is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint ADE, and Signal49 Research.

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Future Skills Centre or the Government of Canada.







Table of Contents

Overview	3	About Purpose	4
The Purpose Ecosystem	5	Training	8
Supporting Learners	10	Employment	11
Participant Experiences	14	Looking Ahead	18

1 OVERVIEW

What sets Purpose apart

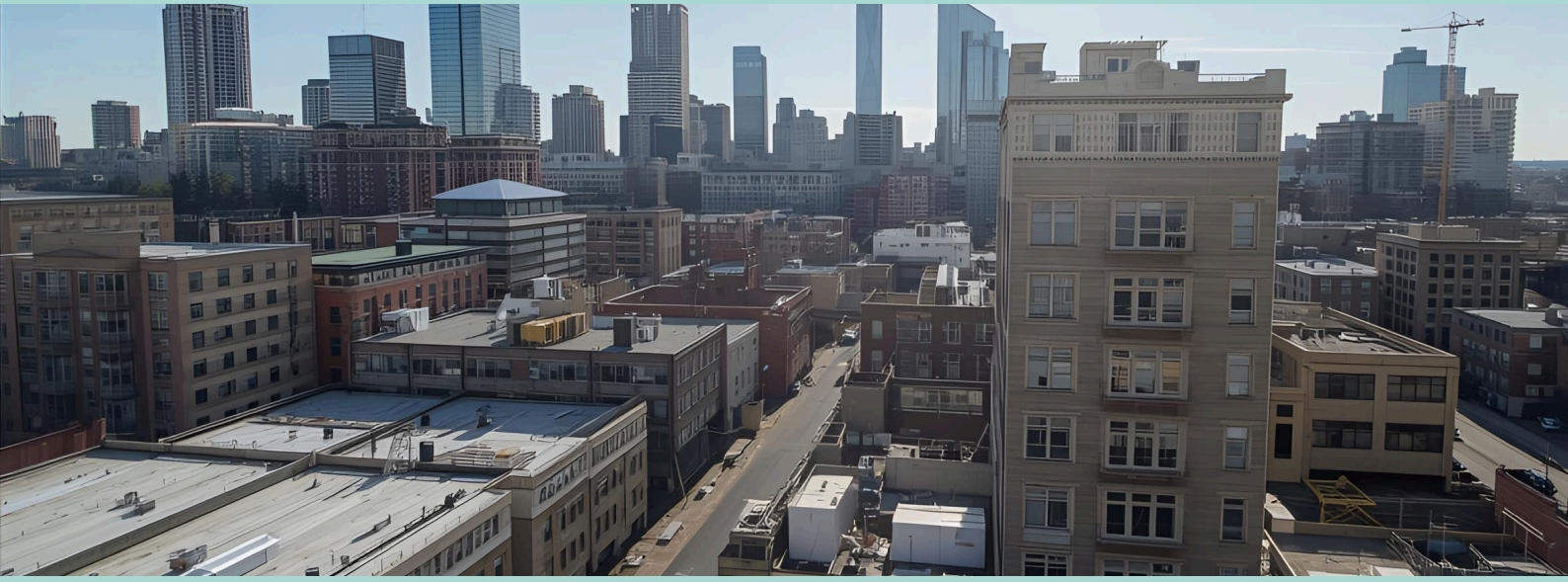
PURPOSE
HOMES

ABOUT PURPOSE

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.

Purpose provides training opportunities for equity-deserving groups that might otherwise be excluded from training and employment, including those with justice-system involvement, unstable housing, and in substance use recovery. By helping learners with complex needs build skills and find employment, they are decreasing unemployment and reliance on social assistance, empowering individuals, and generating employees with in-demand skills to help address labour shortages within the construction sector.

This report outlines the findings of SRDC's evaluation of one Purpose Construction training cohort. Utilizing mixed methods such as surveys and interviews, we gained insights into participant experiences, training effectiveness, and the supportive resources available, which play a crucial role in fostering successful employment outcomes for participants navigating challenges in their lives.



THE PURPOSE ECOSYSTEM

Purpose Construction operates as a community-driven ecosystem where housing development, training, and employment reinforce one another. They support individuals facing barriers to enter the skilled trades and often hire graduates onto their teams, strengthening both their workforce and the local non-market housing stock. As a social enterprise, profits are reinvested back into the community.

Training

Builds skills and confidence for equity-deserving learners who then become the workforce powering Purpose's housing and repair projects.

Employment

Provides stable jobs that reinvest labour, income, and lived experience back into future training cohorts and community housing work.



Development

Produces non-market housing in a neighbourhood with high housing demand, using green building techniques.

