

Welding graduates secure higher paying construction jobs and save for the future



BACKGROUND

This case study illustrates how TCC funding for the Gladiator Welding Program helps Fresnoans develop skills to ascend in the construction industry and lay a foundation for economic mobility. It highlights how Aaron Greenwood and Josh Asberry leveraged this free skill-building course to land positions as welders, earn more money, build a financial safety net, and explore new career trajectories. For more on Transform Fresno's Workforce Development Plan, see page 58.

Interviews for this story were held in September 2023.

Josh Asberry in welding gear. Photo courtesy of Gladiator Welding Program

JOSH ASBERREY was born and raised in Fresno. He started working at the age of 16, and after graduating high school he attended college. But after one semester he realized it was not the right path for him and explored various jobs including landscaping, security, and baking. It wasn't until he entered the construction industry that he started to enjoy his work. He liked being outside and having opportunities for promotion that included better pay.

“I was excited about doing construction and just being out in the work field. It really motivated me to want to be better and be in a higher position. It was just the whole fact that you work hard, you learn, then you move up.”

JOSH ASBERREY

Eager to increase his earning potential in the building trades, Asberry enrolled in the TCC-funded, no-cost Gladiator Welding Program in 2022. The pre-apprenticeship program prepares individuals from Southwest Fresno for careers as welders, an occupation that is critical for building and maintaining infrastructure.

Within five months of entering the Gladiator Welding Program, participants earn American Welding Society (AWS) certifications in metal inert gas (MIG) and tungsten inert gas (TIG), and learn the arc welding technique, a process that uses an electric arc to generate heat to melt and fuse metal. The program is led by the State Center Community College

“I learned how to weld ... I got the basics and how to perfect my craft... and when I went back to my construction job, I had that skill. So I was able to move up the chain.”

JOSH ASBERREY

District, operated by Voice of Including Community Equitably, and supported by the West Fresno Family Resource Center, the latter of which provides case management and mentorship services.

Directly after completing the program, Asberry was recruited for a new job. He was grateful for the opportunity, but turned it down because he had already built rapport with his colleagues and he secured a pay increase to work as a welder at his current job.

Asberry's tenure as a welder greatly improved his financial situation, but it was also physically taxing, so he ultimately decided to leave the industry after his brother passed away. After taking some time off to mourn with his family, he pursued his commercial driving license. And while he's no

“I've been working all my life, trying to make ends meet, and after the program, things started to turn around. I was able to put some money down and buy a home. Now, as a truck driver, I don't have to work as hard to pay the bills.”

JOSH ASBERREY

longer applying his newfound welding skills in his current role as a truck driver, Asberrey credits the Gladiator Welding Program as the stepping stone into job opportunities with higher wages. The time he spent in the welding indus-

try enabled him to save for a home, which he successfully purchased in 2022 for himself, his wife, and his four children. And with that monumental goal out of the way, Asberrey felt financially secure enough to make another career shift.

AARON GREENWOOD went to high school in Fresno and then spent a year at Fresno City College studying criminology, a choice that was inspired by his father’s career as a corrections officer. After a year at college, he realized he didn’t enjoy it. This led him to explore job opportunities in retail, where he spent about seven years working at companies such as Walmart, Dollar Tree, and Lowe’s making \$15 per hour. While he enjoyed talking to people, customer service was not satisfying.

In search of a fulfilling career working with his hands, Greenwood started looking into the building trades. A friend of Greenwood’s had completed the Gladiator Welding Program and recommended it strongly. Greenwood knew he had to apply.

He was accepted to the program in 2022 and worked nights and weekends to make ends meet. Despite challenging circumstances, he was focused on providing a better life for his three-year-old son. Additionally, Greenwood’s mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer, and he was determined to launch a meaningful career before she passed so that she could see him reach that milestone in his life. Like Asberrey, he earned his AWS certification in MIG license in hardwiring, TIG, and arc welding.

“Not only did the program deliver what I wanted, it delivered relationships with people I can call, till this day, and ask them for help with anything I need ... It gave me some mentors that I can really rally around.”

AARON GREENWOOD

Greenwood expected to learn about welding, but the program had more in store for him. Through training he gained a meaningful community of peers that he calls on to this day. In fact, one of his welding instructors helped him get his first position welding workout equipment making \$17 per hour.

Greenwood was then able to leverage his training and work experience for a position for a pipe welding company, which offered a higher wage and more on-the-job support. With two different welding positions under his belt, Greenwood developed a better sense of career options in the industry, and began reflecting on what type of welder he wanted to be. He realized he enjoyed welding most when he was challenged and was able to stretch his technical skills.



Aaron Greenwood in welding gear. Photo courtesy of Gladiator Welding Program

Eager to take on more complicated projects, Greenwood began to consider iron welding. He applied to multiple structural steel positions which fabricated metal components for buildings. He was hired by Golden State Steele, with a 33% income increase compared to his service industry wage, access to healthcare, as well as a 401K.

Beyond the financial benefits at Golden State Steele, Greenwood especially enjoys the company’s supportive culture and the opportunity to work on meaningful projects. For example, he worked on a frame that was set to go to McKinley Elementary School, and is proud that he is helping provide the physical structure for spaces that build community.

The program has benefited Greenwood and his family in numerous ways. He now contributes to a savings account, is saving for his first house, and even maintains his beloved hobby of preserving vintage cars. And while his time after the program has also brought incredible loss, namely, the passing of his mother, he feels at peace knowing that she saw him working in a career he enjoys and which provides for his family. Professionally, he is looking forward to returning to school in the next five years and advancing to higher skill positions within the welding sector.

“From here... I plan on going back to school to become a certified welding inspector ... I want to be in the field for the next 30 years.”

AARON GREENWOOD