On a brisk and damp Friday morning, Community Works Lead Instructor Greg Garfield and two of his students work together to build a staircase for the back deck of a new Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) house in Springfield, Massachusetts.

The students were part of a group of 15 who intermittently worked Fridays and Saturdays from December 2020 through early February 2021 at GSHFH build sites. A Community Works crew previously worked with GSHFH in March 2020 for our Women’s Build event at another Springfield build site.

Community Works is a pre-apprenticeship program that offers Springfield/Holyoke area residents the opportunity to learn and work in the building and transportation industries. The six-week program includes classroom and hands-on learning experiences. Upon completion of the schooling, students may apply for a state-registered apprenticeship program or transportation-industry employment.

“Our collaborative efforts throughout the community are so important in allowing us to move our projects and programs forward,” said John O’Farrell, GSHFH Fundraising and Volunteer coordinator.

“Partnering with Community Works is a great example of how we can...”

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support one another in providing critical programs that deliver positive outcomes for those we serve, while benefiting the local community at the same time. We are so grateful to have them back on the site with us.”

Greg, a retired carpenter who’s been teaching in the Community Works program for the past two years, said a career in the trades offers longevity, particularly in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. As long as there are roads, buildings, and houses, there is a need for people in the construction industry. Working with GSHFH gives his students an opportunity to work and practice the trade as well as give back to the community.

“Habitat has afforded us the opportunity to teach these skills,” Greg said, just before answering a question from his student Destiny Barnette about how he would perform the same task if it were just one person working on the project instead of three. “And volunteering makes for better communities. If you work together, you make life better. If you give, you’ll receive in return.”

Greg said what he wants for his students is to find something they enjoy. “If you don’t like construction work, it’s tortuous work and it’s just making a living. If you like it, it becomes an art.”

Tylisha “Ty” Starks, a 30-year-old mother of two from Indian Orchard, said she was desperate to pursue, she’s interested in laborers’ work and carpentry. Destiny, a 30-year-old former mental health worker from East Longmeadow, said she signed up for the program after seeing a flyer. “I wanted a different career and I like that the teachers are knowledgeable and relatable. I’m just thankful to have a program like this,” she said. “One of the challenges is just having the courage to try something different.”

Like Ty, she’s unsure which trade she’d like to pursue, she’s leaning toward electrical work or carpentry. Their work is paying off for Habitat. Since the Community Works crew started their work, they’ve built the front deck and stairs, in addition to the back deck and its stairs. In a couple of weeks, a new family will move into the house.

Destiny Barnette (left), Tylisha “Ty” Starks (center) playfully pose by the Community Works banner. Lead Instructor Greg Garfield stands to the right of the sign at a Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) build site in Springfield.
You’re invited! Join us Feb. 24 at Facebook Live

Dedication ceremony
Facebook Live
facebook.com/gshfh
10:15am, Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2021

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