Re-investment

Profits are re-invested back into the organization to continue supporting community growth.

Purpose as a Trainer

Purpose provides training opportunities for equity-deserving groups that might otherwise be excluded from training and employment, including those with justice-system involvement, unstable housing, and in substance use recovery. By helping learners with complex needs build skills and find employment, they empower individuals, decrease reliance on social assistance, and generate employees with in-demand skills to help address labour shortages within the construction sector.

Purpose as an Employer

Purpose provides commercial repairs in the non-profit community and property services for Manitoba Housing buildings (i.e., provincially subsidized non-market housing). Purpose is a "patient" employer, providing a supportive environment that provides wraparound supports and opportunities for continual skill development. Site supervisors provide a trauma-informed and culturally responsive environment, creating an inclusive space that facilitates success for employees who might otherwise have challenges maintaining employment on traditional job sites.

Purpose as a housing developer

Purpose addresses critical community needs by building environmentally friendly, multi-generational, affordable home ownership. Their housing development work is concentrated in Winnipeg's North Point Douglas neighbourhood, a residential area with a high housing need. In our consultations with board members and staff, we heard that many traditional developers are not investing in housing development in this area due to lack of profitability. As a result, Purpose faces little direct competition as a housing developer while addressing an acute need for affordable housing within the area.

COMMUNITY-INFORMED

Purpose's training curriculum was designed in consultation with community. For example, Indigenous board members lead community organizations and review the cultural components of Purpose's curriculum and wraparound support offerings to ensure they are aligned with community needs.

As one board member shared, "if you're gonna help community, go ask them how they want to be helped." Purpose is also responsive to needs as they are reported by training participants, and works to incorporate new supports as needed.

> "The training that they provide to people who want to better their own lives… And it's bettering their lives, but at the same time, they're also bettering the lives of other people in the community as well, because…they're taking rundown houses and turning them into something that the families can be proud of living in."
>
> – Local service provider

STAFF WITH SHARED LIVED EXPERIENCE



Purpose's employs a diverse team, reflecting the diversity of their trainees and the wider community. There is representation of equity-deserving groups that are traditionally under-represented in the trades, including women and members of the 2SLGBTIQIA+ community.

Shared lived experience provides opportunities for staff to connect with participants, build trust, and have a more in-depth knowledge of the strengths, needs, and challenges participants may have when entering the program.

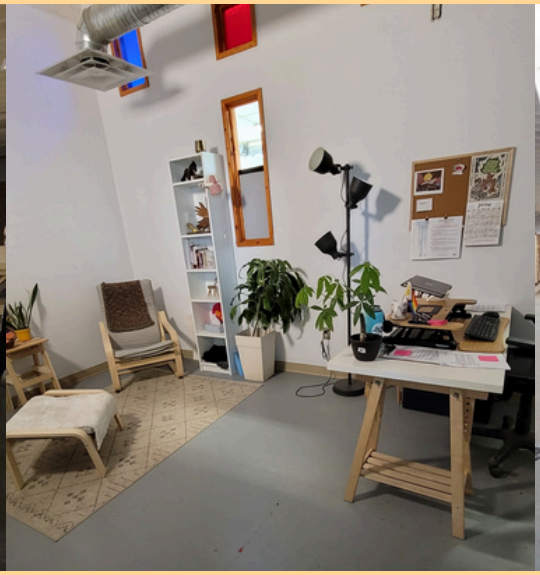
2 TRAINING

Framework & Foundations

PURPOSE
HOMES

TRAINING PROGRAM

The training program prepares participants for real work settings. It begins with 8 weeks of in-class learning that mixes tool training, guided project completion, and structured book-learning to build core knowledge. After completing the classroom portion, participants continue with 12 weeks of job-site placement, offering steady hands-on experience, exposure to real tasks, and time to build confidence on the job site.


The program supports learners to gain:

- Technical and social-emotional skills
- Increase confidence and resilience
- Support trauma recovery
- Provide opportunities for cultural (re-)connection
- Facilitate access to services
- Friendships and social support

Success in these areas sets learners up to find and maintain employment. For example, key learning objectives include building a habit of attendance and developing strong communication skills (e.g., providing notice for absences, raising concerns, asking questions), which support employability.

"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 Participant

SUPPORTING LEARNERS

STRENGTH-BASED

- Training recognizes and builds on participants' existing skills.
- Provides opportunity for creativity and skill-building through curiosity.
- Opportunities for building confidence and self-advocacy.
- Flexible pacing allows advanced learners to deepen skills while others receive support.
- Instruction grounded in accessible, relatable language.

