

Move Over Brothers, There Are Sisters in the Brotherhood Now!

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Mya Angelou once said, “Success is liking yourself, liking what you do, and liking how you do it.” A carpenter by day, the founder of a nonprofit organization by night, Ashia Smith lives her life through this quote. When something in her life is not working the way she likes it – she alters her physical being until she does.

Ashia spent more than a decade juggling corporate life, venturing through different positions in New York City hoping to find the work that best fit her passion and interests. However, each path she chose lacked a certain component that she imagined would make her feel whole and happy. After a decade in the corporate world, Ashia never imagined that what would make her feel happy and whole lied in a position that at one time wasn't even open to women.

She came to WomenRising desperately searching for an outlet that would offer her the wholesomeness she had been searching for. Within minutes of meeting Ashia, Linda Nation, WomenRising's Workforce Development and Training Center Coordinator, had an intense feeling that she would benefit tremendously from the NJ Sisters Pre-Apprentice Program with the Carpenters Union. Without hesitation, Ashia trusted Ms. Nation's instinct and attended a session that ultimately led to Ashia's future.

The information session alone brought clarity to Ashia in a way the positions she held in the past had not. She examined the faces of the women, and their fascination inspired her, the excitement her peers displayed for the work that they would be doing hypnotized her to feel the same. In that session, she decided that this would be what she would do for the rest of her life.

After completely crushing the interview, Ashia became a member of the Pre-Apprentice Program with the Carpenters Union. From the moment she stepped into the building, the career-hesitation she previously felt was gone. Instead, she was filled with the excitement and wholesomeness she once only imagined existed.

While it is called Sisters in the Brotherhood, the Carpenters Union does not provide preferential treatment to the women. Ashia spent her summer strength

training, scaffolding, learning how to use heavy machinery, safety training with extensive lessons on OSHA, and every other training that her male counterparts encounter.

Ashia especially did not want to receive special treatment because she is a woman because when she left the program for the night she would come back to Jersey City to run her nonprofit organization, *She Is*, alongside her partner and co-founder, Dia Roberts. At her nonprofit, she serves as a role-model to young girls throughout the city. As this role model, it was difficult for her to preach anything is possible for the young girls if she was getting special treatment for her gender as an adult woman.

Leaving the corporate world was a major decision for Ashia, but pursuing the passion that burned within her to feel whole made that decision much easier. Ashia was one of sixty women who interviewed for the program and six weeks later she was one of twelve who graduated. Now, Ashia is a Sister in the Brotherhood as a Union Carpenter for Local 253 and a role model for women of all ages.