

# Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council ANNUAL REPORT 2025



**In partnership with  
Arkansas Rehabilitation Services,  
Arkansas Workforce Connections,  
Department of Commerce.**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

A Message from the Chair	3
Greetings from Commissioner Baxter	4
SRC Membership and ARS Team	5
ARS Field Services Regional Map	6

## SRC RESPONSIBILITIES AND GOALS

Responsibilities of the Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council	7
Goals and Priorities	8

## CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

NDEAM	11
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## YEAR IN REVIEW

VR AFFILIATED PROGRAMS	12
------------------------	----

Access and Accommodations	15
Business Engagement	18
Field Services	20



# A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

On behalf of the entire Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), its members, and its stakeholders, in accordance with Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, please accept this as our FY 2025 Annual Report. Below are items of note that occurred during FY 2025.

First off, we continue to strive for full compliance with federal and state SRC membership requirements, including overall numbers and composition. We still currently have four members and appreciate any assistance with recruiting new members.

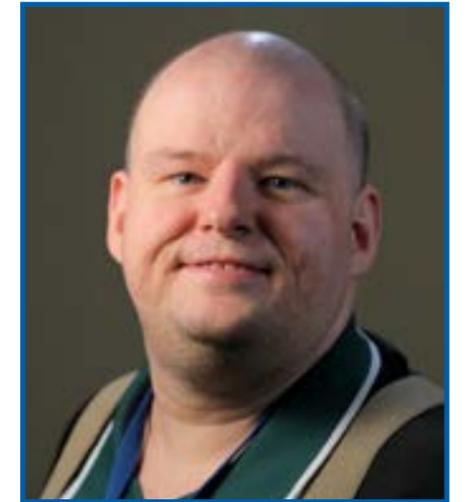
In October 2024, I traveled to Seattle, Washington, to meet SRC members from other states and learn more about how SRCs operate in relation to partner and stakeholder organizations at the NCSRC conference. I didn't have time to attend the CSAVR portion, though. I haven't been able to attend either of the 2025 NCSRC conferences, but I intend to attend one in 2026 if circumstances permit.

In early 2025, the SRC held several meetings regarding the proposed merger between Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) and the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB), as well as the accompanying merger of the SRC and the DSB's board. Ultimately, after several meetings, the decision was made to put the merger on hold.

The University of Arkansas, Fayetteville's Counselor Education Program was chosen to complete the ARS's Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) and has been and will continue to provide updates at SRC quarterly meetings.

On a personal note, I consider it an honor to serve a second year as Chair of the SRC during my first term. I am proud of the work we are doing together to help ARS prepare Arkansans with disabilities to work and lead productive and independent lives. I am confident that, working together with each other, ARS, and our other stakeholders, SRC will continue to make progress towards full inclusion, integration, and independence for Arkansans with disabilities.

Respectfully,  
Frank Hellmer  
Chair  
Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council



**Frank Hellmer,**  
Chair,  
Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council

# GREETINGS FROM THE COMMISSIONER

Greetings,

As 2025 ends, Chairman Frank Helmer and I are pleased to present the Annual Report of the State of Arkansas Rehabilitation Council. The collaboration between the State Rehabilitation Council and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services continues to serve as a cornerstone of our shared mission to empower Arkansans with disabilities to achieve meaningful employment and independence.

This year, we are proud to highlight some significant achievements:

### **Strengthening Federal Compliance**

The agency made significant strides in improving both programmatic and fiscal compliance with federal requirements. Over 68% of our Corrective Action Plans were successfully completed, reflecting the dedication of staff and leadership to accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement.

### **Enhancing Case Management Efficiency**

ARS continued to enhance its case management system with new tools designed to save time and improve accuracy. The integration of AWARE Sign and the Automated Wage Interface streamlined documentation and wage verification processes, reducing administrative workload, and allowing staff to focus more directly on meeting the needs of individuals we serve.

### **Promoting Disability Awareness**

ARS always promotes Disability Awareness in the workplace, and this year's highlights included activities recognizing National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), which showcased the achievements of individuals with disabilities and underscored the value of an inclusive workforce.

### **Building Collaboration Across the Agency**

In September, staff from across all divisions gathered for an agency-wide meeting to reflect, celebrate, and plan ahead. The meeting provided an opportunity to share organizational updates, highlight achievements, and discuss strategic goals for the coming year.

