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Fall 2025, Issue #4

Published For:
**Canadian Association of Women
in Construction (CAWIC)**
c/o Ontario General Contractors
Association (OGCA)
180 Attwell Drive, Suite 280
Toronto, ON M9W 6A9
info@cawic.ca
www.cawic.ca

Published By:
Matrix Group Publishing Inc.
Return all undeliverable addresses to:
309 Youville Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba R2H 2S9
Toll-Free: (866) 999-1299
Toll-Free Fax: (866) 244-2544
sales@matrixgroupinc.net
www.matrixgroupinc.net

President & CEO
Jack Andress

Operations Manager

Shoshana Weinberg
sweinberg@matrixgroupinc.net

Senior Publisher

Jessica Potter
jpotter@matrixgroupinc.net

Publishers

Julie Welsh, Christine Scarisbrick

Editor-in-Chief

Shannon Savory
ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net

Editor / Social Media Manager

Jenna Collignon

Finance / Administration

Lloyd Weinberg, Nathan Redekop
accounting@matrixgroupinc.net

Director of Circulation & Distribution

Lloyd Weinberg
distribution@matrixgroupinc.net

Sales Manager

Jeff Cash
jcash@matrixgroupinc.net

Matrix Group Publishing Inc. Account Executives

Colleen Bell, Jackie Casburn, Chandler Cousins, Rich
Cowan, Rob Gibson, Jim Hamilton, Frank Kenyeres,
Sandra Kirby, Andrew Lee, Brian MacIntyre, Chad
Morris, Lynn Murphy, Wilma Gray-Rose, Monique
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Layout & Design

Kayti McDonald

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CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF PROGRESS, POSSIBILITY, AND COMMUNITY

This year marks a bold and inspiring new chapter for the Canadian Association of Women in Construction (CAWIC). As we celebrate 20 years of championing women in the construction industry, we are proud to say that our momentum and progress is stronger than ever.

Membership across the country is rising as more women and allies join us in building a more equitable, innovative, and inclusive construction industry. We're delivering more value than ever through expanded programming, accessible resources, dynamic events, and powerful partnerships that reflect the needs of our members and the demands of today's industry. From the development of our new mentorship program and professional development workshops to our growing presence in advocacy at the local and national levels, CAWIC is taking bold new action to help deliver on our mission to enhance the success of women in our industry.

We're breaking down barriers, amplifying voices, and creating spaces where women in construction can participate, lead, and thrive in. This issue of **Women Building Canada** magazine captures the energy and evolution of that journey and the important work still underway. Inside this edition, you will find:

- **Laying the Foundation: CAWIC's 20-Year Journey of Empowering Women in Construction:** Take a look at how far we've come. From the early days of CAWIC to the national movement that is being accelerated today, hear from some of the trailblazing women who helped build CAWIC's legacy and learn how our current momentum is shaping the years ahead.
- **From Bystander to Builder: Male Allyship in Action:** True allyship in our industry isn't performative. This article explores what authentic support looks like from our male colleagues and champions. From job sites to boardrooms, real partnership is changing workplace culture and driving progress for all.
- **Safety, Not Style: The Real Reason Women's PPE Matters:** Safety shouldn't be one-size-fits-men. For years, women have had to adapt or compromise with ill-fitting PPE. That's changing. Discover how inclusive safety gear is more than a comfort issue. It is a game-changer for productivity, morale, and wellbeing across Canadian job sites.

BUILDING A CONSTRUCTION COMMUNITY TOGETHER

CAWIC is proud to lead the charge, but our success is built by all of you: our members, partners, allies, and volunteers who continue to push for progress. Thank you for believing in this mission and thank you for building an exciting future together.

Here's to the next 20 years. **W**



CAWIC

Kristen Bauer

President, CAWIC

THANK YOU TO CAWIC'S CORPORATE MEMBERS

CAWIC would like to thank each of its corporate members for supporting the organization's mission and goals!

For a full list of corporate members visit the link below. Be sure to click on the logos to visit their pages.

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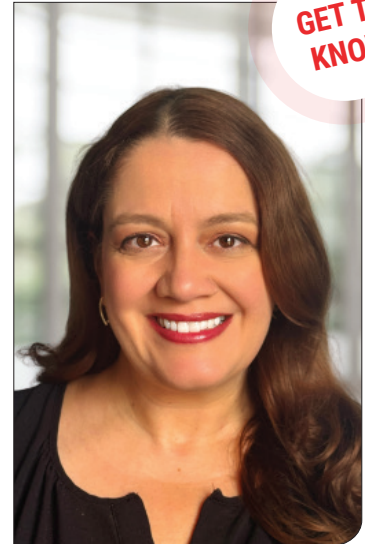
WARM GOODBYES FROM CAWIC'S OUTGOING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

After 20 years, the Canadian Association of Women in Construction (CAWIC) continues to push boundaries, champion women in construction, and reshape the industry for the better. As CAWIC moves into a new era, I want to take a moment to celebrate where we've been and to share my excitement for where the association is headed.

For me, CAWIC represents far more than an organization. It's a community that believes that women belong in every corner of the construction industry. During my time with CAWIC, I've seen this national community grow in strength, resilience, and reach. Through impactful programs, engaging events, national partnerships, and a strong and united voice, we have strengthened the community and helped to drive real and lasting change in the industry.

The future is exciting and bright for CAWIC. As I step away as Executive Director, I am thrilled to pass the torch to Sarah Morison. Under the leadership of Sarah and with Kristen Bauer as President, CAWIC will continue to drive transformative change and impact for women in our industry. Their strategic leadership, innovative perspective, and deep dedication to equity and inclusion are exactly what this next phase of growth calls for. They will continue to expand CAWIC's reach, deepen the association's impact, and continue to amplify the voices of women in construction across Canada.

To the CAWIC members and partners: thank you. Your work, your resilience, and your leadership are what drive the CAWIC mission forward. I look forward to continuing to cheer CAWIC on and supporting the association as a volunteer! **W**



GET TO
KNOW

CAWIC

Kristina Fixter

Past CAWIC Executive Director

CAWIC Volunteer

EXCITEMENT FOR THE FUTURE FROM CAWIC'S INCOMING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It's an honour to be joining CAWIC as your new Executive Director. It's August 5th and my first official day in the role. I'm just getting started, but already I can tell that you are people who care deeply about your work, this organization, and about creating real opportunities for women in construction. I am too.

