Future Skills Centre | Centre des Compétences futures

Project Insights Report

Scaling Purpose Homes

PARTNERS
Purpose Co.

LOCATIONS
Manitoba

INVESTMENT
$998,087

PUBLISHED
November 2026

CONTRIBUTORS
Sayani Manna

Executive Summary

Manitoba's construction sector faces significant challenges, including a shortage of affordable housing, and the need to transition to low-carbon building practices. These are compounded by a shrinking labour supply in the region. Buildforce Canada projects approximately 9,800 Manitoba construction workers will retire by 2034. Statistics Canada's April 2026 Labour Force Survey shows an overall decline in the labour force participation rate, countrywide, as the population ages. Recruiting from Indigenous communities and other equity-deserving groups in the construction sector (including women, newcomers and 2SLGBTQIA+ community members) can help build a diverse and resilient workforce. However, systemic barriers, including limited access to employment and affordable training, geographic isolation and language challenges persist.

Winnipeg-based social enterprise housing developer, Purpose Construction, tested an integrated training program to address these challenges. With support from the Future Skills Centre (FSC), Purpose Construction built on a successful pilot of a 20-week pre-apprenticeship, hands-on construction training program called Scaling Purpose Homes. The model involves paid skills training, employment placements, and affordable housing development. The program was delivered to a cohort of primarily Indigenous learners.

An evaluation showed the program was effective at supporting Indigenous Peoples and equity-deserving groups in skilled trades employment in the construction sector. Nearly three-quarters of learners, from all cohorts, who completed the training found full-time employment in skilled trades.

As part of program scaling, Purpose Construction explored aligning its curriculum with industry-recognized micro-credentials to strengthen graduate employment prospects. However, the program evaluation showed that micro-credentials have limited value unless they are delivered by a body recognized by employers.

The evaluation credits the program's success to three interconnected elements: Trauma-informed and culturally-grounded training environment; comprehensive wraparound support including training stipends; and an in-house employment placement model that provides safe and supportive first jobs.

KEY INSIGHTS

1. Within weeks of completing the Scaling Purpose Homes initiative, five of seven (71%) graduates who were part of the evaluation were employed.

2. Paid training stipends, flexible wraparound supports for mental health, cultural understanding, and legal and housing assistance were essential to enabling learners to complete training and transition to employment.

3. Engagement with local employers and unions aligned the program with sector realities, while highlighting that micro-credentials held limited practical value unless issued by accredited and recognized providers.

The Issue

Manitoba's construction sector faces three compounding challenges: skilled labour shortages, a need for affordable housing and the transition to low-carbon construction practices. Contributing about 6.3% of the provincial economy, Manitoba's construction sector has prioritized expanding affordable housing, modernizing infrastructure, and adopting green energy. All of these priorities rely heavily on a skilled trades workforce that is experienced, adaptable and diverse. The demand for skilled workers is growing due to the gap created by an aging and shrinking labour force, with employers looking to groups who are underrepresented in the sector to fill available roles. Yet systemic barriers continue to keep Indigenous peoples and other equity-deserving groups (including women, newcomers, and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals) from employment and training opportunities in the sector.

Winnipeg's North Point Douglas neighbourhood is a lower-income, underserved neighbourhood with neglected infrastructure, vacant lots and a diverse community of Indigenous Peoples and newcomers. The community faces an acute need for affordable housing. Traditional developers have turned away from this area due to a lack of profitability from low rental and sale values. The community faces a housing shortage, and community members are also largely distanced from the construction sector due to barriers including justice-system involvement, housing instability, and prolonged separation from the labour market.



What We Investigated

The Scaling Purpose Homes initiative builds on a skills-development model that Purpose Construction piloted with three cohorts between 2023 and 2024. Participants completed a six-month paid training program that combined skills development with wraparound supports and hands-on experience in the construction of affordable homes. Wraparound supports included housing assistance, addiction recovery support, budgeting, life-skills classes, and job readiness training. The training program incorporated Indigenous traditional knowledge, Elders' teachings, and ceremonies. During the pilot, Purpose built five affordable housing units on vacant lots donated by the City of Winnipeg and trained 40 Indigenous learners.

