

Anna Hawkins

Trainee

Jane Addams Resource Center

Years before her training at JARC, Anna Hawkins worked for a cosmetics company doing visual merchandising in a soap store. She spent her shifts surrounded by savory fragrances while cutting and stacking soap. How did she go from separating soap to joining steel in JARC's welding program?

"I like working with my hands," explained Hawkins, who loves practicing self-taught crafts like painting and drawing for fun. "I'm not good at them yet. But I still try all the time." Her grandfather had a furniture repair business in his garage when she was younger, so her love of working with her hands is shared by at least one other person in her family.

Prior to joining JARC, Hawkins went to college to study nutrition and dropped out, but returned to study public health. Both times in college, she juggled two part-time jobs while studying. "I lived on my own and had no outside help with my expenses. It was getting tough, I was struggling to even pay rent sometimes. I had to ask myself if I was going to college because I was told that was the only way, or if I was going because I could truly see myself using the degree that I was pursuing." Although Hawkins knows she could probably go back to college for the few courses required to get a degree in public health, she sees a future for herself in manufacturing.

She was prepared for the hands-on education at JARC, but was surprised at the breadth of the curriculum. She was expecting the program to be more intensive than extensive, but accepts that much of her learning will take place in the workplace.

"I started to get frustrated, because I wasn't working on the machines as much as I wanted to," admitted Hawkins. "I was doing the same thing over and over again." When she understood that the objective of JARC was to prepare her for the workforce, and not teach her everything that she needs to learn, she became less discouraged. Now she is proud of her choice.

"There's never a day where I'm just sitting or doing book work," described Hawkins. She says she is blessed to have teachers that capture the attention of the students. Hawkins loves the passion that she sees from the educators and how they build confidence. "When you first get into welding, if you've never done anything like that before, it could be kind of scary, because you don't want to hurt anybody or yourself."

Hawkins tries to be a great example for other younger people like herself, but is dismayed that too many are looking for ways to get rich quickly or to find fame on social media. When she told one of her friends that she was joining a welding program, her friend was puzzled. That is why she has her own suggestions for what programs like JARC can do to attract younger people.

"I would love to see JARC and programs alike specifically going to career days, after school programs, community colleges, or malls and shopping centers in



underserved or lower income communities,” Hawkins said. “Specifically, where young people would not usually be exposed or privy to opportunities like the programs at JARC, giving them other options to consider for their futures.”

With so many options for her to pursue in welding, she is not sure what she wants to do. All she does know is that she wants to work on different projects everyday, and not be stuck doing the same thing all the time. Like some of her teachers, Hawkins is interested in returning to JARC at some point as the one in front of the class educating the next generation of welders.

“I would definitely be open to giving back and even helping JARC with ideas and helping to materialize whatever the program looks like in the future.”