



Blackburne House Group



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Women Build Careers in Construction

Blackburne House and PLUS Housing Group are working in partnership to help women break down the barriers to a career in construction.

Power tools, hard hats and builder's boots are all in a day's work for women studying building crafts and construction at Blackburne House. Students gain hands-on technical training and complete a month-long work placement with a PLUS approved contractor. 80 women have completed the courses since they first started in 2003.

Course graduates enter a thriving market. It is estimated that 76,000 career opportunities will be created in the construction industry each year for the next five years, with an estimated £4 – 5 billion of planned construction activities over the next five to ten years. However, skills shortages are proving a real problem for the industry.

The Learning and Skills Council's 2004 National Employer's Skills Survey revealed that over 40% of job vacancies in the construction industry remain unfilled due to a lack of skilled candidates. This is the second highest skills shortage of any UK industry and is threatening the sector's future expansion. Currently, less than 1% of jobs in the construction sector are filled by women.

Blackburne House is taking several steps to address this problem and will deliver a major conference entitled 'Gender on the Agenda: Women in Construction' on Thursday, 27 April. Speakers will include Sir Joe Dwyer, President of the Institute of Civil Engineers and Claire Curtis-Thomas MP, a qualified engineer and Chair for both the All Party Group for Construction Skills and the All Party Group for Women in Science, Engineering and Design. PLUS Housing Group is a sponsor for the conference.

The conference also provides a platform to launch the Merseyside Women's Craft Guild, which will provide support, advice and information to women working in construction and produce a directory of women in the trades, which can be used by employers and the public.

Claire Dove, Chief Executive of the Blackburne House Group told us: "We have been striving to encourage women into construction for a number of years. It was our ambition

to develop construction courses for women, which we achieved in 2003 and have since expanded the provision to incorporate building craft occupations, plastering, carpentry and joinery and more recently home maintenance skills.”

Wayne Gales, Operations Director for PLUS, added: “These Blackburne House construction courses help women to build careers in the construction industry by breaking down barriers and challenging perceptions. PLUS is committed to equality and diversity and this extends to the employment opportunities offered by our contractors, who are delighted to provide the student work placement opportunities.”

Success Stories:

Michala Cleverly

28 year-old Michala was a stay-at-home mum before she started training with Blackburne House. She lives in Huyton with her husband and they are developing their own home within the grounds of the former Huyton College for Girls. Michala has always been interested in building work and previously spent two years living in Spain building dry-stone walls.

Michala is studying for the CITB Foundation Award in Building Crafts and the BTEC Introductory Certificate in Construction at Blackburne House.

Michala has ambitions to either set up her own business or work in building control or conservation. “I wish this course had been available for me straight after school,” Michala says. She is encouraging her two young daughters to follow their ambitions. To other women thinking about a career in construction, Michala says “you’ve just got to come on the course and try it!”

Michala will undertake a month-long work placement with a PLUS approved contractor as part of the construction course. Her next personal project is to build a porch for her family home and dig out two air-raid shelters at the bottom of the garden.

But, Michala warns, “your birthday and Christmas presents start to change when you start this course; I got a pair of builder’s boots from my husband for my last birthday!”

Alison Beckett

40 year-old Alison lives in Childwall and has a long-standing interest in DIY. Alison says she would have made a career out of her hobby years ago if a women-only course had been available.

Alison achieved the CITB Foundation Award in Building Crafts at Blackburne House in 2003, completing a placement with PLUS approved contractor Penny Lane Builders. She started working as the Construction Technician at Blackburne House in 2004. Alison describes her previous career as “chief cook and bottle washer”, running a home and looking after her two teenage daughters!

“I had no qualifications when I left school, but I took a chance and found my direction. Since I started at Blackburne House I’ve been flooded with ideas and opportunities. I never want to give this up,” Alison says.

Alison is passionate about getting more women to work in construction and says that women construction professionals offer that little bit more, “we can do everything men can do – and we tidy up after ourselves!” Alison adds, “It’s about time society changed and made it more accessible for women to get into this kind of work. It’s about providing choice.”

Alison is now studying for further qualifications and has ambitions to teach construction and engineering skills to other women.

Both women agree that the construction courses at Blackburne House provide a wonderful opportunity to share ideas, make friends and develop their potential. They also stress that there is a thriving market for women construction professionals and are excited about the opportunities now open to them.

For more information about the ‘Gender on the Agenda: Women in Construction’ conference, or for course details, please contact Blackburne House on 0151 709 4356.

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Note to Editors: Photographs of Michala Cleverly and Alison Beckett in the Blackburne Housing training workshop are attached with this release in jpeg format.

Background information:

The **Blackburne House Group** seeks to transform women’s lives through the provision of training and opportunities of every kind in an environment of equality and inspiration. Blackburne House has been offering educational opportunities to women for over 20 years. The organisation has been officially recognised as a centre of excellence having been awarded Grade 1 for education provision by the LSC. This grade was only achieved by the top 8% of external Adult Education Institutions in Britain. In addition, the centre is ranked in the top 10% of colleges and educational providers in the UK.

Building crafts and construction courses at Blackburne House include the CITB Foundation Award in Building Crafts, the BTEC Introductory Certificate in Construction, NVQ Carpentry and Joinery and Home Maintenance.

PLUS Housing Group is an alliance of independent organisations with complementary goals, making a positive contribution to the housing and regeneration sector. Member organisations are CDS, Hornby Homes, New Gen, and INclude Neighbourhood Regeneration. 46% of senior management positions at PLUS are held by women and the organisation is committed to promoting equality and diversity.

For more information, please contact: Bridget Waters, Communications Officer, PLUS Housing Group on 0151 708 4653 or e-mail: bridget.waters@plusgrouppltd.org.uk