

Jemiah Clay

Ironworker's apprentice

KentuckianaWorks Construction Pipeline Program

I just did five years in the penitentiary. I was involved in gangs.

I came home and was at church, ran into a minister. He told me to go to the Urban League. Even when I went there, there was a gentleman there by the name of Mr. McAfee, Frank McAfee, and he said, "Are you scared of heights?" And, I'm like "No sir, I'm not scared of nothing." He said, "You might make a good ironworker."

I went to the Local 70, which is the ironworkers union, and Mr. Murphy would come right behind me, like he was going to bat for me. But then when I actually seen that the people in the Pipeline program were really trying to help you, I said, "Ah, man I'm onto something here." To make a long story short, they accepted me. I just told them, "Just give me a chance – just once. And, I'm good." And ever since then, I've been truly blessed.

They got me a job. They've been keeping me working. I'm riding this ironworker thing all the way out 'til I retire. This is my career. Like Mr. McAfee said, "We're not trying to get you no job, we're trying to get you guys careers." I have a career! You know what I'm saying? I'm fine. I have full benefits. My kids, everybody has insurance. Everything's fine!

Financially – I mean I went to a car lot and got a car off the car lot. I have a bank account. So financially, I am great. I mean I'm not worried about nothing. I'm a taxpayer.

My wife, she's more confident in me. I mean, my kids are more confident in me. When they tell their friends, when they go to school and say my daddy's an ironworker or my daddy helped build the arena, I can see the glow in their face. So I mean all the way around the board, it's helped tremendously.

It's not easy. But it feels better at the end of the day that didn't nobody handed it to you. They tell you they don't guarantee you no job. They just crack the door open for you, and everything is left up to you. I mean even when I'm on the job and they ask me this question, "How did you even got into this?" I tell them. I just can't believe that a lot of people don't know about this program. I really don't. If I can make it, I swear to you anybody can. I owe everything to them people, everything to the Pipeline Program, I mean absolutely everything! I feel lucky.