



Women share insights on getting into construction

November 3, 2020

By RESCON



Meagan Donnelly, insulation installer for Torino Drywall Inc.

Vaughan, Ont. – There are many career paths available to women and young people entering the construction industry.

That was one of the takeaways from an online panel session, entitled *Empower Youth in Trades*, sponsored by the **Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON)** at the First Work Aspire Youth Summit held during a recent Futures Conference 2020 event.

Three women who are working in the industry shared their insights on how and why they got into their fields. They also provided their perspective on opportunities that exist in construction and how youth can get into the trades. **RESCON policy and programs analyst Amina Dibe moderated the online session.**

“One of RESCON’s top priorities over the past few years has been raising awareness to youth about the multitude of careers and jobs in the construction industry – from the skilled trades to construction management,” says Dibe. “We’ve partnered with organizations like Job Talks Canada to profile more than 40 people and jobs in the construction industry, via engaging [YouTube videos](#).”

The panelists said there are many careers women and youth can pursue in construction, from the skilled trades, to design and architecture to building information modelling, that are off-site and on-site.



Asal Afshar, employment program specialist at Tridel.

“When it comes to construction, there are so many opportunities,” said panelist Asal Afshar, an employment program specialist at Tridel. “There are so many ways to grow in the industry. You can make a very good living financially. It is a very good and viable career.”

Afshar has a background in social work. She got into the industry after doing research for a report on youth and entry-level jobs while in her previous role at CivicAction. She learned a lot about construction and found the industry appealed to her.

Today, she manages employment, training and education initiatives at Tridel with partners like Toronto Community Housing, employment programs within the BOLT Foundation and community economic development ventures. The focus of her job is working with young people who are eager to get into the industry.

She said people often think someone has to have certain strengths or technical skills to succeed in the industry, but soft skills like communication, problem-solving and a good work ethic are

more important attributes, as are having a positive attitude and an ability to work as part of a team. Panelist Meagan Donnelly, an insulation installer for Torino Drywall Inc., said there's a lot of opportunity for youth who want to get into the trades because many older workers will soon be retiring.



Meagan Donnelly, insulation installer for Torino Drywall Inc.

Donnelly was a social services worker but after a couple of years in the field figured she was ready for a change. A friend told her to check out construction, which she did. She now works in a crew.

The work can be demanding at times, but she enjoys the job – and the money.

While construction is male-dominated, Donnelly said women and youth who are considering a career in the industry shouldn't be put off by the stereotypes, as there are many misconceptions. She recommended that anyone who wants to get into the trades should network and enroll at a training centre.

Tamara Baptiste, an architectural projects co-ordinator with The Regional Municipality of York, said there are many opportunities in different fields within the industry itself, including home inspection, safety, building science, sales and administration. She is a graduate of the construction engineering technology program and the RESCON-sponsored Residential Construction Management program at George Brown College, which led her to a job at The Daniels Corporation.



Tamara Baptiste, architectural projects co-ordinator with The Regional Municipality of York.

In her current role at York Region, she is responsible for providing technical expertise in the planning, design, implementation and project management of building improvements, renovation programs and new construction projects in housing facilities owned and managed by Housing York Inc., and the facilities owned and managed by York Region.

She got into the industry via a friend who was a contractor. She worked for him and eventually went to work in the oilfields in Western Canada where she operated rock trucks and rollers on road builds.

“Construction just seemed interesting to me the more I got involved,” she said.

For women and youth looking to get into the industry, Baptiste recommended getting in touch with a training school or industry association.

Someone who’s interested in construction owes it to themselves to investigate whether a job in the industry is a good fit, she said.

“You won’t know until you try it out.”