



Innovative Partnership Reduces Energy Costs

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Last week Vermont Works for Women and J.A. Morrissey completed the first phase of efficiency improvements on 60 of 336 units at Burlington's Northgate Apartments, an affordable rental community located on the banks of Lake Champlain. The housing complex serves families across a range of incomes from below 30 percent of median up to 95 percent of median income.

"This is the way to go — creating opportunities for women and others to get out there and learn these skills, work and earn a living, and cut costs and energy consumption at the same time." Judy Reynolds, construction crew member, Vermont Works for Women.

Northgate is home to more than 1,000 residents from all over the world, with families from 14 countries. The pilot project addresses several important community needs. It helps residents of Vermont's largest affordable housing complex lower their energy requirements and also reduces the carbon footprint of aging housing stock in need of efficiency upgrades.

As part of the project, women are receiving job training in weatherization — a growing field with a significant demand for labor, and one in which women are under-represented. The Northgate project also offers substantial progress toward achieving the state's stated residential efficiency goals.



As a result of the efficiency improvements, fewer fossil fuels will be used, and heating costs for each unit will be lower. Residents at Northgate pay for their own utilities, and so the estimated 33 percent savings in energy costs are an immediate benefit. Per unit carbon dioxide savings are estimated to be 1,500 pounds annually.

FRESH Energy is the program of Vermont Works for Women that trains

Vermont Works for Women

is a 501c3 nonprofit organization founded in 1987 to help women and girls recognize their potential and explore, pursue and excel in work that leads to economic independence.

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and employs women in the fields of construction, efficiency and renewable energy.

Serving as a subcontractor to J.A. Morrissey on the project, program participants are removing insulation, replacing rotted sills or clapboards, caulking and sealing. In addition to what they are learning on the job, crew members receive classroom instruction in building science through a curriculum developed by Efficiency Vermont.

This particular training model offers many benefits. It has the strong potential to be self-supporting within two years and grows new green jobs.



Women are given specific exposure to the emerging and rapidly growing work of installing solar tracking systems. Graduates can apply for full-time, year-round jobs at J.A.

Morrissey with benefits and are also trained in areas that offer them potential for becoming self-employed without having to make a significant investment in capital or a long apprenticeship. And because the program operates in tandem with seasoned J.A. Morrissey employees, participants are mentored in a range of skills related to weatherization, green construction, window and door replacement, heavy equipment operation, and performing energy audits.

FRESH Energy participant Judy Reynolds joined the crew in December. She has always wanted to pursue a career in the construction field, but has found it difficult to gain the necessary experience. Commenting on her work in the program she says, “This is the way to go — creating opportunities for women and others to get out there and learn these skills, work and earn a living, and cut costs and energy consumption at the same time.” Her current goal is to become a carpenter specializing in green construction.

Jeanne Morrissey, owner and president of J.A. Morrissey says there has been a decline in the number of obstacles facing women entering the construction workforce and a greater sense of opportunity. “There’s still work to be done,” Morrissey says. “Fewer obstacles and the creation of more opportunities are largely due to organizations like Vermont Works for Women.”

Work has been funded through Northgate reserves intended for these purposes and through private foundation support or in-kind contributions that have helped subsidize labor costs. The Northgate Apartments Board and Maloney Properties have a 10-year capital improvement plan that is being funded through rental income, recently revised to accelerate weatherization and energy-related improvements. The partnership with J.A. Morrissey (a company that offers general contracting and construction management services) and Vermont Works for Women (a nonprofit organization in Winooski) provided the opportunity to move this plan forward more quickly.

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