

Local organization celebrates its first female construction training graduates

Alexa Block, KREM / October 31, 2017

SPOKANE, Wash. -- They lay tile, operate forklifts and do heavy lifting just like any male counter parts can, but women still only make up about 9 percent of the country's construction workers, according to OSHA.

USA Today reports in recent years there has been a nationwide push to increase that number.

The Head Start to the Construction Trades program is trying to help change that.

The Head Start to the Construction Trades or HCT Program is a free six week training course which prepares people to work in construction fields. It started as a pilot program in March 2016. With funding from the City of Spokane, the program launched in April of this year. Since it began about 50 people have graduated from the course and about 40 of them found permanent jobs.

The Inland Northwest Associated General Contractors run HCT. Inland Northwest Associated General Contractors Director Mike Ankney said there is a shortage of construction workers. Their job is to recruit people into the workforce. He said they put a special focus on recruiting women and minorities to construction fields.

With help from the non-profit Women Helping Women Fund, the Inland Northwest Associated General Contractors held its first all-female HCT training course.

Melissa Halvorson, Amanda Giger and Christina Duhamel are three of the seven women who graduated from the program.

They got an introduction to fields like carpentry, plumbing, welding and ironwork, as well as received their OSHA, Forklift, First Aid and CPR certifications, which are the building blocks for careers in construction.

"It's good for the economy, and it's good for families, it's good for individuals and it can be a career, it can be a good income, a good wage, it just gets everything going," said HCT instructor Shawn Kingsbury.

It is not just about the work experience and certifications. It is about the hope and confidence they have gained.

"Construction has always been something I have been interested in and wanted to be a part of but I didn't really like know there was anywhere that I could fit in," said Halvorson.

"It's hard to express how it feels when these people in this program have worked miracles in your life," said Christina Duhamel.

These women are making huge strides in their individual lives while at the same time forging a path for other women who may be thinking about laying the foundation for a new career.

"Try something different and let go of any fear and just have faith that it is going to be a good thing and it absolutely was," said Giger. "Women are capable of lifting and doing those long days and that it's really about working together has human to human and I don't think so much as male to female."

Ankney said they are currently holding HCT training at the Geiger Correctional Facility with inmates. They plan on holding another all-female class sometime in February and any woman is encouraged to apply.