These highlights represent only a portion of the meaningful progress Arkansas Rehabilitation Services has achieved over the past year. As we look ahead to the coming year, we do so with optimism and a renewed sense of purpose—ready to build upon our successes and continue serving as a trusted resource and advocate for the people of Arkansas.

Sincerely,



Joseph Baxter, Commissioner  
Arkansas Rehabilitation Services



**Joseph Baxter,**  
Commissioner,  
Arkansas Rehabilitation Services

# SRC MEMBERSHIP AND ARS TEAM

## Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council

The Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council is a citizens' advisory council, appointed by the governor, to provide guidance to the state's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program. Its members help shape policy, engage in strategic planning, and provide guidance to promote increased employment for individuals with disabilities. Members report annually to the governor and the U.S. Department of Education on the status of the VR program. The SRC spearheads customer satisfaction surveys, participates in the preparation and review of the comprehensive needs assessment, and co-hosts public hearings and forums. The council includes individuals with disabilities, community rehabilitation program employees, vocational rehabilitation counselors, advocates, and representatives of the business community.



**Frank Hellmer,**  
Chair,  
Benton



**Courtney Leach,**  
Co-Chair,  
Conway

**Jennifer Carlin,**  
Sherwood

**Bradley Ledgerwood,**  
Cash

## Arkansas Rehabilitation Services

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is under Arkansas Workforce Connections, a division of the Arkansas Department of Commerce. The Department of Commerce is the umbrella organization for workforce and economic development drivers in the state of Arkansas.



**Joseph Baxter,**  
Commissioner



**Nathan Winter,**  
Deputy Commissioner

**Carl Daugherty,**  
Chief of Field Services

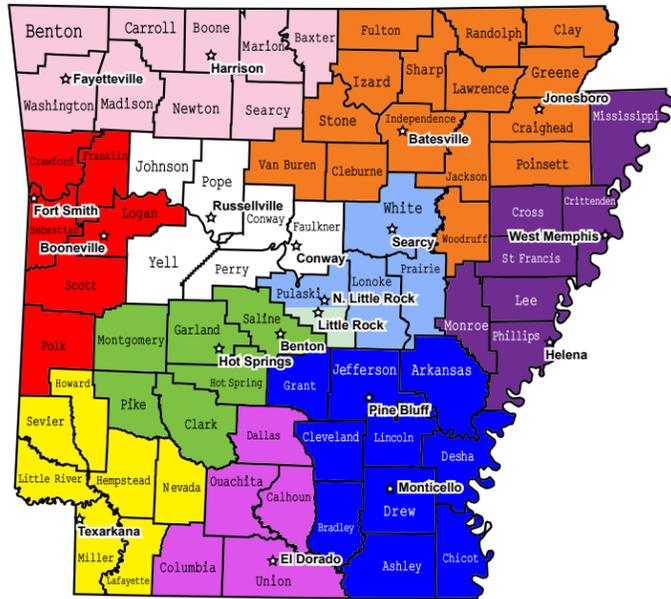
**Robert Treviño,**  
Associate Commissioner  
of Program Planning  
Development & Evaluation

**Amy Lamb,**  
Associate Commissioner of  
Access and Accommodations

**Gretchen Newton,**  
Director of Business  
Engagement

# ARS FIELD SERVICES REGIONAL MAP

# RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SRC



<p><b>Region 1</b> Fayetteville: 479-582-1286 Harrison: 870-741-7153</p> <p><b>Region 2</b> Jonesboro: 870-972-0025 Batesville: 870-793-4153</p> <p><b>Region 3</b> West Memphis: 870-735-4725 Helena: 870-338-2753</p> <p><b>Region 4</b> Fort Smith: 479-755-3300 Booneville: 479-675-3835</p> <p><b>Region 5</b> Russellville: 479-890-5751 Conway: 501-730-9725</p>	<p><b>Region 6</b> Hot Springs: 501-623-4479 Benton: 501-317-1390</p> <p><b>Region 7</b> North Little Rock: 501-833-1490 Searcy: 501-268-4542</p> <p><b>Region 8</b> Texarkana: 870-773-2807</p> <p><b>Region 9</b> Pine Bluff: 870-534-2404 Monticello: 870-367-9669</p> <p><b>Region 10</b> Little Rock: 501-686-2800</p> <p><b>Region 11</b> El Dorado: 870-862-5451</p>
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### Field Offices: Counties Served

