

Women Focus Canada Inc. – Women in Skilled Trades Program

HVAC Gas Technician Scholarship 2025-2026 – Final Report

We would like to thank the CIBC Foundation “Inclusive Communities” program for the grant that made this program possible.

Women Focus Canada Inc. (WFC) aims to alleviate poverty for marginalized Black and racialized women in Canada through the delivery of transformative programs and supports, increasing access to education and employment outcomes for these underserved and underrepresented communities.

WFC's Women in Skilled Trades Program (WIST) is dedicated to building the financial independence of these women by providing career paths in the skilled trades, particularly Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC).

Why Skilled Trades?

Job prospects in Ontario's skilled trades are exceptionally strong, with a projected shortage of over 100,000 workers by 2030. And incomes in the HVAC field are significantly above average, driven by demand for energy-efficient building systems, and an aging workforce.

However, historically, there has been a gender gap in the skilled trades, with women being underrepresented in the HVAC workforce. According to Statistics Canada, as of 2022, women in Canada represent only 5% of skilled trades workers. As more attention has been centered around reducing this gap through a rise in women's trades programs, women still feel the reality of limited access to this field.

This issue is further exacerbated for Black and racialized women who disproportionately face unemployment and reduced access to equitable education, being long subordinated due to their race, gender, and class.

We gathered evidence for the gap of both awareness of and access to this field through an environmental scan in the community and determined that there are opportunities in this field for women, but many women are not aware of that.

As a result, in March 2025, during our International Women's Day event, we invited Rokhaya Grey, a member of the Carpenters Regional Council (Local 27), and the Ontario Chair of the Sisters in the Brotherhood (SIB), to share about the potential of careers in the skilled trades. Within days, more than twenty-five women had registered their interest in the skilled trades on our website or by contacting WFC directly, more than 6% of the total attendees at the event.

Support Provided by the WFC Women in Skilled Trades Program (WIST) 2025-2026

This program is designed to fill this gap practically by creating space for Black and racialized women to learn, participate, seek opportunities and complete certifications, all while being supported in a culturally responsive manner. Thanks to a grant under the CIBC Foundation “Inclusive Communities” focus, we received funding to support one woman to participate in this program in fall 2025-2026.

The multi-dimensional support provided by the WIST program included:

- Tuition coverage, books, and exam fees
- Placement opportunities
- Wraparound supports including:
 - Tools and safety equipment such as safety boots, hard hat, safety goggles, uniform, multi-meter
 - Transportation, grocery and childcare assistance
 - Ongoing culturally sensitive support from the WFC Executive Director and a caseworker with whom the participant met weekly.
 - Communication channels co-developed with the participants including WhatsApp, email, and phone, so she always felt connected to support.

Impact of the Women Focus Canada's Women on Skilled Trades (WIST) Program

The participant is a racialized immigrant single mother who lives with her parents. She's on Ontario Works and wants to get a job and support herself and her child. Before being accepted into the WIST program, the best job opportunity she had been able to find was working in MacDonald's.

But she always wanted to work in the skilled trades. She loves working with her hands and even renovated a bathroom. Friends in the trades shared how work in this field can support her financial stability. But she did not have the opportunity to pursue this option – her family couldn't support her to get training.

Thanks to the WIST program, she now has the training and certification she needs to pursue a well-paying career in a field that she loves and has demonstrated aptitude for – both prior to entering the program and through her performance in the training programs and field placements.

Specific Outcomes

The program participant successfully completed

- **G3 Gas Technician training** through HiMark – this is the first level of training in the Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) field.
- **Gas Technician 3 Theory course** through George Brown College. This additional credential was intentionally included to strengthen her resume and broaden her academic exposure within a recognized college setting.
- **G3 Gas Technician Certification** through Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA) – Ontario's public safety regulator for a variety of fields including HVAC. TSSA certification is required to work in the HVAC field.

- The participant successfully passed her TSSA exam on the first try, a significant accomplishment, since reports from training forums suggest that only about 50% of students not already employed in the field pass on their first attempt.