I want to first thank outgoing Executive Director Kristina Fixter for her leadership. It's clear that CAWIC has grown significantly under her direction, and the energy she's helped generate is electric. She's also been incredibly generous during the lead up to my first day, and I'm grateful for the thoughtful handoff. I also want to congratulate Kristen Bauer as she steps into the role of President. Her leadership on the board and heartfelt commitment to CAWIC's mission have already made a big impact, and I'm excited to be working alongside her and the rest of this awesome board.

I'm one of those irritating do-it-yourselfers who probably should have gone into a trade, and I have deep respect for the kind of skills our members bring to their work. That said, this past long holiday weekend, I had a septic emergency and found myself assisting my plumber with a shop vac, to their great amusement. I'll let you ponder that so as not to shock anyone, though I do regret not having a photo that could have accompanied this letter.

My background is in nonprofit leadership, working with associations, charities, and B-Corps to help them grow, engage their members, and stay grounded in their values. Right now, my focus is on listening and learning. Over the next few months, I'll be connecting with members, volunteers, and partners to better understand your experiences and goals. I hope to hear from many of you and to meet you at the conference in September.

If you'd like to connect, you can reach me at smorison@cawic.ca. I'd love to learn from you.

Thanks for the warm welcome. I'm proud to be here and looking forward to what we can build together. **W**

GET TO
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CAWIC

Sarah Morison

Executive Director, CAWIC

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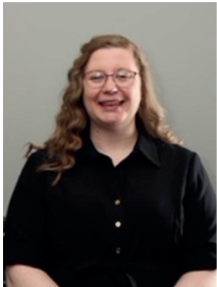


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LAYING THE F

CAWIC's 20-Year Journey of Emp



FOUNDATION:

Empowering Women in Construction

BY KAITLIN VITT, MAGAZINE STAFF WRITER

What started as a grassroots support system has become a national force for change in Canada's construction industry. From mentorship and advocacy to career-shaping programs and bold leadership, the Canadian Association of Women in Construction (CAWIC) is proving that when women are supported, they don't just succeed – they transform the industry. Meet the trailblazers, hear their stories, and discover what's next as CAWIC celebrates two decades of lifting women up and tearing down outdated walls.

Twenty years ago, a group of women in construction came together to build something Canada had never seen: a support system designed by and for women in every corner of the industry.

The Canadian Association of Women in Construction (CAWIC) was founded on four key pillars: leadership, mentorship, membership, and partnership. These cornerstones continue to shape the organization.

"From the start, we were driven by a clear mission to support, empower, and advance women in the construction industry," says Catya Covassin, a past CAWIC Vice President and founding member. "We built this network without social media. We built it through face-to-face connections, phone calls – we showed up for one another. And we proved that with community, resilience, and hard work, women can thrive in the industry."

That foundation of trust and mutual respect is what has allowed CAWIC to expand its reach. While new tools and technologies have modernized the way CAWIC communicates, the organization's essence remains unchanged. It's still about lifting one another up, breaking down barriers, and creating a sense of belonging for every woman in the field, regardless of her background, identity, or job title.

This spirit of inclusion would soon evolve into a movement that aimed not only to connect women – but to transform the construction industry itself.

CAWIC was officially established in 2005, but its roots go back to 1982, when the Toronto chapter of the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) was formed.

The idea for CAWIC emerged after attending a NAWIC conference in Dallas, Texas.

"We all found the conference very inspiring, and it allowed us to identify the huge gap in our own country for women working in the construction industry at large," says Angela Wilson, Founding CAWIC President. "When we initially launched, we received a flood of responses and support, further growing our initial idea and creating the foundations for the association."

This marked the beginning of an organized response to the gender imbalance that had long gone unaddressed in Canada's construction industry. Sector leaders, union reps, educational institutions, and even municipal bodies began reaching out. It became clear that CAWIC could fill a void that no other organizations were addressing.

A MOVEMENT BEGINS

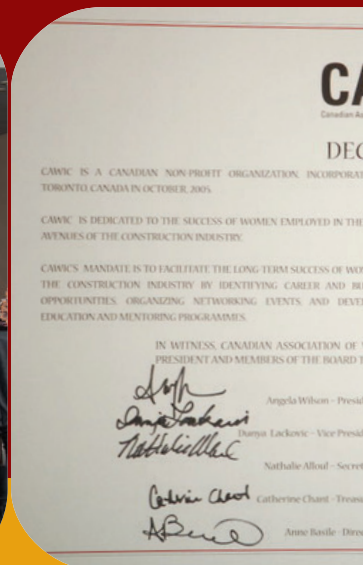
CAWIC's 2005 launch event drew over 250 attendees, signalling a strong desire for this support system. Unlike many emerging organizations, founding members said CAWIC didn't have to fight for its legitimacy.

"There was no resistance, from our perspective, because the women who got together were already respected in the industry," Covassin says. "With that came a lot of acceptance for our roles, and we were able to promote other women."

CAWIC members celebrating the organization's fifth anniversary.



The founding CAWIC Board, as well as NAWIC representatives, at CAWIC's Launch Gala.



Covassin has over 40 years of experience in the construction industry. She was a senior project manager for a prominent commercial real estate developer, overseeing tenant construction of the company's largest portfolio, totalling over 4.5 million square feet. Prior to this position, she worked at a multidisciplinary firm, where she was among the few women in a technical staff position.

"In construction, credibility is earned by rolling up your sleeves and proving your capability," Covassin says. "Once you do that, the possibilities are endless."

While Covassin and other founding members had impressive resumés, they didn't misdirect this authority; rather, they used their experience to inspire others.

"While many of us were 'firsts' in our respective roles, it was never about titles or accolades. It was about creating pathways for others, using our voices to advocate for

change, and ensuring that women who come after us are better supported," Covassin says. "It was about taking the road less travelled, standing up for what's right, mentoring the next generation, and lifting others up. We are part of an extraordinary network of women, and together, we just become stronger."

FROM INCLUSION TO IMPACT

Ruth Bramham, another founding member of CAWIC, has been involved since the formation of the organization's Canadian identity in 2005. Bramham, a transgender woman, served two terms on CAWIC's board.