- Batesville:** Independence, Cleburne, Van Buren, Stone, Izard, Jackson, Sharp, Woodruff, Fulton
- Benton:** Saline
- Booneville:** Logan, Franklin, Polk, Scott
- Conway:** Conway, Faulkner, Perry
- El Dorado:** Ouachita, Calhoun, Dallas, Union, Columbia
- Fayetteville:** Benton, Washington, Madison
- Fort Smith:** Crawford, Sebastian
- Harrison:** Baxter, Boone, Marion, Newton, Searcy, Carroll
- Helena:** Lee, Phillips, Monroe
- Hot Springs:** Clark, Hot Spring, Montgomery, Garland, Pike
- Jonesboro:** Clay, Craighead, Greene, Lawrence, Poinsett, Randolph
- Little Rock:** Pulaski [south]
- Monticello:** Ashley, Desha, Bradley, Lincoln, Chicot, Drew
- North Little Rock:** Pulaski [north], Lonoke, Prairie
- Pine Bluff:** Jefferson, Cleveland, Grant, Arkansas
- Russellville:** Johnson, Yell, Pope
- Searcy:** White
- Texarkana:** Howard, Lafayette, Nevada, Hempstead, Miller, Sevier, Little River
- West Memphis:** St. Francis, Crittenden, Cross, Mississippi

- Reviews, analyzes, and advises Arkansas Rehabilitation Services regarding the performance of its responsibilities under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act as it relates to program eligibility (including order of selection) and the extent, scope, and effectiveness of services provided;
- In partnership with Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, helps develop the Arkansas State Plan for the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program;
- Submits an annual report to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) commissioner and governor that highlights vocational rehabilitation services goals and achievements and make the report available to the public;
- Helps coordinate working relationships between Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, the State Independent Living Council (SILC) and centers for independent living;
- Coordinates activities with other councils to avoid duplication of effort and help increase the number of individuals served;
- Performs other functions consistent with Title I of the Rehabilitation Act as the Arkansas State Rehabilitation Council determines to be appropriate; and
- To the extent feasible, reviews and analyzes Arkansas Rehabilitation Services's vocational rehabilitation program effectiveness including an assessment of consumer satisfaction with rehabilitation services provided.

## Meeting Dates

### FY2025 Meeting Dates

- December 19, 2024
- February 20, 2025
- March 4, 2025
- March 20, 2025
- June 26, 2025

### Proposed FY2026 Meeting Dates

- December 18, 2025
- March 19, 2026
- June 18, 2026
- September 17, 2026

# GOALS AND PRIORITIES

As required by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA), Arkansas Rehabilitation Services submitted its portion of the Arkansas combined State Plan in FY2022. Within that State Plan are specific goals and priorities for ARS that were developed in partnership with the State Rehabilitation Council to address both WIOA requirements and ARS's ability to better serve its customers.

**Our goals and priorities are as follows:**

## **Goal 1: ARS will meet State and Federal accountability and performance requirements.**

- Priority 1: ARS will meet and monitor established performance accountability measures on a quarterly basis to determine progress in meeting federal/state requirements.
- Priority 2: ARS will provide career counseling to 14(c) program participants to meet Section 511 requirements.
- Priority 3: ARS will implement additional strategies focused on RSA identified areas of weakness to strengthen data verification requirements.
- Priority 4: ARS will ensure current ARS policy aligns with federal requirements.

## **Goal 2: ARS will reserve and use a portion of its funds for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.**

- Priority 1: ARS will develop and implement a comprehensive marketing plan.

## **Goal 3: ARS will provide pre-employment transition (Pre-ETS) and transition services to students with disabilities as outlined in WIOA.**

- Priority 1: ARS will continue to expand Pre-ETS services through initiating engagement of students prior to the age of 16.
- Priority 2: ARS will transition at least 15% of the students served to VR.
- Priority 3: ARS will expand Pre-ETS, utilizing data, to unserved/underserved populations across the state.
- Priority 4: ARS will increase the number of students engaged in work-based learning, pre-apprenticeships, and on-the-job trainings by 15%.