These were the anticipated outcomes of the program and gave the participant solid entry-level qualifications in the field. However, G3 Gas Technicians must work under supervision, which sets certain limits on their economic control over their lives.

As a result, we were delighted when, thanks to the participant's dedication and hard work, the student also completed:

- **G2 Gas Technician training** through HiMark – this is the second-highest level of training in the HVAC field.
- **G2 Gas Technician Certification** through TSSA.

G2 Certification is a highly significant accomplishment because it qualifies the participant to install, service, and repair natural gas and propane equipment without supervision on equipment up to 400,000 BTUH (a measure of heating / cooling power – for example residential furnaces often range from 30,000 to 135,000 BTUH).

This gives the WIST participant significantly greater economic independence because in addition to working for someone else – and having more to offer a potential employer because of her additional G2 skills – a G2 Certified Gas Technician has the option of starting their own business.

Armed with these credentials, the WIST participant is currently searching for work in the field, with the support of HiMark and Women Focus Canada Inc.

Along the way, HiMark is providing her with work-related opportunities and funding to talk about HVAC to other women looking into this field, opening their eyes both to the potential economic opportunity and clarifying where to start.

Women Focus Canada Inc., The Redwood & HiMark

In choosing training partners for the Women in Trades Program, WFC did our own due diligence regarding the options. We were also supported by The Redwood women's shelter, which has run its own successful HVAC program for 6 years. Their participants are successfully trained by both HiMark and George Brown College, and The Redwood connected us with their contacts at both institutions. Our WIST program was also supported by ongoing consultation between the Executive Directors of The Redwood and WFC, enabling us to leverage their experience to provide our own highly effective program right from the start.

Learning for the Future

The feedback from the participant was that, while she appreciated the additional training through George Brown College, she felt that she had already absorbed the content through the HiMark program. Feedback from other participants who have taken both programs confirms this perspective.

Therefore, in our next cohort, we would consider including only the HiMark training to confirm that it is sufficient to meet the educational and employment objectives of this program.

The Value of the Women in Skilled Trades (WIST) Program

The WFC WIST Program generated significant and multidimensional impacts on the participant's academic, professional, and personal outcomes.

At the mid-program stage, one of the most immediate impacts was the reduction of financial stress, which enabled greater focus on academic performance. The student noted that the support allowed her to “focus on doing well by helping her not worry about finance,” demonstrating how financial stability directly influenced her ability to engage with training.

This is supported by program monitoring data indicating 100% sustained participation during training milestones, including successful completion of the G3 and G2 certification on the first attempt. This early success represents a strong indicator of both participant capability and program effectiveness.

The program also played a critical role in helping her manage competing responsibilities. Through flexible and responsive support, she was able to balance coursework with personal commitments. As she explained, the program supported her “by allowing her grace and giving her time to reach out on her schedule, especially during exam week,” which reduced stress and enabled continued progress.

At the endline stage, she reflected positively on the program's responsiveness, noting that the support addressed her concerns “to the best of their abilities” and that it “majority of the time fixes the problem entirely.” This highlights the importance of participant-centered support in sustaining engagement and enabling successful outcomes.

In summary, having both financial and interpersonal support was a powerful combination for the participant. Having regular access to a consistent, culturally relevant supporter, someone who was in her corner, with whom she could talk about challenges and who supported her with effective problem-solving enabled her to make the most of the resources provided.

Next Steps

We are grateful to the CIBC Foundation “Inclusive Communities” grant for enabling this program to have the impact and achieve the results it did in 2025-2026.

This pilot has demonstrated first-hand the value and effectiveness of WFC's Women in Skilled Trades Program, in alignment with CIBC Foundation's objectives of advancing social and economic equity by improving reskilling / upskilling education and employment for underserved communities.

Women Focus Canada Inc.'s next step is to seek additional funding to expand the program to support additional marginalized and racialized women, increasing their access to education and sustainable employment opportunities.