

**Mark**  
**Automotive Technician**

Mark comes from a family of culinary artists, but, as he explains, “everyone thought I was going to be a cook, but I wanted to do something different.” So Mark enrolled in and completed a degree in Automotive Technology from Kennedy King College with honors in May 2012. He had a 3.9 GPA, was a Presidential Scholar, President of the Automotive Club, and Phi Beta Kappa. But when it came to securing a job, these accomplishments did not matter – no one wanted to hire him because of his criminal background.

After multiple job interviews that seemed promising but never panned out, the employment office at Kennedy King College referred Mark to NLEN’s U-Turn Permitted program. He completed the program, and says he benefitted in particular from the practice interviews. He explains, “I had always been nervous in interviews, because I didn’t know exactly what to say, especially regarding my criminal background.” With the help of U-Turn Permitted, he honed his interview and other skills, and was ready to try again. But first he enrolled in NLEN’s Urban Weatherization initiative. He left the program before completing it to pursue a job opportunity. Unfortunately, the employer had led him to believe this would be a full-time position, but it was part-time and temporary – hardly what Mark needed to meet his aspirations and support his family.



Mark with his daughter at a dance recital.

Feeling as though he had missed an opportunity at NLEN, he received a check-in call from NLEN and was invited to enroll in Moving Forward, a new program right in his area of expertise – automotive technology. He was delighted, “I thought I blew my chances by leaving Urban Weatherization. I have participated in other re-entry programs, but no one had ever called me to invite me back after it was over.”

Mark completed the Moving Forward pre-training and pre-testing, but he did not pass the electrical practical exam on his first try. “I found out later I had missed it by one wire. I was nervous.” But he started working for the CTA through its apprenticeship program as a Rail Car Servicer while he waited to be invited to test again. When the time came, he was ready. He recently passed the exam and is now just waiting to start the new job as Rail Car Repairer, a repair job that is closely related to automotive and incorporating the electrical repairs he enjoys most. He will start the union job as soon as the CTA begins a new cohort of trainees.

A father of two young children, Mark is also busy with dance recitals and basketball games. But he looks forward to settling into his new job and then working towards a master’s degree in Mechanical and Electrical Engineering to help him advance in his new career at the CTA.