

New service available on PEI to assist women to advance in apprenticeable skilled trades

by Gloria Welton

The **Office to Advance Women Apprentices** is new to the Island. The program was developed in Newfoundland and Labrador 10 years ago. During that time, the percentage of female tradespeople in Newfoundland jumped from three percent to 13 percent.

"On PEI, women represent about three percent of those employed in the trades," says **Cheryl McNeill**, Project Coordinator. "The percentage of women in college trades programs is much higher, but there has been no service to help them remain in and advance through their apprenticeship to journey person status. Also, there is a low number of employers hiring and retaining women.

"We work with women to help them become employed and to maintain employment in their trade. We also support employers with suggestions about inclusion and retention of tradeswomen. We ask employers about their concerns and we work with them to offer suggestions and solutions."

"The core of our organization is built on developing strong communication, education, and partnerships with all employers, unions, and tradespeople."

Offices in Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba opened in the spring of 2019, and the offices on PEI and New Brunswick opened in October 2019.

The Office to Advance Women Apprentices-PEI assists in enhancing employment outcomes for women in underrepresented skilled trades by:

- Addressing barriers limiting women's entry, advancement, and completion of apprenticeship in Red Seal construction trades
- Developing and maintaining a registry database to help track and connect women to trades employment
- Providing wrap-around supports including career services, employment supports, and networking opportunities
- Coaching and mentoring employers and apprentices
- Providing workshops to prepare tradeswomen to write their Red Seal exam
- Helping women to consider trades and take steps to explore the many options

Cheryl says trades careers are a great opportunity to learn, grow, and develop every day, while making a good living. "There are endless opportunities."

"If you are a woman interested in the trades or currently working in the trades, we are here to help you advance, find and maintain employment, and reach Journey person status," says Cheryl.



From left, Cheryl McNeill, Project Coordinator for the Office to Advance Women Apprentices is seen with some women who are gaining from her guidance and support.

Melissa Smith took the Holland College Heritage Retrofit Carpentry and the Cabinetmaking programs, and Wood Manufacturing to hone her skills a bit more. "I now am a union member and I get good pay. When I first started, I was the only female in the union on PEI, but now there are about six women. Before I met Cheryl, I was fighting the battle on my own." Her goal is to earn her Red Seal in Carpentry.

Tanya Penny is doing drywall work. "I hope to stay on the Island for now. However, being with the union will give me options to move to other provinces, which might work out well."

Deanna Arsenault says she likes cabinetmaking and plumbing, but has not decided which trades to pursue yet. Cheryl's support has opened my eyes to different views and has opened doors."

Frankie Walsh has worked with her father at his welding shop in Morrell. "I would like to sign up as an apprentice welder and advance my career by earning my Red Seal. I went to UPEI for two years, took the Child and Youth worker program at Holland College, and then started the welding program. The support from Cheryl is great because I know there is someone there to help me reach my goals. It is a lot harder on my own."

The Office to Advance Women Apprentices will hold networking events for tradeswomen and women interested in the trades on the first Thursday of every month at their office on John Yeo Drive in Charlottetown.

For more information, call **902-201-2922**, or email cmcneill@womensapprentices.ca

Visit www.womenapprentices.ca/pei

For the full interview, visit www.employmentjourney.com and search **Office to Advance Women Apprentices**.

Funded by the federal government through the Women in Construction Funding Program with in-kind and financial supports from the Atlantic Canada Regional Council of Carpenters, Millwrights, and Allied Workers.

Indigenous skills training supports participants to fulfill their dreams

by Stella Shepard

The **Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET)** program is designed to assist off-reserve Indigenous Peoples to prepare for and determine career paths.

The **Native Council of PEI (NCPEI)** administers the program as a sub-agreement with the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples.

"Clients are offered educational supports, work placements, and much more," says **Nancy MacLean**, Employment & Training Coordinator with NCPEI. She has a current caseload of more than 50 clients, Island-wide.

Those eligible to apply include Indigenous youth, women, men, single parents, mature workers, persons with disabilities, and those experiencing career change or transition.

Program details

- One-on-one discussion of career plans
- Guidance with educational goals
- Labour market information to help make solid career decisions
- Financial support while attending education/training
- A 14-week paid work placement

"Higher education provides the skill sets and the confidence to seek employment opportunities," says Nancy. "Many clients who took the program have gone on to full-time employment in their chosen field. The ISET program provides the necessary tools to achieve career aspirations."

Sasha Burkitt of Charlottetown is one of the many success stories of the ISET program. The mother of three was at a crossroads in her life, unsure of which direction to take, and lacked confidence. She had been out of school for years and previous employment had been in low-paying entry-level positions.

In 2018, she completed a 14-week Level Entry Cooking program through the Tourism Industry Association of Prince Edward Island (TIAPEI) and discovered a passion for the culinary world.

"I secured employment managing a kitchen at a resort, but lacked the skill sets for the position," says Sasha. "I had no idea what I was going to do with my life, but I knew I couldn't do that job and I didn't want to be unemployed."

Sasha contacted the chef she had worked with at the TIAPEI cooking program to ask for advice. He suggested she enroll in the two-year Culinary Arts program at the Holland College Culinary Institute of Canada, and offered to provide a reference. She applied and was accepted in September 2019, but lacked a plan to pay for tuition.

Sasha learned about the NCPEI ISET program through the cooperative partnership with the MCPEI Employment and Training Coordinator, **Cindy Midgley**, and then contacted Nancy.

"Sasha has the passion and the desire to work in the culinary sector," says Nancy. "Support from the ISET program is key to accomplishing her goals."



Sasha Burkitt of Charlottetown is a client of the ISET program.

"The ISET program changed my life," says Sasha. "The financial assistance opened the door, and the emotional support from Nancy is what's making it possible for me to continue and to achieve my career goal. I wanted a career I was happy with, and this would not have been possible without the support from the NCPEI."

Sasha balances family life and a student workload with the assistance of her husband and Nancy at NCPEI. She maintains a 90 percent average and is optimistic about a promising career in the food sector.

For more information about the **Indigenous Skills and Employment Training**, contact **Nancy MacLean**, Employment & Training Coordinator, at **902-892-5314**, or email humanresources@ncpei.com

Visit www.ncpei.com

The ISET program is funded through partnership with the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples and Employment and Social Development Canada.