In 2025, with FSC's support, Purpose scaled the program for a fourth cohort with enhancements to the existing model, including 8 weeks of hands-on training and 12 weeks of work placements with access to enhanced wraparound supports. Additionally, industry-recognized microcredentials were integrated into the program, aligned with the Manitoba Construction Sector Council's standards, that incorporated modular construction techniques into the curriculum, and embedded green energy practices into the program.

The evaluation, by Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), examined three main areas: skills development and work readiness, wraparound supports, and employer and community perspectives. It explored which training methods and resources were most effective in helping participants build technical and employability skills, and how microcredentials and hands-on green building training could be made more accessible to equity-deserving groups. The evaluation also assessed how culturally grounded and flexible supports helped participants complete the program and transition into employment. Finally, it examined how employers, unions, and community organizations viewed the relevance of green building skills training and the value of microcredentials in meeting workforce and sector needs.

SRDC used a variety of data collection methods, anchored in EDI and reconciliation practices, including prioritizing Indigenous Peoples' voices from Purpose's Indigenous advisory board and local Indigenous organizations. All data collection activities, including surveys, key informant interviews, photovoice reflection, and community consultations, were conducted through a strength-based lens that recognized the participants' existing skills and capabilities. Data were analyzed to understand program improvements from previous iterations, ability in equipping and building a diverse workforce, and training completion and employment outcomes.

What We're Learning

The evaluation showed that the program successfully delivered key activities and short-term outcomes, including hands-on training and support, high levels of training completion, participant engagement in discussions on in-demand entry-level skills, and responsiveness to community needs. However, the evaluation was constrained by the program's small sample size of seven participants, short data collection period, and limited employer participation.

Hands-on training built workplace readiness
The 20-week training program equipped multi-barriered learners with both technical skills and social-emotional skills sought by employers. Participants reported gains in all areas of learning, including tool use and techniques, safety protocols, communication, and adaptability skills. All respondents in a survey of the previous three cohorts felt the program met its objectives, and approximately 90% said it helped them build skills to bring into work. Hands-on, in-person learning on real construction projects were tangible indicators of their progress. Learners also reported through photovoice reflection on less tangible outcomes such as increased feelings of confidence, greater community engagement, and successful re-engagement with training and work after prolonged separation from the labour market. Interviews with local employers revealed that while hard technical skills were the expected baseline for hiring, transferable social and emotional skills made jobseekers stand out, with their work ethic, professional attitude and openness to learning.

Wraparound supports improved learner participation
Training stipends and flexible wraparound support made participation and program completion possible for many learners. The program shows how comprehensive wraparound support and training stipends can help multi-barriered populations transition from being distant from the labour market to being skilled employees in the sector. Beyond stipends, efforts to reduce complex barriers enabled learners to access transportation support, legal clinics, in-house mental health counselling, and cultural supports including Elders' visits and sharing circles. Support was tailored to be delivered flexibly on a needs basis by staff with shared lived experience, building genuine relationships with participants over time.

An in-house employment model improved short-term employment outcomes
The program's in-house employment model was critical to employment outcomes. Of the graduates employed from the evaluated cohort, all five were hired by Purpose Construction itself. This social-enterprise model of engaging learners in training and employment was successful in creating post-program placements and in hiring learners who are aligned to the workplace culture and best practices. It also removed other barriers such as workplace discrimination and/or harassment, inconsistent year-round work, and rigid workplace policies. The program also enabled participants to be involved in the meaningful work of building and repairing affordable homes, directly impacting the community. Many participants described this work as a source of pride and motivation. That said, questions on the long-term sustainability of in-house placements arise, as program staff recognized that many workplaces would not be accommodating to redress the barriers faced by these groups or provide stable year-round employment.

