



**Isaiah Jones**, Facility Maintenance  
Ohio Gratings



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## WorkAdvance helps Change H.S. Student's Path from Dropout to Graduate to Full-Time Employment

Isaiah Jones hit the wall with high school. He reached his junior year but wasn't on track to graduate. He wanted to drop out and enter the workforce.

His mother, Gina, wanted to explore other options first. She worked for the local Chamber of Commerce and was connected to various community and workforce development organizations that she thought might offer some alternatives.

Jones' mom identified a combination of programs aimed at getting her son on the right track, WorkAdvance among them. Jones is mechanically inclined, a hard worker, and likes to work with his hands, so Stark County

WorkAdvance's three-week technical and job-readiness skills training was a good fit to equip him with the foundational skills to land him an entry-level position with a local manufacturer.

Jones is the youngest participant – and completer – in the Stark County Manufacturing Workforce Development Partnership's WorkAdvance history.

Secondly, NCUS, the community-based organization that partners with the Stark Industry Sector Partnership on WorkAdvance and other initiatives, worked to place Jones in its charter high school's work study program. Jones attended that school his senior year,

caught up on earning his missing credits, graduated on time and worked part-time applying his newly acquired credentials. It was a win-win for both Jones and his mother.

### Senior Year Turnaround

“At first I wasn't sure I wanted to go back, but then I realized when I got done with high school I could move on to do bigger things,” he said.

Jones worked part-time his senior year of high school in facility maintenance with Ohio Gratings, Inc. in Canton, a leader in metal bar grating design, manufacturing and custom fabrication



**Jones standing with Supervisor Jim Compher (on left)**  
(Ohio Gratings)

services. Its products are used in industrial and architectural applications for walkways, catwalks, trenches, stairs, bridge decks, screens, grilles, fencing, mezzanines, and shelving around the world.

A couple weeks before graduation, Jones was given the news that he would be promoted to full-time, a position he coveted.

His supervisor knew Jones was a long-term fit from the start. It was only a matter of him finishing school so he'd have more time to work.

"The smile on his face and his pink shoes kind of got everybody off on the right foot from the beginning," said Jim Compher, Facilities Manager. "He's grown from a general laborer to fully one of the facility guys. We can assign

him basically anything in the realm of what we do. He never says no. He's always willing to work. And once he was of age, he became forklift certified, so he's a very well-rounded individual for us."

## Becoming a Role Model

Jones went from nearly dropping out of high school to becoming a gainfully employed young man and role model with a bright future that he says may eventually include additional education.

He said he aspires to someday go back to school to study diesel engines, work on forklifts and become a forklift technician at Ohio Gratings.

"Part of me never thought I was ever going to graduate high school. But then that door opened and I'm here today and very glad I got the opportunities that were given to me," Jones said.

Samuel Muhammad, director of NCUS Canton, has been part of Jones' development from the beginning.

"Isaiah's is a transformative story," Muhammad said. "I'm very pleased with what he's been able to accomplish because it's what his heart needed. It's what his soul needed."

## Workforce Ecosystem Players



Industry Sector Partnership



OHIO GRATINGS, INC.

Employer



Training Partner/CBO

Visit [tinyurl.com/WorkAdvance](https://tinyurl.com/WorkAdvance) for more information on WorkAdvance.



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