

A CAREER BUILT FOR A GOOD FUTURE

Meet Justin Wedderburn, a graduate of the Hammerheads program and a proud member of International Union of Operating Engineers Local 793. Justin is a young father who credits the changes in his life and his new-found passion for the trades to the mentorship and support he received through the Hammerheads program of the Central Ontario Building Trades. It is an employment-based training program offering apprenticeship career opportunities to the youth of under-resourced neighbourhoods in our communities.



Justin's early life was rocked by turbulent events. He lost his mother at the age of 14 and after finishing school was living day by day, paying the bills by taking on unsteady and precarious work with no benefits. Justin changed his attitude after realizing he was going to be a father. He wanted a different future for his son and family.

Through the Hammerheads program, his personal and professional skills were developed and he was exposed to the diversity of trades. He made plenty of friends during the program. His group motivated each other and supported each other to be successful. After graduation, he still kept in contact with other graduates. Justin

decided to pursue a career as a crane operator. It required in-school training at the Operating Engineers training centre as well as on the job experience.

He had to work hard to qualify for graduation from the training centre and be certified as an operator. Justin credits his success to the mentorship and support he received from his brothers and sisters at IUOE Local 793 who accepted and supported him as he transitioned from precarious agency employment to a unionized good paying job. Justin was introduced to the labour movement and was inspired by its collective accomplishments.

"When you join a Union, you join a community. I feel like I am part of a real brotherhood – people see my 793 hat and come over to introduce themselves. I have access to benefits and opportunities that I could only dream of. It's nice to know I can take my son for an eye exam, as well as get great wages".

Justin wants other young people to consider the trades because he is confident that they will succeed if they gave it a chance. He recalls how he never considered construction because it seemed to have a bad reputation, but that is far from the truth. He was pleasantly surprised by the level of wages and the benefits union members enjoy. Through the Hammerheads program, he received professional support for two years that changed his outlook of life. He now loves

construction and is hungry to learn and develop more skills.

"I am happy, because I am doing something that I love, I have a job and a career. I see a lot of guys who are good with their hands but are wasting their talent. Now I am helping people and contributing to society. It's definitely been a blessing. I know my mom would be proud of me".

Finally, Justin has become an ambassador for the Hammerheads program in his community because of the opportunities that he was exposed to in the trades. It is important for society for diversity in the workplace, it opens doors to conversations and relationships that can challenge closed minds in society. He is grateful that he found many friends in his Union family at International Union of Operating Engineers Local 793 who are invested in his success.

He is grateful for his family who have supported him unconditionally and whom he loves very much. A veteran union member once told him that the reward for hard work and the construction schedule was being able to spend quality time with his family. That's why he wants those in precarious employment to seriously consider a career in the trades. His has been a wonderful journey exploring a career in the construction trades, an opportunity that he hopes others would not take for granted.