

# **BUILDING** **Strong Communities**

Aligning stakeholders to provide industry-driven, apprenticeship-readiness pathways into union construction careers.

## Building Strong Communities

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**“This program changes lives. It gives people the education and skills to make informed career choices that will benefit themselves and their families.”**

*-Rick Martagon,  
Executive Director of Building  
Strong Communities*



Building Strong Communities is a Minnesota nonprofit dedicated to empowering individuals and revitalizing communities through careers in the construction industry.

Some unique aspects of BSC include:

- BSC is a 501(c)3 focused on helping Minnesotans gain access to the Trades. This program helps address critical workforce shortages while promoting the industry and strengthening communities.
- The programs include Registered Apprenticeships, mentorship opportunities, and support services that help participants overcome barriers to success.
- By fostering partnerships with schools, businesses, trades, nonprofits and community organizations, BSC creates pathways to employment and career advancement.
- BSC offers exploration and education across 21 different trades. This approach helps participants discover the trade best matched to their skills, abilities and interests.

# 2024 BSC Graduation



This record-breaking graduation was a testament to the dedication and hard work of all those involved in the Building Strong Communities program, promising a brighter future for its graduates, the industries they will soon join, and the communities in which they will work.

With a mix of virtual and hands-on classes, BSC students gain insights into various trades and receive in-depth interview training and coaching. **The goal of BSC is for every student to receive a job offer after graduation!**

Community-based organizations play a vital role in this program through recruitment, workforce readiness, and providing supportive services. This network included **Avivo, Career Solutions, Central Minnesota Jobs and Training, EMERGE Community Development, Native Sun Community Power Development, Summit Academy OIC, Twin Cities Rise, and SOAR Careers.** These unique partnerships brought together key stakeholders to prepare individuals for promising careers in energy and construction trades.

## BSC By the Numbers:



Continuous  
**recruitment for 21  
different trades**



In 2024 **BSC graduated  
the largest cohort** in the  
program's history.



This year the programs set another  
**record with 127 cohort participants,**  
**representing** the Metro, Duluth, the Iron  
Range, Mankato and Rochester



**107** placements  
over **2 years**



# Meet the Graduates



## Amber Patino-Linley

Amber Patino-Linley was looking for a career change when she started searching online for skilled trade positions. Through the Building Strong Communities program, she connected with the **Roofers and Waterproofers Local 96**. “Building Strong Communities gave me all the tools and information I needed to navigate the people and situations in a male-dominated field,” said Amber. “At first I was intimidated, but it’s a lot different than I expected – in a good way.”

## Kris Tornow

Kris Tornow needed a change in his life after struggling with addiction. He was looking for a new career path. His SOAR Career Solutions case worker connected him with Building Strong Communities, and he was accepted into the program. “When I was told about Building Strong Communities, I knew my life was going to get better,” said Kris. “It was a gift, and it was also my pathway to joining a union,” he added. Kris is a proud member of **Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers**.



## Natalie Pilrain

Natalie Pilrain is living her dream with the **Operating Engineers Local 49**. After graduation she was placed with Ames Construction as a first-year apprentice. Her favorite piece of equipment is the skid loader. “I’m working out of St. Paul on a bridge site, and I love the work,” she said. “It doesn’t feel like work because I love what I do.” Natalie said her son would be very excited if he could see what she does at work.



# Meet the Graduates

## Christopher Von Ville

Christopher Von Ville was successfully recovering from addiction when he and his wife discovered Soar Career Solutions where they attended career workshops and training. “They connected me with Building Strong Communities,” said Christopher. “My struggles with addiction were a reason for my getting into the program,” he added.



## Dorlisa Flournoy

“Construction work was calling me,” said Dorlisa Flournoy. She was working for a temp agency in the medical device field when an online search brought her to Building Strong Communities in early 2024. Her passion was always in the construction field. Now, five months after that initial contact, Dorlisa is an operating engineer working with heavy equipment.



## Construct Tomorrow & BSC

Through **Youth Career Exploration** funding, **Building Strong Communities** formed a strategic partnership with **Construct Tomorrow** to reach more than **7,729 students** around the state.

- Bemidji
- Eveleth
- Duluth
- Hinkley
- Iron Range
- Litchfield
- Mankato
- Minneapolis
- Rochester
- St. Paul

