

VERMILION ENERGY/YWCA SKILLS TRAINING CENTRE

SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT (SROI) CASE STUDY

Fast Facts

- Number of trainees expected to increase to 100 in 2012
- 205 trainees served between 2008 and 2011
- In January 2012, program expanded from 16 to 20 weeks in length
- New additions to programming in 2012 include:
 - * Ongoing trainee assessment/evaluation;
 - * Full week introductions to plumbing and electrical trades;
 - * Full time employment specialist focusing on work experience and job placements for graduates;
 - * Increased focus on personal and work site safety
- Average starting wage for our graduates = \$16/hour

One-Year SROI: \$1 : \$4.65

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"The benefits [for employers] are two-fold: we know that in order to get into and complete the program, [trainees] have already made a life decision to improve their career options. They come to us eager and open to learning and improving their skill levels. Eager employees make for career employees and we like the feeling of being a part of a "step up" in their lives ."

~ B. Taylor, Work Experience Provider and Industry Employer

Program Background

For many women, the fear of not having the financial means to support themselves and their families is very real. According to the Parkland Institute, the average woman's annual income in Alberta in 2011 was 68% that of the average man.¹

Women also make up the majority of minimum wage earners in Alberta (64%) and account for 92% of the single parent households dependent upon Alberta Works income support.²

In recent years, employers in the construction industry in Alberta have been challenged with a shortfall of workers due to growth and a rising rate of retirement. These challenges are expected to continue into the future as the economy shifts and the up swing in retirement continues.³

Accordingly, the industry is making a concerted effort to recruit employees from groups that are traditionally underrepresented in the trades.

A New Partnership

In response to these needs in the community, Vermilion Energy and the YWCA of Calgary partnered in the

development of the Vermilion Energy / YWCA Skills Training Centre in 2007 to provide skilled training to women in Calgary, providing them with greater access to stable and secure employment in the construction industry. The product of the program is a skilled workforce capable of meeting the occupational demands within the industry.

Social Value Created

Applicants to the Vermilion Energy / YWCA Skills Training Centre (Skills) come to the program facing barriers to achieving viable employment.

Some applicants rely on income assistance or survival jobs and lack the education, skills and/or competencies to

obtain and maintain better paying employment.

Other women are heads of households and face unaffordable childcare and part-time work that provides them with insufficient earnings and benefits.

The Skills program creates social value by providing women with the training and experience necessary to access viable careers in construction. Through the program, women increase their employment opportunities, develop a clear sense of their career options within the

THEORY OF CHANGE
If underemployed or unemployed women, at risk for poverty, have access to trades education, training and support they will be more likely to find and maintain viable employment in order to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

industry and build the confidence to take the next steps towards their career goals.

Industry employers benefit from Skills graduates. These women have a demonstrated commitment to careers in the trades and the program plays an integral role in connecting them to employers through the work experience opportunities it provides. In doing so, employers save in recruitment costs and staff turnover associated with accessing the general workforce. Similarly, employers incur potential savings by opting for employees with comprehensive safety training and the associated reduction in risks for accident or injury and reduced training requirements.

How Vermilion Energy / YWCA Skills Training Centre Works:

Women interested in applying to the Vermilion Energy / YWCA Skills Training Centre are required to attend one of the program's weekly information sessions with the program recruiter. This session gives them a chance to tour the centre, learn about the realities of working in construction and seek out any additional information they need to determine if a career in construction is a good fit for them. Registration is continuous throughout the year.

Prior to being accepted into the Skills program, applicants undergo an interview / evaluation to assess their suitability for the program.

Examples of the program's requirements are:

- ⇒ Demonstrated commitment to a career in the trades
- ⇒ Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES) - Level 2+
- ⇒ 70% or better on YWCA Math and Literacy Assessments
- ⇒ High level of physical fitness required to sustain career in trades
- ⇒ Access to a vehicle and driver's license is preferred as the inability to travel to work sites can be a barrier to employment in the industry
- ⇒ Punctuality
- ⇒ Work History
- ⇒ A Canadian English benchmark of 6 or higher

There are six 20-week sessions offered each year, with as many as 20 trainees per session. The Skills curriculum includes 20 weeks of pre-employment training focused on carpentry, with an introduction to plumbing and electrical.