"I wondered whether, when I applied to be on the board as a director, they'd accept me," Bramham says. "But they welcomed me with open arms. They said, 'Hey, great. We could do with people like you.'"

Starting her career as a quantity surveyor in England in the 1960s, Bramham immigrated to

Canada in 1968. She began openly living as a woman in 1993.

"I spent 30-odd years in the business in the male role. I understand exactly where women are coming from," Bramham says. "And now, I've been accepted as a woman. I don't see why you shouldn't accept other women as being okay in the business."

Although she didn't face pushback later on in her career, that wasn't her experience when starting out. As a transgender woman, she faced discrimination and was terminated from several positions in the early 2000s before finding long-term employment at Toronto's York University in 2007.

Bramham eventually served as York's accessibility coordinator. Throughout, she remained a strong advocate for inclusivity, encouraged by the cultural shift she witnessed.

"In the years since I started working in construction, it's been obvious that women

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ent Catya Covassin - Director
ent Mira Fabian - Director
y Elizabeth Johnson - Director
ter Lynne Schoales - Director
tor Colleen Sheridan - Director

CAWIC's Charter.



In 2005, Angela Wilson, Toronto Chapter President, attended the NAWIC Convention for the official signing-in of CAWIC.

Several CAWIC founders gather at a recent event. Thank you to everyone who has made this association such a success!

have been more accepted in the industry – far more these days than they ever have been,” Bramham says. “When you start getting companies calling CAWIC and saying, ‘Hey, we’re looking for a manager,’ and they don’t even question whether they’re looking for a man or a woman, that’s progress.”

Support remains at the core of CAWIC’s mission. It’s what helps women thrive, even when they face setbacks.

That spirit of support continues to shape how CAWIC responds to the barriers women still face. Sometimes, it’s a bias in hiring. Other times, it’s a lack of access to resources, mentorship, or understanding.

But for every challenge, CAWIC offers a counterbalance: community.

“If you like the industry, please come and join us, and you’ll find it a good place to work,” Bramham says.

“If you run into trouble at the place that you work because you’re a woman, just get them to talk to us,” she adds with a laugh. “We’ll set them straight.”

After working in the industry for nearly 60 years, Bramham retired on March 4, 2023, on her 79th birthday. She has advice to offer to woman working in construction, whether they’re just starting out or have been in the industry for a while.

“Don’t take no for an answer. But also be aware of the position you hold in the company,

and be willing to work your rear end off in the job that you’re doing – and enjoy the work that you’re doing.”

Besides career advice, Bramham has valuable personal advice to offer, too: “When you get up in the morning, look in the mirror and say, ‘Hey, I am who I am. I’m not letting anybody say otherwise.’”

CREATING A SAFE PLACE

Progress, however, hasn’t been automatic. It’s been built step by step, through mentorship, programming, and deliberate outreach. CAWIC’s programming has evolved to reflect the full range of careers available in construction, not only in fieldwork, but also in leadership, innovation, accessibility, and administration.

CAWIC’s reach extends far beyond networking. It operates a national bursary program, awarding numerous \$2,000 bursaries annually to outstanding women enrolled in construction-related post-secondary programs. Since the association’s inception in 2005, more than 80 recipients have benefited, often using the funds to purchase tools or pursue Red Seal trades.

Membership itself is a powerful tool. CAWIC offers access to workshops, site tours, a member directory, and special events, along with career resources and regular communication, to empower women at every

career stage. This multifaceted support reflects CAWIC’s holistic understanding: success in the industry isn’t just about working in it – it’s about growth, longevity, and leadership.

“Mentorship has also been central to our success,” Covassin says. “Hundreds of women entering the construction field benefit from our supportive community. We serve as a safe place to be heard, seek advice, and grow professionally.”

CAWIC’s mentorship program connects established professionals with emerging talent. Open to all members at no additional cost, this pilot program aims to foster strong, knowledge-driven relationships that support career advancement.

“We’ve made a profound impact by advocating for equality, fostering career growth, and creating a supportive community for women across every sector,” Covassin says.

The association’s support isn’t limited to only professionals already in the field – encouraging the next generation is just as important.

“We’ve invested in the future one girl and one woman at a time, from hosting elementary school outreach programs through NAWIC’s Block Kids program to offering bursaries for post-secondary education,” Covassin says.



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"From the start, we were driven by a clear mission to support, empower, and advance women in the construction industry. We built this network without social media. We built it through face-to-face connections, phone calls – we showed up for one another. And we proved that with community, resilience, and hard work, women can thrive in the industry."

– Catya Covassin, a past CAWIC Vice President and founding member

PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL ADVANCEMENT

In many ways, CAWIC has functioned as both a professional resource and a personal lifeline for women entering unfamiliar territory. Whether it's navigating apprenticeship programs, moving into leadership roles, or shifting into construction from adjacent sectors, the organization's programming reflects that journey.

"At its core, CAWIC aims to educate other women, provide mentorships and networking connections, and answer the many questions other women may have about what opportunities exist or how to best navigate a career within construction," says Founding President Wilson.

For younger women or newcomers to the industry, that can mean exposure to the variety of career paths within construction. For others, it may be about second chances or discovering new possibilities later in their careers.

"We introduced women working in one discipline to the full spectrum of opportunities in construction, from office administration to skilled trades, and from residential builds to commercial, institutional, infrastructure, and government projects," Covassin says.

COMMUNITY OF CONNECTION

Stepping into the role of CAWIC's president in July 2025, Kristen Bauer's involvement with CAWIC began in 2019. With a background in heavy equipment and innovation, Bauer has spent her career in construction-adjacent industries.

In 2019, she was tasked with leading the women's employee resource group at United Rentals, where she works as the Innovation Product and Solutions Manager.

"I didn't even know what an employee resource group was back then, but I said sure," she says. "That led me on a hunt to find an association that provides support and resources for all of our female employees across Canada. That's how I came across CAWIC."

What stood out to her about CAWIC was the connection the association offers.

"The network you build through CAWIC – people who support you, cheer you on, give you guidance, and sponsor you in rooms where you're not present – is so valuable," Bauer says. "Being able to sit in a room beside another successful woman who has done what you want to do, or gone where you want to go, takes away that imposter syndrome or that anxiety around growing your career."

