

‘Do not let the stereotypes deter you from construction,’ advises panellist

Angela Gismondi November 11, 2020



When considering a career in construction, it’s important to do your research and talk to people in the industry, said a panel of women at a recent session entitled Empower Youth in Trades.

“You can get jobs with the government, you can get jobs in the private sector, you can work with architects in their firms. All of these things are connected,” explained panellist Tamara Baptiste, an architectural projects co-ordinator with the Regional Municipality of York. “When thinking of construction the goal is to get that stigma out of our minds that you are just on a construction site.

“I think it’s very important. I can’t stress this enough, just talk to people who are in the industry. If construction is something you think you may have an interest in, you owe it to yourself to at least investigate.”

The online session, sponsored by the **Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON)**, was part of the First Work Aspire Youth Summit held during a recent Futures Conference 2020 event. **The panel was moderated by RESCON policy and programs analyst Amina Dibe.**

All three women agreed construction careers are vast and there are multiple entry points to the industry.

“I never even considered construction, to be honest, as a viable career path but as I started doing more research I realized how wrong I was and how many opportunities there are,” said Asal Afshar, an employment program specialist at Tridel.

Afshar shared a personal story about when her brother told her he wanted to get into construction.

“This was many years ago and I strongly discouraged him from it,” she said, adding at the time she didn’t know much about the industry. “I regret saying that to him. Now that I’m working in construction and the more research I do I actually think it’s quite the opposite. There are so many ways to grow in the industry. You can make a very good living financially.

“There is a lot of good that comes with working in the construction industry. It’s a very good and viable career.”

Soft skills are just as important as technical skills, she added.

“With construction people think that you have to be a certain person to be in construction or have a certain strength or technical skills and knowledge. While there is a technical side to construction, especially if you want to join the trades, I think something that is overlooked is a lot of the soft skills that are important,” said Afshar. “Communication, problem solving, strong work ethic and willingness to learn, those are the more important things you need to have. Usually the employer will teach you the technical side of it. But it’s really about showing up every day with that really positive attitude, willingness to learn and teamwork that are the most important.”

A poll taken during the session showed 68 per cent of participants had family members in construction.

“Talk to them, learn a little about what they do,” said Baptiste. “A lot of times in construction people, if they see those soft skills, they will take you under their wing and it’s easier to get in that way and you get that exposure to different areas of construction.”

“There is a networking piece that is so important when it comes to construction,” explained Afshar, adding job shadowing can help people decide whether or not a career in construction is for them. “It’s really about getting out there, talking to people, getting to know people. That’s the best way to get your foot in the door in construction.”

Stigma does exist, which can create barriers to entering the field.

“I feel that most women are going to be kind of nervous getting into construction because it is mostly men,” said Meagan Donnelly, an insulation installer for Torino Drywall Inc. “There are

so many misconceptions about it that it makes it difficult for someone to take that step and get into it.

“Do not let the stereotypes deter you from construction.”

“You don’t have to be physically strong to do it. I think that could possibly be one of the reasons that a lot of women don’t enter construction because they have that perception,” Baptiste added.

“I think some of the fear is being around males and the stigma around construction is that it’s almost barbaric the way men behave. It’s so far from the truth. I’ve been in construction for quite a few years and the men are very helpful, extremely respectful.”