Recognized credentials carried greater employer value
Micro-credentials provided by Purpose held limited value for entry-level workers in the construction sector. Employer and union interviews were consistent on the point that micro-credentials are only valuable when issued by trusted and well-accredited bodies. They noted learners, in some cases, had also been asked to redo well-accredited courses at their own expense. Purpose Construction intends to continue training cohorts in green energy construction practices, while pursuing partnerships with local unions to offer recognized credentials rather than developing its own.

Why It Matters

With large-scale investments in the skilled trades, Canada is looking to increase recruitment, retention and advancement of diverse groups to meet demand.

The outcomes of Scaling Purpose Homes are vital in understanding how cultural- and trauma-informed skills training can help build and mobilize a diverse and resilient construction sector workforce. The initiative shows that individuals distant from the labour market who are facing systemic barriers to employment can successfully transition into skilled trades with the right training conditions. While the evaluated cohort was small, it presented another model successful in reaching a population that conventional apprenticeship programs fail to serve.

The program is also another demonstration that wraparound supports and case management are essential features for learners with multiple complex barriers. Paid training stipends allowed participants who could not forgo income to commit to full-time training and training completion, while legal clinics, in-house mental health counselling, and cultural support with Elders' visits and sharing circles, all delivered flexibly by staff with shared lived experience, supported program completion.



State of Skills: Quality of Work

Improving quality of work, through better wages and benefits, social environments, security, safety, and inclusion, alongside skills and professional development is one part of a larger strategy to address these labour shortages.

Read Thematic Report

The program's social enterprise model, which combines paid training with in-house job placements, was a major contributor to its success. However, this employment model is also one of the most difficult elements to replicate. Purpose Construction's ability to hire graduates and provide stable employment is closely tied to its role as a social enterprise engaged in community housing construction and repair projects. Furthermore, the organization benefits from strong community trust and guidance from an Indigenous advisory board, which helps ensure the program remains culturally grounded. Unlike many workplaces, Purpose can offer consistent year-round employment, flexibility, and a safe, trauma-informed environment for workers with complex needs. Its inclusive workplace culture mirrors the program's values, making it a natural transition point into employment for graduates. The evaluation highlights the importance of sustainable funding to help programs build employer partnerships, integrate wraparound supports, and provide continued assistance as participants transition into employment outside the social enterprise.

The program's experience with microcredentials has broader implications for the skills development sector. Training providers increasingly use microcredentials to signal competency and training completion; however, employers and union representatives interviewed noted that these credentials often have limited practical value because of inconsistent quality standards and limited oversight. In response to these findings, Purpose Construction revised its Theory of Change to prioritize partnerships that provide union-recognized credentials going forward. The findings also highlight the need for clearer accreditation frameworks and stronger employer recognition of microcredentials, enabling learners to make more informed decisions about whether pursuing a credential will meaningfully support their employment opportunities.

What's Next

In 2026, Purpose Construction received SCALE funding from FSC to grow the program's reach and deepen its impact. Plans include expanding enrollment and including ongoing training and development to support career progression of Purpose staff, many of whom are graduates of the training program themselves. Supervisors will also be equipped with tools and strategies to foster inclusive workplace cultures and support employee retention as the organization grows.

Using participatory methods, the next phase is intended to co-develop training materials and tools with employees to address skill gaps as workers move from entry-level roles into supervisory positions. This approach keeps the program grounded in the lived experience of its workforce, consistent with how the model has been designed.

Purpose continues to deliver training in low-carbon building techniques and is exploring partnerships with community stakeholders such as unions and employers. As green building practices become standard across the industry, embedding these skills early positions graduates well for long-term careers in a changing sector.

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

How to Cite This Report
Manna, S. (2026). Project Insights Report: Scaling Purpose Homes, Purpose Construction. Toronto: Future Skills Centre. https://fsc-ccf.ca/projects/scaling-purpose-homes/

Funded by the
Government of Canada's
Future Skills Program



Scaling Purpose Homes is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

© Copyright 2026 – Future Skills Centre / Centre des Competences futures