For Bauer, that confidence-building came not just from networking, but from the culture of encouragement built into CAWIC. The association's environment allows members to grow personally and professionally while seeing others lead by example.

"When you talk to a CEO, it takes away the mysteriousness around that role, and you're just like, 'Oh yeah, I could do that,'" she says.

She sees her new role as president of CAWIC as an opportunity to help others reach that same realization, especially women who may not have considered construction a viable option.

'THE NATIONAL, CONSOLIDATED VOICE'

As CAWIC president, Bauer is focused on reinforcing the association's position as a unifying voice in the sector. She sees the need to align industry associations, government partners, and private sector

stakeholders toward a common goal: gender equity in construction. That includes expanding partnerships, strengthening leadership pipelines, and advocating for systemic change.

"Our top goal is to be respected as the national, consolidated voice for women in our industry," she says. "And that includes making sure we're opening doors, not just for women who are already here, but for those who don't yet know what's possible."

THE LEGACY CONTINUES

Throughout the years, CAWIC has grown into a powerful force for change.

"Over the past 20 years, we realized that for women working within the construction industry, their roles are more than just a desk job. It has given women an opportunity to use their hands – build roads or be a part of something that is tangible and long-term – and ultimately be proud of their work and achievements," Wilson says.

Wilson has over 35 years of experience as Ontario Sales Manager for liquid asphalt cement with Bitumar and as Ontario Sales Manager for aggregate and recycling at Dufferin Aggregates.

"CAWIC gives women the opportunity to forge their own path and be a part of something that will continue to support other women in the industry," she says.

For Wilson and other founding members, the long-term goal was simple but powerful.

"Our hope with this association was to allow women to not be afraid to pursue a career within the construction industry – an industry that is heavily male-dominated – no matter the department, and that they would have the support they needed in order to progress in their careers," Wilson says.

A BRIGHT FUTURE

As CAWIC enters its third decade, its purpose is clearer than ever: to continue creating space for women to lead, grow, and thrive in construction. With a strong national voice, increased capacity, and a growing network of allies, CAWIC is poised to expand its impact across the country.

Its future success will be shaped not only by seasoned professionals, but by students,

National Association of Women in Construction

Charter

To all to whom these presents shall come:

Greeting

KNOW YE that the National Association of Women in Construction has granted and by these presents does grant to the members, whose names are hereunto affixed and to all regularly elected members and their successors, this charter fully constituting them a local chapter under the name and title of

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, Chapter No. 295
of the National Association of Women in Construction

located at Toronto, Ontario, Canada, with all the rights and privileges given to the members of the National Association of Women in Construction according to the Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws of the National Association now in force or hereinafter enacted.

This CHARTER shall be in full force and effect from the day of the date hereof and for such time as the members of the local chapter shall conform to the laws and rules of the National Association of Women in Construction.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the National Association of Women in Construction has authorized its President and Secretary to affix their signatures, and caused the seal of the Association to be hereunto affixed this the

fifth day of
June in the year of our
Lord 1982

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Chapter Members

Elizabeth Schenker - president
Shirley A. Burroughs - vice president
Carol C. McKeogh - Treasurer
Janice O'Leary
Shirley Murphy
Marianne E. S.
Laura Kokko

NAWIC's Charter from 1982, when the Toronto Chapter was founded.

apprentices, entrepreneurs, and changemakers who see themselves reflected in this community. CAWIC is not just a support system; it's a launchpad, a place where women can step into their potential, challenge outdated assumptions, and build careers that feel purposeful and possible.

"Join an association like CAWIC, a safe environment where you can find people happy to mentor you, where you can ask questions, get job leads, and find guidance on how to move forward," says Covassin.

Because when women are welcomed, supported, and valued, they don't just take part in the industry; they redefine what's possible. And CAWIC will be right there with them, every step of the way. **W**

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2016-18: LISA BROWN

2015: TAMMY EVANS

2014: JANE NEVILLE

2011-13: TAMMY EVANS

2010: MIRA FABIAN

2008-09: DEBBIE WADSWORTH

2005-07: ANGELA WILSON (FOUNDING CAWIC PRESIDENT)

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A Women's Work (AWW) students and its founder Natasha Ferguson posing for a photo in the A Women's Workshop. Photo courtesy of AWW.

What does real support for women in construction look like? In one of Canada's most male-dominated sectors, true allyship goes beyond slogans – it's about accountability, action, and everyday presence. From job sites to boardrooms, explore how authentic partnerships are reshaping culture, boosting inclusion, and building a better industry for everyone.

BY KAITLIN VITT, MAGAZINE STAFF WRITER

Construction remains one of the most male-dominated sectors in Canada. Women make up only 13% of the industry's workforce. Women are often underrepresented – if not entirely absent – on job sites. But as the industry faces a worsening labour shortage and increasing pressure to build inclusive workplaces, male allyship is emerging as a key tool for meaningful change.

Natasha Ferguson, founder of A Women's Work (AWW) Support Centre (www.AWWOrg.com), has seen the impact of exclusion firsthand. A carpenter with seven trades under her belt, Ferguson is one of the first – and only – women in Canada to own a full-service construction company and still be active on the tools.

"We're not as weak as many paint us out to be. We have strong minds. We're nurturers and multitaskers naturally," she says. "We just want to be treated fairly, and I think fairly means allowing us to excel and move up in the industry."

Ferguson co-founded AWW in 2020 with her late mother to address the barriers women face entering the trades.

When AWW officially became a nonprofit in 2022, the organization began offering 16-week foundational training in trades such as drywall,

FROM BYSTANDER TO BUILDER: MALE ALLYSHIP IN ACTION



“Male allyship means men actively supporting and advocating for gender equity, especially within male-dominated organizations. It involves using their influence and position to drive meaningful, systemic change.”

– Lisa Laronde,
Ramudden Global, Past
President of CAWIC

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plumbing, electrical, and framing. Last year alone, 85 women completed the program, and 60 of them were placed in gainful employment. Demand is growing, with more than 900 women to date applying to AWW's courses and programs.

But Ferguson didn't launch AWW as a business opportunity. She created it because she was tired of being underestimated and excluded. She sees the gender gap as a cultural issue, not a capacity one, and believes that the way forward includes men who are willing to support, collaborate, and listen.

