



KAITLYN KETTNER



Inside Electrician Apprentice

NECA-IBEW Electrical JATC

Portland, Oregon

Kaitlyn has always liked working with her hands and fiddling with electronics and gadgets, so it was no surprise when her dad suggested that she go into the trades. As a mother of two, she was looking for a career that she could grow in and that would allow her to support her family.

“The whole vibe of the brotherhood and the sisterhood feels so good to be a part of—just the community.”

Before her apprenticeship program, Kaitlyn had gone to school to be a nurse. After addiction took hold of her life and she experienced some legal trouble, however, the medical field was no longer an option for her. She found herself working odd jobs. Growing up, she had always heard about apprenticeships and unions, so she went to the Women in Trades Career Fair and learned more about the apprenticeship opportunities available through the [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers \(IBEW\)](#).

Kaitlyn applied for the Inside Wireman Apprenticeship Program. She struggled to pass the math test, but ultimately she succeeded. Although she did not have one of the top rankings to get into the program right away, she completed a pre-apprenticeship program at the Union's training center,

which meant she had a direct pathway into the apprenticeship program. Kaitlyn is a year into the apprenticeship program, and she loves it! She says it keeps her constantly moving and busy, which is good for her. She enjoys how the job sites, the environment, and the coworkers are always changing, and how each day is different.

Now, 3 years into her recovery and well into her apprenticeship, Kaitlyn has offered to work nights at Kaiser Hospital and she will receive a substantial pay increase. Since becoming an apprentice, she has been able to get health insurance for herself and her sons, start paying off her student loans, improve her credit score, and obtain a credit card through IBEW's own credit union. Kaitlyn even played on IBEW's softball team, which won the championship last year.

To aspiring apprentices, Kaitlyn says to keep asking questions and to not give up. She suggests that taking classes can help to improve math and other skills before the entrance tests. Kaitlyn mentioned instead of feeling pressured to prove herself in the male-dominated program, it was important for her to continue to ask for help and to keep asking questions. IBEW has a women's group within the union, called the “Sisterhood,” which Kaitlyn plans on getting more involved in soon.

Kaitlyn says her positive attitude and outlook have been an asset on the job, and she continues to get good feedback for her problem-solving skills. Now, she is the one going to the job fairs and conventions to do outreach and introduce others to the program.

“One of the things that has been really helpful for me in making decisions for my future is that I know when I'm going to get a raise. There's not a lot of questions or wondering. You know the minimum, and you can always go up from there. There's a steady uphill.”

Q: WHAT DOES A LABORER DO?

A: Inside Electricians perform electrical installations, construction, maintenance, repair, and service. They work on electrical construction projects ranging from single-family residences to state-of-the-art industrial plants. They install conduits and wire lighting, switches, converters, and complex computerized systems.