



Community Success Story

Nak'azdli Construction: Building for the long term at Nak'azdli Whut'en

The Story of Nak'azdli Construction

Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation is a key employer in the Fort St. James area and the Nation's Development Corporation owns several businesses. In 2021, the Nation took the initiative to bring together local workers and form a construction crew to handle construction projects on the reserve. The goals were to reduce reliance on outside contractors, improve the quality of work, and take responsibility for construction on-reserve.

Jess Kilpatrick was teaching pipefitting at the local college and had previously worked with the Nation on other projects. The Band office created a construction manager position for Jess, and she put together a Nak'azdli Construction team and mentored employees in multiple trades.

Over the first few years, Nak'azdli Construction worked under the administration branch of the Band. They built several on-reserve projects benefitting the community: four tiny homes, a common building and a dog kennel building. They also completed a major renovation on the natural resource building and two renovations on the daycare, as well as servicing public buildings and rental housing.

Since 2023, Nak'azdli Construction is now under the Nak'azdli Development Corporation, which is owned by Nak'azdli Whut'en Band and Council. From an original team of four employees, the business has grown to a team of 12+ that includes carpenters, electricians, plumbers and gas fitters. The company offers a full suite of construction services including new builds and renovations.



Project Partners:

Jess Kilpatrick
Construction Manager,
Nak'azdli Construction Ltd.

Nak'azdli Development Corporation
(2023-present)

Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation
(2021-2023)

Community Context: Nak'azdli Whut'en

Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation is a member of the Carrier or Dakelh Nation of the Dene. Society is based on the Clan System and currently there are four clans: Lhts'umusyoo (Beaver), Lusilyoo (Frog), Kwun Ba Whuten (Caribou) and Lohjabou (Bear).

Nak'azdli Whut'en has about 2,000 members with eighteen reserves in and around the District of Fort St. James in BC's Central Interior. Their off-reserve population is significant, living in Fort St. James, Prince George, Vancouver, throughout the province and beyond.

Source: nakazdliwhuten.ca

All photo credits: Nak'azdli Construction.



Resilient and Energy-Efficient Standards

Many older on-reserve homes haven't lasted the way they should, due to low-quality materials and workmanship. Nak'azdli Construction is committed to higher building standards and higher energy efficiency in their projects. Their builds are intended to last multiple generations and withstand extreme weather and climate change. Temperatures in this region can range from -40°C to +40°C, so new homes must be well prepared for heat and cold. The company also works with the housing department on maintenance and renovations to extend the lifespan of existing buildings.

Before the company was created, Nak'azdli members interested in trades would often have to move away for apprenticeships. Having a company like this on-reserve helps provide training and work opportunities for apprentices. Almost all the company's employees are Indigenous and most are from Nak'azdli Whut'en.

A New Energy-Efficient Residential Project

The construction company will begin breaking ground this July on a new multi-family residential project with 32 units, consisting of two apartment buildings and three townhouses. The buildings aim for Energy Step Code 3 standards and will have infrastructure in place for adding solar energy generation in the future.

Nak'azdli Construction partnered with the Alberta company Keller Construction to submit their bid on this BC Housing project. The project incorporates an Indigenous Participation Plan (IPP) that facilitates the process for Nak'azdli Whut'en apprentices and member-owned businesses to participate in the project.

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Thanks to Jess Kilpatrick, Justin Holdis and Brenden Bird for sharing their experience for this case study. You can find the company on Facebook: [Nak'azdli Construction Ltd.](#)



Advice & Lessons Learned

- Finding balance is key to success: valuing the needs of customers, employees and partners.
- Retain employees with fair wages, which helps workers stay in the community. Provide support for their lives outside of work, such as benefits, and flexibility for family commitments.
- Find local tradespeople who may be able to provide mentorship to younger staff. For example, people retired or close to retirement may be willing to share their knowledge.
- When looking for apprentices and mentees, try to find people locally who are interested in trades. This could include people who are just coming out of school, or who have construction experience but haven't been to school for it yet.
- Working on local construction projects gives trainees the chance to complete their apprenticeship without having to leave their home community, which can be a win-win situation.

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