

Industrial Craft program builds lives as well as industry

For James Keyes, 30, applying for the Industrial Craft Training Program through Lee College's Center for Workforce and Community Development was a significant step toward turning his life around. Born in Channelview, Keyes grew up alongside his older sister and was no stranger to financial challenges. His mother was a single parent who lived paycheck to paycheck to support the family throughout his younger years. "She did everything she could to keep food on the table and teach us right from wrong," Keyes recalls about his mother, "she always supported me through my rough times. She never turned her back on me."

Growing up, Keyes remembered both parents working long hours to financially support the family. Unfortunately, this provided Keyes with the chance to develop a troubled path. "While my mom was gone working turnarounds, I wouldn't stay home," Keyes admits, "I'd go out with friends and play in the streets." His father worked as a police officer to support his own wife and step children in addition to helping support Keyes, his sister, and his mother. "I saw him every other weekend and any chance he could," Keyes said.

By the age of 15, Keyes was introduced to drugs and would battle a drug addiction for years to come. "I dug myself into a hole," he admitted. Keyes dropped out of high school during his junior year after becoming a father to two sons. "I got a job sacking groceries to provide for my family," he said. His battle with drug addiction continued to spiral downward and ultimately lead to his arrest. "I believe that moment saved my life," he said. After being arrested, and finding out that he was about to be a father to a baby girl, Keyes decided it was time to change his life.

Keyes moved from Baytown to Webster after attending a state rehabilitation Program. "I completed the rehabilitation program and never looked back," he said. "Over the years, I've had to hustle. I've had to prove myself and dig myself out of this hole." Keyes started working as an electrical apprentice and was looking to advance his skills in the field when he heard about the Industrial Craft Training Program. "My previous record created some setbacks, but this was a great way to get some more experience and good referrals," Keyes said.

Just four days before Keyes completed the last class, he was offered a job as a journeyman for JAM Electrical. "The course gave me the skills to get this job and the pay raise has been a significant improvement for my finances. I'm able to support my family and I'm a much better person now," Keyes said. "I love spending time with my family, and teaching my kids how to play sports. I strive to be a positive influence on my sons and my daughter."

For the first time this holiday season, Keyes had the opportunity to shower his children with all the gifts on their Christmas lists—something he never had the chance to do before. "I'm proud that I'm going to be around my whole family this Christmas and be praised for everything I've accomplished."

Learn more about the Industrial Craft Training opportunities at www.lee.edu/workforce.