PUTTING IT IN PRACTICE

Allyship isn't about grand gestures or speaking on behalf of women; it's about backing them up, stepping aside when needed, and creating space. Allyship also includes being open to constructive feedback about how allies are showing up.

Ferguson echoes this idea and stresses the importance of communication.

"Some of the complaints I get from women are that they're being coddled, excluded, or straight up told, 'Why is that person here?' I tell women it's not just about learning the tools, but it's the confidence levels as well. We can't expect the whole industry to change just for us," Ferguson says.

"I try to give them as tough of skin as possible so that when they get out on job sites, they feel comfortable, and they feel confident, and they can speak for themselves. They're not afraid to say what they need to say."

At AWW, many of the instructors are men. They serve as examples of how male instructors and professionals can model genuine, everyday allyship: they listen, support, mentor, and advocate. On their own, these actions may seem small, but collectively, they shape the culture of a team and the safety of a job site.

Having so many male instructors at AWW is intentional, Ferguson says. These are seasoned tradespeople – "triple

trade threats," as she calls them, who have experience in multiple trades. The instructors bring a willingness to work alongside women as equals.

By fostering mutual respect from the beginning of a woman's training, AWW aims to normalize what a healthy, inclusive construction environment looks like. The goal isn't to protect women from the industry, but to prepare them to reshape it.

ACCOUNTABILITY IN ACTION

In recent years, many companies have added diversity statements to their websites and hosted inclusion events. But a branded initiative doesn't always translate to real change on the ground, and both women and equity leaders are quick to point out the difference.

Aliya Ansari, Director of Supporter Success at Catalyst, offers a clear distinction between performative and genuine allyship.

"Performative allyship is symbolic. It's often self-serving, and it's usually associated



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SCAN ME





leadership practices and team cultures at scale. Lisa Laronde, Chief Transformation Officer at Ramudden Global and Past President of the Canadian Association of Women in Construction (CAWIC), agrees that transformation starts with accountability at the top.

"As a senior leader, I model the behaviour I want to see – openly supporting equity and inclusion and addressing bias when it arises," says Laronde. "I build accountability

by integrating inclusion into team key performance indicators (KPIs), providing training, and fostering diverse hiring practices."

Laronde has held several trailblazing leadership roles, including being the first woman President of RSG International and Powell Contracting.

"I wouldn't be where I am today without the support of male allies," Laronde says. "They advocated for me by highlighting my

with large statements without action," Ansari says. "Genuine allyship, according to Catalyst, involves consistent, courageous actions that challenge inequity, even when it's uncomfortable for the person. It's also about accountability, humility, impact, and not just the intention."

Catalyst is a global nonprofit with the goal of building workplaces that work for women. The organization conducts research and hosts programs and workshops.

"When companies partner with Catalyst to become a supporter, that's a clear indication of commitment. Traditionally male-dominated industries never saw themselves as playing a role in gender equity and gender partnership," Ansari says. "When the broader senior leadership executive team see themselves as stakeholders in gender equity work, that's when we really see the needle move."

ALLYSHIP IN LEADERSHIP

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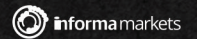
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accomplishments, defending my decisions, and promoting my leadership abilities. Most importantly, they believed in me and recognized that I was the right person for the job."

Support from colleagues plays a vital role in shaping the overall safety and inclusiveness of a job site, which impacts how well teams function and collaborate.

"Male allyship contributes to both physical and psychological safety on job sites. When men model respectful behaviour, it discourages harassment and microaggressions, creating a more inclusive environment," Laronde says. "Psychological safety is essential for team collaboration and well-being, and allyship plays a crucial role in fostering it."

While she has experienced the power of allyship, at times, she has also felt the absence of it.

"I've experienced environments where a lack of allyship and unconscious bias made it difficult to thrive," she says. "I overcame

this by building a trusted inner circle – both women and men – who believed in me, offered honest feedback, and supported me through challenges."

She also made hard choices to preserve her integrity.

"I made the difficult decision to leave roles that didn't align with my values, recognizing that not all organizations are willing to change."

For leaders seeking to embed allyship into their own organizations, Laronde emphasizes that it's not about perfection; instead, it's about continuous commitment.

"Diversity, equity, and inclusion is a journey, not a destination," Laronde says. "Leadership must be fully committed to practising it daily."

BEYOND THE INDIVIDUAL

While individual action is crucial, building a culture of allyship requires more than good intentions. It demands company-wide strategies, leadership accountability, and

policies that embed inclusion into the daily fabric of the workplace.

But structural change doesn't mean abandoning individual leadership; rather, it amplifies it.

"Mutual accountability creates a ripple effect. Organizations can integrate allyship into leadership development and performance metrics," Ansari says.

"Celebrating and rewarding inclusive behaviour is key. That's when people see the impact," Ansari says. "Using storytelling and role models to show allyship in action is very powerful."

Ansari also recognizes the importance of psychological safety, not just for women, but for men learning how to be better allies.

"Often times in the workplace, men are afraid of saying something wrong in relation to this work," Ansari says. "They may experience anxiety, and we're now seeing more research about men's mental health, so that goes hand in hand when discussing

continued on page 33



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An AWW instructor working on a live site with a student from the GC Donate program, which is a community-driven initiative dedicated to making building and renovation projects affordable while empowering women and newcomers to Canada. Photo courtesy of AWW.



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continued from page 29

allyship. We need to create safe spaces for men to learn what allyship in action means without judgment."

Laronde says that while there may be a fear of saying the wrong thing, men shouldn't let that stop them in being an ally.

"No one gets it right all the time, but what matters is showing up and being part of the solution," Laronde says. "Allyship comes in many forms – choose one that feels authentic to you and start there."

WHERE TO BEGIN

For men who want to be better allies but aren't sure where to begin, there's a common piece of advice: start by listening.

"Listening and collaborating are huge," Ferguson says. "That makes anyone feel welcome."

And once you've listened, she adds, give women the space to speak and lead without jumping in to take over.

"We'll ask you for help when we need help; we don't need you to help us every day," Ferguson says.

Ansari suggests men take initiative in educating themselves.