Within the 20 week format, each trainee will take part in a work experience with an industry employer. They also receive on-going case management and career support from an Employment Specialist. Additionally, Skills trainees learn about nutrition and fitness, resume writing, budgeting and communications skills, all of which equip them with the competencies and confidence to ensure they are successful in finding and maintaining viable employment, thus meeting their career goals.

Working Towards a New Career

Each Skills trainee is required to successfully write the Alberta Pre-Apprenticeship Exam at the end of the 20-week session.

If a Skills trainee does not pass the Pre-Apprenticeship Exam, she has the opportunity to access ongoing remedial support to prepare her to sit the exam again.

A successful exam result triggers a series of options that, otherwise, would not be available to the trainee.

Graduates who successfully complete the exam have the option to continue on to an apprenticeship in the trade of their choosing. Some Skills graduate may work for a year or two as a skilled worker, as they prepare to become an indentured apprentice while others will make the leap only months into their first employment opportunity. Generally speaking, an apprenticeship will last four years. Apprenticeships have a structured work and study schedule. As a person goes through the process, they progress towards 'Journeyed' status, which means that they are fully qualified in their trade, and entitled to base wages that can only increase with experience.



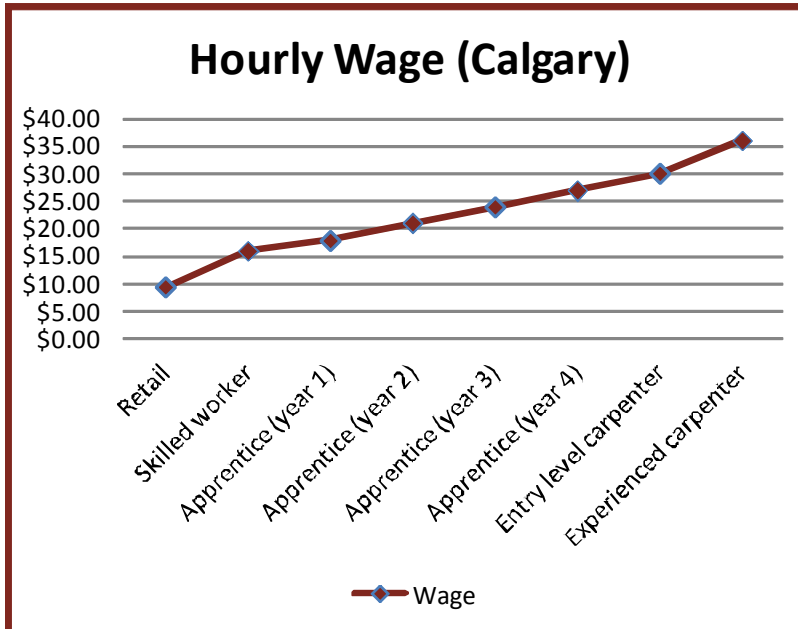
"I am a woman that enjoys working hard and having something to show for the work I have done."

~ Skills Trainee

Skills Trainees at Work

SROI Case Study: Vermilion Energy / YWCA Skills Training Centre

Apprenticeship wages follow an incremental pay scale based on standardized pay rates for their trade. As the women increase their experience, they increase their earnings. In year one, carpentry apprentices earn 60% of a Journeyed salary, in year two, 70%, in year three, 80%, and in year four, 90%. For instance, an entry-level Journeyed carpenter in Calgary earns approximately \$30/hr; therefore, in year one of her apprenticeship, a woman can expect to earn \$18/hr, year two earn \$21/hr, etc. This pay scale enables their effort and achievement to be recognized as the hours invested in their skill development and education increases.



Example of Earning Potential for Skills Trainees

Understanding Change

As a result of their economic circumstances, women experiencing poverty are at greater risk for physical and mental health concerns, homelessness and family violence. They are more likely to visit doctors, access

emergency room services, food banks, transit subsidies and subsidized childcare than the general public.⁴

The employment opportunities available to them often lack stability and viability, requiring women to work irregular hours at multiple jobs to make ends meet. These conditions too often result in increased social isolation and decreased individual and personal resilience, as the women and their families have fewer supports in place to assist them through challenging times.

