

Success Spotlight: Jakwan Hightower

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Program: Adult Education

Location: Lake County

STORY

Jakwan grew up in East Chicago and became a truck driver, delivering ice to stores and gas stations throughout northwest Indiana and Chicago. However, there were times the job didn't pay the bills and hours were short. "No one wants ice when there aren't barbecues in the middle of winter here in northwest Indiana," he said.



With a young daughter at home, Jakwan decided he wanted to resume his education and be able to provide a better life for her as she got older. In early 2020, he connected with the East Chicago Adult Learning Center, based in the community's high school.

"I always knew I wanted to help people," Jakwan said. "I was a team player. I played sports and had a team mentality."

Staff at the learning center thought Jakwan should earn a Paraprofessional certificate so he started taking classes. "I had to be disciplined, stay in class and pay attention because I wanted to get better."

Jakwan earned his certificate and was able to stay in the community for work. He's now a paraprofessional at East Chicago High School where he was once a student. He works one-on-one with students to help them with their academics and extracurricular activities. He's also a class sponsor, helping students raise money for upcoming events.

Earning his certificate was the first step in what Jakwan sees as a career. "I'm enrolled at Ivy Tech and I'm working on my associate degree," he said. "I want to be a physical therapist or athletic trainer here at the school, working with different teams."

Paraprofessionals play an important role in schools, serving in a variety of classrooms and can help someone pursue a teaching license or degree. At East Chicago, another paraprofessional began working with special education students, then went on to become a special education teacher and today is the director of special education for the school district.