"Approach this work with genuine curiosity," she says. "Listen to women, believe them, and speak up against inappropriate behaviour."

Ansari also emphasizes the importance of sponsorship, which is advocating for women's advancement behind closed doors.

"At Catalyst, we define a sponsor as a senior leader or influential individual

who actively uses their clout to help a sponsee gain access to high-visibility assignments, promotions, or career opportunities," Ansari says. "This role goes beyond mentorship – it's about advocacy in rooms where decisions are made. Allyship and advocacy go hand in hand."

Whether it's listening, amplifying voices, or challenging inappropriate behaviour in the moment, allyship is less

LaunchHER into Trades

LaunchHER into Trades is connecting women in trades across Manitoba by offering free support and networking opportunities, helping them grow, support one another, and succeed in this challenging industry.

"I believe LaunchHER will contribute to the success of many tradeswomen, they provide the resources and support that can be hard to find." -Rebecca Kehler (Level 1 Industrial Mechanic Millwright)

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about big, heroic gestures and more about consistent intention and presence.

Laronde agrees with other women in the industry, that small, everyday actions matter, especially when they help shift group dynamics and normalize inclusion. That kind of daily presence and participation also makes a difference in long-term retention and career growth.

"Genuine male allyship in construction doesn't require grand gestures – it can be as simple as speaking positively about a female colleague to influential peers, inviting her to industry events, or supporting women-led initiatives," Laronde says. "The key difference between performative and true allyship lies in authenticity and impact. Performative actions maintain the status quo, while genuine allyship fosters cultural change. Women can often sense when support is authentic."

That kind of daily presence and participation also makes a difference in long-term retention and career growth.

"Allyship plays a vital role in retaining and advancing women in construction. Burnout often stems from a lack of support, flexibility, or growth opportunities. In today's world, where both partners often work, allyship helps balance responsibilities," Laronde says. "Allyship benefits everyone. Companies with women in executive roles are, on average, 20% more profitable. Inclusive environments attract and retain top talent, driving innovation and success."

She adds that returning to work after a leave can be a particularly vulnerable time for women – and a critical opportunity for allies to step in.

"For women returning from parental leave, allyship ensures they can re-enter the workforce without losing momentum in their careers," she says.

She also points out that small moments can accumulate into meaningful professional support.

"Male allyship means men actively supporting and advocating for gender equity, especially within male-dominated

organizations," she says. "It involves using their influence and position to drive meaningful, systemic change."

BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE FUTURE

Allyship is not a one-off gesture – it's a daily practice that helps reengineer the culture of construction from the ground up. When men listen with respect, speak up against bias, and step aside to share power, they create workplaces where women are seen, heard, and supported.

"We're all facing the same challenges – labour shortages, the cost of building, lack of mid-management. It's not just a women's issue," Ferguson says. "The industry is at a point where everyone needs to work together."

The construction industry doesn't change overnight, but every site, crew, and company can take a step. Allyship isn't about perfection – it's about participation. As more men listen, learn, and lead with inclusion in mind, they help build a stronger, more equitable future for the entire industry. **W**

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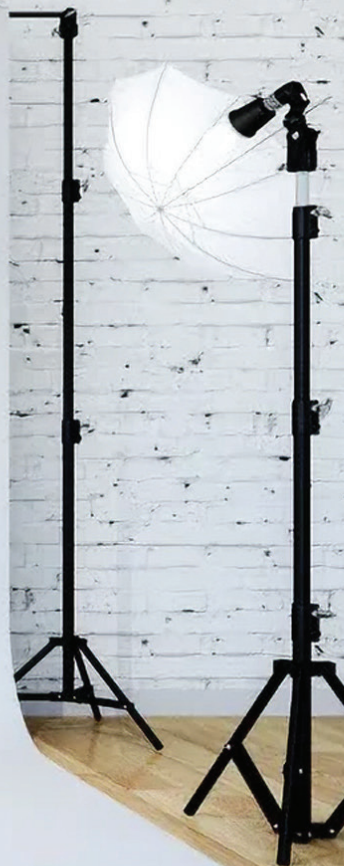
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SAFETY,

Ill-fitting PPE isn't just uncomfortable – it's unsafe. For decades, tradeswomen have had to modify, purchase, or settle for gear designed for men. But the industry is waking up. In this article leading voices share how inclusive, properly fitting equipment is reshaping safety culture on job sites across Canada. From gloves to high-vis to fall protection, learn why it's time to stop treating women's safety like an afterthought – and how companies are stepping up to build a better standard.



LEFT TOP

White Cap Canada is proud to showcase its line-up of PPE at industry events. Its expanding its offerings in women's PPE across categories, including gloves, eye and face protection, and high-visibility gear. Photo courtesy of White Cap.

LEFT BOTTOM

Decorated Canadian Olympic boxer and brand ambassador, Mandy Bujold, on site in correctly fitting women's workwear. Photo courtesy of Mark's Commercial.

RIGHT

F.A.S.T. products are proudly made in British Columbia. They include Incident Command System (ICS) vests, custom safety vests, gear bags, preparedness kits, and more. Photo courtesy of F.A.S.T.

NOT STYLE:



From work boots to heels: Susan Carey, President of BuildSafe, knows that PPE is only one part of a broader conversation around workplace safety and equity. Photo courtesy of Susan Carey.

The *Real Reason* Women's PPE Matters

BY KAITLIN VITT, MAGAZINE STAFF WRITER

In an industry where safety is paramount, one critical component of construction has long lagged behind – properly fitting personal protective equipment (PPE) for women. For decades, women entering traditionally male-dominated trades have been handed gear designed for the average male body, gear that is often ill-fitting, unsafe, and demoralizing.

As more women enter the trades, more voices, both on the ground and in leadership, are refusing to accept this as their only option. The message is clear: inclusive, well-fitting PPE is not a luxury; it's a necessity.

While some companies have started taking proactive steps, the burden of advocating for properly fitting gear has often



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fallen on individual tradeswomen. Leaders in the industry, including Susan Carey of BuildSafe and Dee Miller of F.A.S.T. First Aid & Survival Technologies Limited, note that women frequently end up modifying men's PPE or purchasing their own equipment to ensure a safe fit.

"It's not about pink-washing or just shrinking men's products," she says. "It's about engineering gear that fits properly and functions well for every worker."