Most of all, women experiencing poverty are more likely to lack the self-confidence and self-esteem necessary to

imagine a better future for themselves and their families. With hope, confidence and tools to move forward, Skills participants offer future employers reliable, skilled and conscientious employees, while creating value for themselves and the community as a result of their success.

Social Value Created: Trainees

Sherra, a single mother of three, came to Skills in the fall of 2010 on the advice of a relative who read about the program online. At the time, Sherra was struggling with low self-esteem but was very interested in a career in construction. With the support of the program registrar, she was able to secure Alberta Employment and Immigration funding for her tuition and living allowance and could thus focus on her career.

Once in the program, Sherra demonstrated a strong work ethic. She developed a clear aptitude in carpentry, and identified opportunities to round out her skills. By the end of the program, Sherra demonstrated competence and confidence in her mock interviews and received positive reviews from her work experience supervisor. At graduation, she had achieved a 20% improvement on her Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES).

"I have struggled for many years trying to support myself and my family. This program has provided me with the skills and understanding that will help me gain employment in the carpentry field, ultimately helping me support my family for a much better future."

~ Sherra, Skills Graduate

Upon graduation, Sherra was eager to begin her apprenticeship towards Journeyed carpentry. To meet her goal, she was able to access the ongoing support of the training centre's staff to develop her communication skills and secure employment. Recently, the team was able to connect Sherra with Spindles Stairs & Railings. She is scheduled for an apprenticeship registration in the near future.

Value Created: Employers

The Vermilion Energy / YWCA Skills Training Centre creates value for trainees, who in turn create value for their employers.

Employers of Skills graduates have the opportunity to hire a skilled worker directly from their work experience. This enables the employer to avoid recruitment costs and train their new employees to meet their own standards.

Skills graduates are presented to employers having already achieved several key safety certifications, including First Aid, WHMIS, CSTS and Fall Arrest and Prevention. Presenting with these certifications prevents an employer from having to invest in this training, and increases their confidence that a new employee is familiar with essential skills and knowledge that contribute to

workplace safety.

Research has also shown that having women on site reduces the likelihood of workplace accidents, improves employee conduct and thanks to training in safe tool usage, decreases the likelihood of damaged equipment and related costs.

Skills graduates enter the industry with a strong work ethic, a positive attitude, increased self-confidence and a career action plan, thereby reducing recruitment and new employee start up costs by demonstrating commitment to their job and staying with their employer longer.

“How many times have I said that I wish there was a way for us to try out our new employees first? It helps tremendously with our hiring decisions.”

~ Owner, Zapata Contracting

Social Value Created: Calgary Community

Last but not least, the training provided by the Vermilion Energy / YWCA Skills Training Centre creates value for the Calgary community by contributing to the development of a highly skilled workforce, who choose to stay and live in the Calgary area, improve the quality of life for their families and become contributing members of society themselves, thereby giving back to their community.

Conclusion

“Before I came to this program I was practically unemployable. I had had very little work experience and next to no skills. Despite how earnestly I looked for work, I had much difficulty finding a job.

This program for me has really come as a blessing; I feel as though I have accomplished and learned so much. The quality of my life has improved greatly, from my employability status to my housing situation to my personal worth, all of which could not have been achieved without you.”

~ Cody, Skills Graduate

The Vermilion Energy / YWCA Skills Training Centre creates value in a number of ways. As an opportunity in itself, the program intervenes in the cycle of poverty in which many women in Alberta are currently living and creates sustainable poverty reduction.

In the course of completing our 20-week program, women develop skills and aptitude for the construction industry, feel empowered as they gain new confidence and experience the satisfaction of seeing the results of their hard work.

Upon graduation, Skills graduates can work at a higher wage as skilled workers. They are more eligible and likely to move into apprenticeship programs, where their wages will increase further.

The alternate outcome to involvement with the Skills program includes continued unemployment or under-employment, risk of poverty, lack of self-confidence and a lesser quality of life for women and their families.

A ratio of \$4.65 of value created per 1 dollar invested is a conservative estimate of the ongoing future value of the Vermilion Energy / YWCA Skills Training Centre.

References

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