

REACHING FOR THE TOP

Profiles of Success

SAM ROBINSON

Pre-Apprenticeship Graduate
West Virginia Women Work | Robert C. Byrd Institute

Sam Robinson hesitated when asked how she was doing. This mother of four young children—ages 6, 5, 3, and 9 months—is newly separated and still adjusting to her new life. Sam will be the first to tell you that she’s kind of a loner and keeps to herself. So when this sudden change happened, she had to pluck up the courage to move forward—and it took a lot of strength to persevere. “I knew I needed to do something for my kids, to better my life and theirs.”

After seeing a post on Facebook, Sam made a call to West Virginia Women Work and asked about its pre-apprenticeship program, which operates in conjunction with the Robert C. Bird Institute (RCBI). “To think about the interview was nerve-wracking! It took a lot of stepping up, but I did it, and I got into the program.” This program includes flexible online workforce education from Tooling U-SME and hands-on training from the RCBI machine shop.

Sam started classes in May 2017. By her own account, she is mechanically inclined, and she learned very fast. Focusing on lathe and mill work, Sam reviewed the Tooling U-SME classes prior to going into the lab. “I wanted to familiarize myself with the equipment before I got to class—it made things easier.”

Sam got to know the other women in the program, made a few friends, and rose to the top of her class. She also won a trophy in a competition that involved following a blueprint and completing a project on the lathe and mill in one day. Her life was getting better.

By the time she graduated in August 2017, Sam was already interviewing for jobs. She was put on a wait list at Special Metals—a world leader in the invention, production and supply of high-nickel alloys for critical engineering. Sam



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impressed the company so much that she was hired two weeks prior to the opening start date.

Currently a Level 6 stocker and a Level 8 grinder, Sam is making close to \$16 per hour with additional overtime pay. She plans to take advantage of Special Metals’ tiered system to bid for open jobs. “If you get the job, they will fully train you and move you right up the ladder,” she said. The company also provides vacation pay, all health benefits and new equipment every year. Sam is planning to reach the highest level as a grinder. “There are five grinders here,” she said, “and I want to learn each one and move on up.” She can also drive a fork lift and run a crane.

Sam’s life has changed radically due to the pre-apprenticeship program. She has become independent and more confident, and loves her job. “I get to learn something new all the time,” she said. When asked what she would say to others thinking about the program, Sam said, “Step out. Step up! Be better than the world sees you, because you are. The sky’s the limit!”

Learn more about how to “Grow your own Workforce” by partnering with Tooling U-SME for pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs.