**– Andrea Martin,
White Cap Canada**

These extra hurdles cost time and money and send a message that inclusive gear is still an afterthought. As Carey points out, many women don't even realize their PPE is noncompliant until issues are brought to their attention during inspections or training sessions. The lack of proper gear reinforces a culture where women are expected to adapt rather than be equipped equally.

Andrea Martin, District Sales Manager for White Cap Canada, emphasizes that ill-fitting PPE creates safety risks and communicates exclusion.

"Unisex vests don't fit women properly. They're not cut the right way," Martin says. "They still can create safety hazards."

White Cap, one of North America's leading distributors of construction, industrial, and safety supplies, has over 65 locations across Canada and more than 400 in the United States.

Martin notes that the company is expanding its offerings in women's PPE across categories, including gloves, eye and face protection, and high-visibility gear.

"It's not about pink-washing or just shrinking men's products," she says. "It's about engineering gear that fits properly and functions well for every worker."

White Cap's strategy includes bringing PPE directly to job sites for trial fittings,

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creating catalogs tailored to women's gear, and showcasing parity in pricing.

"We're showing them that it's on par, and that the importance of ensuring fit is not just for the comfort and confidence of the women that are on site, but it's also for their safety," she says.

Martin says one of the most effective practices White Cap has implemented is its use of safety champions across Ontario branches. This team allows the company to stay connected to the needs of women on job sites and adjust product availability accordingly.

White Cap also works closely with manufacturers, sharing feedback directly from women in the field.

"The manufacturers that are out there that are going to continue to add women's PPE to their lineups are going to be the ones that win," Martin says.

SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE

Carey, President of BuildSafe in Cambridge, Ontario, knows that PPE is only one part of a broader conversation around workplace safety and equity. Her company provides site inspections, training, and compliance programs across Southern Ontario, serving clients from small contractors to major developers.

PPE issues span a wide range of gear, Carey explains.

"It's everything from gloves to high-vis to fall arrest equipment, even safety glasses."

She adds that improperly fitted gear often goes unnoticed, pointing out that if safety glasses don't sit flush against the wearer's face, they may not prevent debris intrusion, which is a serious compliance issue.

"There's an education piece that we have to continuously get out there," she says. "A lot of women don't know how PPE is supposed to fit, so they're wearing things that they've been given not knowing how it should fit," she says. "They're not always bringing it forward."

She says procurement teams often don't know the difference between generic PPE and gear that's properly fitted.

PPE that doesn't fit properly causes tripping hazards, snags on equipment, restricts movements, and results in dangerous interferences. Don't allow these hazards on your worksites. Photo courtesy of F.A.S.T.



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F.A.S.T. provides innovative solutions to continually improve their comprehensive line of safety apparel designed for women and men of all shapes and sizes. Photo courtesy of F.A.S.T.

"The person ordering the PPE is usually from purchasing, and they may not know the variance in PPE and how it should fit."

Inclusive PPE supports a larger cultural shift, she says.

"Companies that talk about having strong health and safety cultures should be making it very clear that everyone can speak up for the PPE that they require."

She encourages women in the industry to get involved in support networks, professional associations like the Canadian Association of Women in Construction (CAWIC), and mentoring programs.

"There's a whole sea of women supporting women in the field," Carey says.

Carey also emphasizes that the low number of women in the industry directly impacts the availability and affordability of PPE designed for them.

"That's the one problem with women's PPE – it's more expensive if it's not made in mass quantities."

But she remains optimistic.

"As the number of women joining the industry increase, I think the cost of the PPE will come down," Carey says. "It's all supply and demand."

PRIORITIZING FIT AND FUNCTION

Dee Miller, President and CEO of F.A.S.T. First Aid & Survival Technologies Limited, has seen firsthand how ill-fitting PPE can endanger workers.

"PPE that doesn't fit properly can cause tripping hazards, snags on equipment, restrictive movement, and creates dangerous interferences," she says.

Miller underscores the stakes clearly.

"PPE is a worker's last line of defence in workplace safety because it's the final

barrier between a worker and a hazard after all other control measures have been exhausted," Miller says.

According to Miller, the PPE industry has been slow to address the needs of women. She says much of the available PPE is still manufactured offshore, often in unisex styles or based on men's sizing standards.

F.A.S.T. has developed a Canadian-made line of women's safety apparel certified to CSA-Z96 standards. Over the past two and a half years, the company has focused on designing apparel specifically for women, using female-specific anthropometric data to improve fit and function. The garments feature articulated design elements tailored to move with the natural shape and motion of the female body.

Design elements, such as pocket placement and closures, were developed based directly on feedback from women



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working hands-on in the field. F.A.S.T. collaborates with expert designers, pattern makers, and grading specialists to ensure sizing accuracy. The company also works with Canadian manufacturers of raw materials to not only meet CSA standards, but to also continuously strive for peak performance under all worksite conditions, considering breathability, durability, and mobility.

"Over the past two and a half years, F.A.S.T. has invited women in the construction industry to provide ongoing feedback on our evolving designs," Miller says.

Field input has shaped everything from fabric choices to zipper placement, resulting in major design improvements that boost both comfort and safety.

Miller believes more companies are beginning to recognize the return on investment in proper PPE.

"Employers are responsible for ensuring their workers can perform their jobs safely," she notes. "That includes providing appropriate, properly fitting safety apparel."

CLOSING THE ACCESS GAP

Adam Gaiser, Vice President of Mark's Commercial, says the demand for women's PPE has seen a dramatic shift in recent years, from niche to non-negotiable. While some categories, like work boots, have made significant progress, others, like women's high-vis apparel and other PPE, still lag in availability and innovation.

"The biggest shift has been the demand for it," Gaiser says. "It's become a must-have."

He emphasizes that progress isn't about simply shrinking men's gear – it's about designing PPE from the ground up, using women's specifications and input.

"It's not about colour or fashion," Gaiser says. "It's about fit, functionality and protection."

That includes addressing barriers to both access and retention. In some cases, Gaiser says, women have declined job opportunities or left roles due to poorly fitting or unavailable PPE.

Inclusive PPE is not just a recruitment issue but also a retention one, and companies are starting to recognize this.