WRAPAROUND SUPPORTS

- Transportation support
- On-site mental health support
- Cultural supports
- Practical and administrative supports (e.g., getting drivers licence, support finding housing)
- Legal clinics
- Resource navigation
- Early identification of needs and continuous troubleshooting as needed.



CULTURALLY-INFORMED

- Cultural activities and supports integrated into program, including smudging, sharing circles, Elder visits, and cultural teachings.
- Curriculum reviewed by Indigenous community leaders
- Culture framed as a source of strength, identity, and resilience.
- Support for rebuilding confidence while honouring family and community responsibilities.

TRAUMA-INFORMED

- Training designed for people navigating healing and life stabilization/transitions.
- Emphasis on building trust, communication, collaboration, and adaptability.
- Relationship-focused instructors and staff members.
- Opportunities to develop friendships and a social support network with peers through shared work and learning.

3 EMPLOYMENT

Impact & supporting success

PURPOSE
HOMES

SUPPORTED TRANSITIONS TO EMPLOYMENT

Purpose actively connects graduates with workplaces where they can thrive. Their newly added transition coordinator strengthens this process by:

- Building relationships with local employers and unions
- Sharing job postings and matching participants to opportunities
- Offering workshops and one-on-one support for resumes, applications, and interview preparation
- Conducting weekly or bi-weekly follow-ups after participants begin new jobs to ensure they are supported through early challenges

Purpose also works with local sector partners to raise standards of inclusivity and safety across Manitoba's construction sector. This includes providing education on workers rights and preparing trainees to navigate job sites where mental health needs or substance-use risks may arise.

TRAINING IN-DEMAND SKILLS

Purpose consults with local employers to identify in-demand skills. In this project, employers shared that while basic technical skills are expected, what truly makes candidates stand out are soft skills like professionalism, reliability, positive attitude, and openness to learning. They value applicants who show initiative and some hands-on experience, even if it comes from informal projects rather than formal construction jobs. As workers grow in their careers, communication and leadership skills become the key factors that determine advancement.





IN-HOUSE EMPLOYMENT

Purpose hires many training graduates, providing a supportive employment environment characterized by the same values of their training program. Purpose's work in non-market housing is meaningful for many participants, providing an opportunity to give back to community. Purpose also works to provide full-time, year-round employment, which provides stability and structure for employees. Employees are encouraged to continue to develop skills and career progression is supported.

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

Purpose supports participants not only through training, but also through their transition into full-time, stable employment. To date, 77% of training graduates have found full-time employment in the skilled trades. those who completed training moved directly into employment. Of those employed, 19 were hired by Purpose, 2 hired by local employers, and 2 became self-employed.

For many, employment provides income stability, structure, and pride that helps them continue on paths of healing and recovery.

77%

program graduates are employed in the skilled trades







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

-Program participant

This is the first time in years I've been working, I am in recovery."

-Program participant

"Living a stable, responsible life style... I've been clean and sober since starting the program and employment at Purpose."

-Program participant

4 PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES

Emerging themes from participant reflections

PURPOSE HOMES

Program participants completed a Photovoice activity to document their experiences in the program with photos and written reflections. Some highlights are shared below.

NEW PATHWAYS

Beyond technical skills, participants spoke about leaving the program with new perspectives on work and life. 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 provided the structure and motivation they needed to rebuild.



"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."

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. Participants shared positive feedback about the training environment and the supports offered.

"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."

BUILDING SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE

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



In addition to gaining skills and confidence, participants shared how their work in the program helped them step into a new headspace, where they felt ready to work and learn.

> "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 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.

CREATING COMMUNITY

"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."

While many entered the program hoping to gain technical experience and trade knowledge, they found themselves also building friendships, community, and support network. Participants shared that the connections that may continue to support them as this group of learners moves into employment in the trades. Many shared feeling inspired and interested in supporting other community members to follow this path. One participant shared 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".

EMPLOYMENT AND BEYOND

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.

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, participants are working towards the next steps in their lives.

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

LOOKING AHEAD

Purpose's training, employment, and housing ecosystem creates meaningful opportunities for individuals navigating complex life circumstances.

By pairing hands-on skill development with trauma-informed instruction, cultural connection, and comprehensive wraparound supports, Purpose helps participants build stability, confidence, and long-term pathways into the skilled trades.

This community-driven approach demonstrates how inclusive training, supportive workplaces, and strong employer relationships can open doors for learners who are typically overlooked in traditional training systems.

Looking ahead, Purpose is well-positioned to continue strengthening this ecosystem and deepen the impact it has on individuals, families, and the community.

Thank you to the participants, program staff, and community members who contributed to this evaluation, providing insights and personal stories to help tell the Purpose story.

