

Opening doors for women in skilled construction trades

Office to Advance Women Apprentices Alberta celebrates grand opening in Edmonton

March 8, 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The mission of the Office to Advance Women Apprentices (OAWA) Alberta is to open doors for more women to enter and advance their careers to Red Seal certification in the skilled construction trades. The grand opening of OAWA Alberta's Edmonton office was celebrated on International Women's Day (March 8, 2024).

Carpenters' Regional Council (CRC) received \$2.354 million from the Government of Canada under the Canadian Apprenticeship Strategy Women in Skilled Trades Initiative for the Alberta OAWA project.

OAWA Alberta offers ongoing support to tradeswomen seeking work or already employed in the skilled construction trades. In addition to offering a suite of individualized wrap around services for applicants, the office has developed strategic industry partnerships to connect tradeswomen to employers.

The new OAWA Alberta office is located in Edmonton at #177, 15210 123 Ave. OAWA Alberta has plans to open additional offices in Fort McMurray (scheduled for summer 2024) and Calgary (scheduled for 2025).

"Now is the time to strengthen and expand our workforce," said Randy Boissonnault, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages. "Our investment today is putting women at the forefront in skilled trades training and supporting them to succeed in rewarding, high-paying construction and manufacturing trades that will help build the country's housing supply."

"We're focused on educating women about the incredible career opportunities available to them in the skilled construction trades and creating pathways for them to succeed," said Emma Pollard, Project Director for OAWA Alberta. "Working in collaboration with our industry partners, we are committed to enhancing a worksite culture that supports women in a male dominated industry."

Carpenters Local 579 first established OAWA in Newfoundland and Labrador in 2009. Based on the success of that model, OAWA offices have since opened in mainland

Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Cape Breton, the Prairies region servicing Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and now Alberta (opened September 2023).

To date, OAWA has assisted with more than 2,000 employment opportunities and has provided job-related supports to more than 4,000 women across Canada.

While the International Women's Day 2024 campaign theme is to 'Inspire Inclusion', women unfortunately continue to be underrepresented in the skilled construction trades. According to a 2021 Build Force survey, women accounted for seven per cent of the skilled trades workforce in Alberta. In Canada, women comprise 47.5 per cent of the labour force, but only represent 8.6 per cent of skilled trades workers (Statistics Canada, 2022).

"Ensuring careers in the skilled trades are more accessible for women is a priority to help make our industry more inclusive and to address Canada's labour shortage," said Jason Rowe, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the Carpenters' Regional Council. "Complementing our initiatives like Sisters in the Brotherhood, our investment in OAWA Alberta is another way we are providing leadership to attract and retain more women in the trades."

OAWA Alberta supports 39 key identified Red Seal construction trades. Anyone in Alberta over the age of 16 who identifies as a woman and is seeking support to either enter or advance their skilled construction trades career, or to achieve Red Seal certification, is eligible for OAWA Alberta support. OAWA Alberta services are available at no cost.

Along with cash and in-kind contributions from the CRC, the OAWA Alberta office's total operating budget over a three-year term is roughly \$3 million.