"Over the years, our customers have come to view the treatment of their female employees as equally as important as that of their male employees," Gaiser says. "One of the most impactful ways to demonstrate that is by ensuring women have access to properly fitting PPE – just like men."

To help companies address these challenges, Mark's Commercial includes fit-testing and education into onboarding programs for major clients, helping ensure that new hires receive gear that fits from day one.

Gaiser notes that more companies are beginning to act proactively, recognizing inclusive PPE as a business and safety priority rather than an optional upgrade.



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Construction Labour Relations Association OF ONTARIO

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Tony Fanelli
Executive Director

Email: info@clrao.ca Telephone: 905-671-0888

Mark's Commercial also works with companies to evaluate procurement policies and identify blind spots. Too often, Gaiser explains, employers take the path of least resistance – or worse, shift the burden to the employee.

But Mark's Commercial has found ways to reach companies directly, encouraging them to recognize just how important inclusive PPE is.

"One of the most effective strategies has been partnering with organizations to raise awareness and speak directly with their teams."

Cost is sometimes cited as a barrier to expanding PPE offerings for underrepresented groups. Gaiser acknowledged that it can be expensive to develop gear for smaller segments of the workforce. He said the answer lies not in

customizing PPE for each company but in building inclusive gear at scale.

By mass-producing properly designed PPE for a diverse range of workers – including women and individuals from various religious backgrounds – manufacturers can lower per-unit costs and increase access. Expanding the market in this way, he noted, helps ensure that inclusive PPE becomes the standard, not the exception.

"The most important thing is improving access."

"PPE is a worker's last line of defence in workplace safety because it's the final barrier between a worker and a hazard after all other control measures have been exhausted."

– Dee Miller, F.A.S.T. Limited





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"By having proper-fitting PPE, we're creating a culture of safety and belonging," Martin says. "It's a huge step forward when it comes to equity and inclusion – all those DEI words that a lot of companies like to use, but they don't always take initiative... equipping women with proper PPE sends a clear message that their safety and their contributions are valued within that company."

She adds that investing in the right gear can reduce turnover and increase recruitment.

"Turnover can cost a company a lot of money," Martin says. "Those women who we're retaining are going to recruit more women. They're going to be the champions and the mentors for the next group of women coming out of trade school."

Carey says that culture starts with confidence and knowledge.

"We have to build confidence in the women to speak up," Carey says. "They need the education to know what proper PPE looks like on them, and then the confidence to speak up when it's not there."

Some employers are embedding PPE education into their onboarding and orientation programs to ensure every worker knows how safety gear should fit. Posters, digital guides, and supervisor-led demonstrations are being deployed on job sites to reduce the ambiguity around PPE standards.

LOOKING AHEAD

The path forward is clear. It requires ongoing collaboration between manufacturers, employers, training institutions, and workers themselves. It requires inclusive design from the start – not as an afterthought. And it requires continuous feedback to ensure PPE keeps up with the needs of a growing and diverse workforce.

"We need companies to make this a priority," Gaiser says. "We need to give each of these people a voice and take what they say seriously, collect feedback, and find a solution that works for everyone."

Change won't happen overnight, but the momentum is building. More companies are launching inclusive PPE lines, more safety professionals are speaking up, and more women are stepping into leadership roles where they can influence procurement and policy. Advocates say that the next step is to embed these changes into legislation, training curricula, and building codes.

The goal is simple: every worker shows up to the job with gear that fits, functions, and protects; every person feels seen, supported, and safe; and the next generation of tradeswomen never has to question whether they belong. **W**



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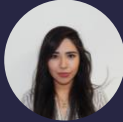
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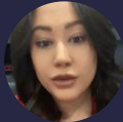
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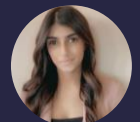
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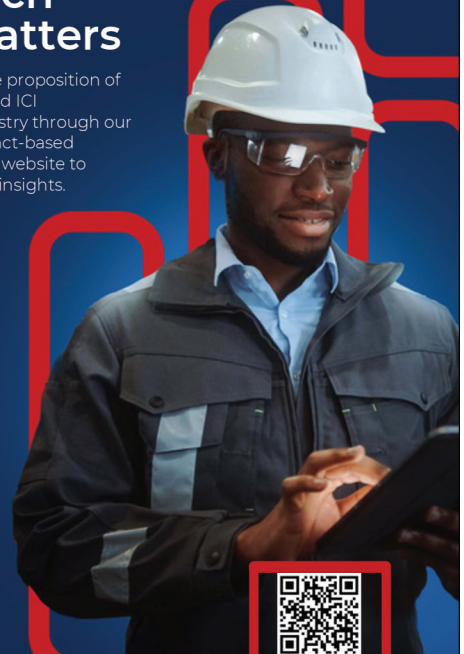


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Through its Bursary Program, CAWIC helps promote education and encourage women to pursue careers in the construction industry. Since 2005, our Bursary Program has helped more than 80 women across Canada pursue their construction education.

MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS ARE:

- Applicant must identify as a woman.
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- Have completed at least one year of a diploma or degree program at a college or university and full-time enrolment in the subsequent year or enrolled in a minimum-year trades program.
- Demonstrated clear career objectives relating to the construction industry.
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- Demonstrated interest in activities that further the advancement of women in construction.
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Should you have any questions, please contact CAWIC at info@cawic.ca.







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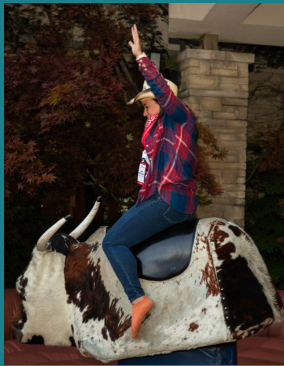
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After a successful launch in 2024, and following two fantastic editions in 2025, we're building on momentum and demand. In 2026, ***Women Building Canada*** will publish:

- ❑ **Spring 2026** – Ahead of Women in Construction Week (March 1-7).
- ❑ **Summer 2026** – Coinciding with CAWIC's AGM.
- ❑ **Fall 2026** – Released during CAWIC's National Conference.

Each issue reaches CAWIC members, industry leaders, government decision-makers, construction associations, educators, and the next generation of women in trades. Digital readership is growing fast – **our last two issues were viewed over 7,800 times!**

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