# GOALS AND PRIORITIES

- Priority 5: ARS will increase the number of transition students that enter employment by having students work-ready upon completion of high school and/or postsecondary training by a target goal of 50% of the total students served and exiting high school.

## **Goal 4: ARS will increase competitive integrated employment for Arkansans with disabilities.**

- Priority 1: ARS will increase the utilization of apprenticeships and on-the-job trainings by 10%.
- Priority 2: ARS will increase referrals by 10% through collaborative partnerships with WIOA partners.
- Priority 3: ARS's Business Engagement Unit will increase referrals from businesses by 10% annually.
- Priority 4: ARS will increase utilization of VR funds to 90% or higher of the authorized funding.
- Priority 5: ARS will increase services provided to employers by increasing referrals to the Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW) program by 10% with the goal of retaining employees with disabilities on the job.
- Priority 6: ARS will provide training to field service staff on the appropriateness and implementation of assistive technology and services throughout the rehabilitation process.
- Priority 7: ARS will increase services provided to unserved/underserved populations by 15%. Services include transportation, access to technology, and expanding business and services provider networks to bridge gaps.
- Priority 8: ARS counselors will maintain at least a 90% rate for IPE development.

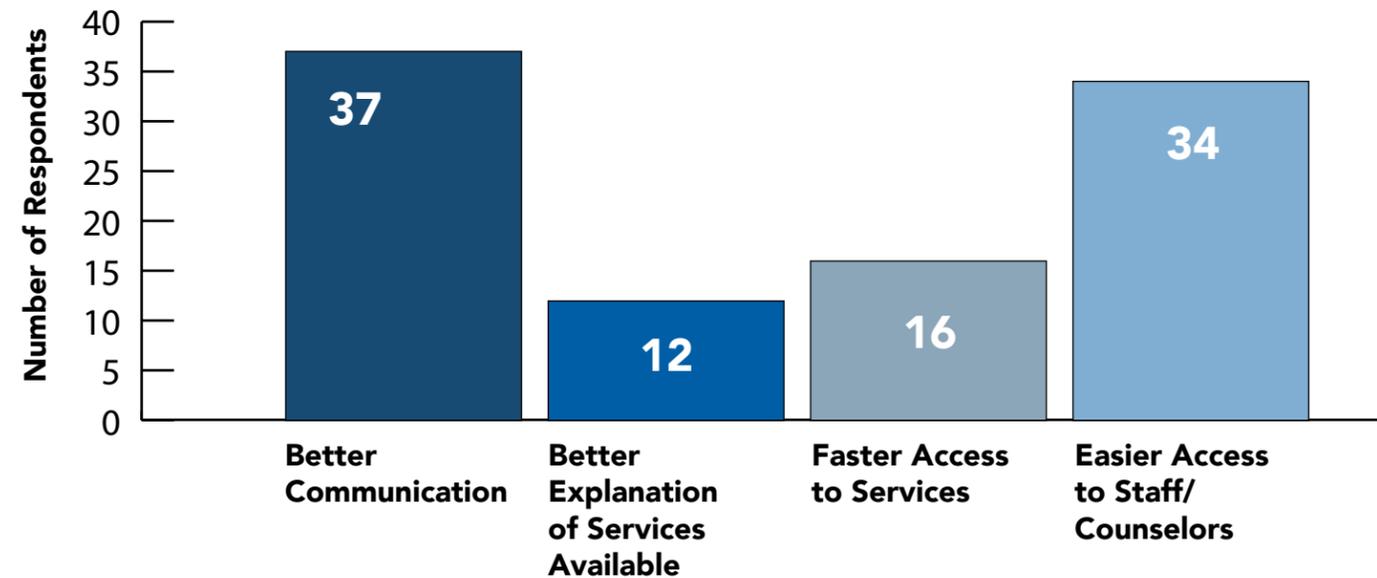
## **Goal 5: ARS will increase successful employment outcomes utilizing Community Rehabilitation Program & Supported Employment vendors.**

- Priority 1: ARS will reach the national average for supported employment closures by FY2027.
- Priority 2: Arkansas Career Development Center will increase its number of competitive integrated employment outcomes by 10%.

Client satisfaction was assessed using a combination of results from the client satisfaction survey, jointly developed by the State Rehabilitation Council and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services staff, and information from the recently completed comprehensive statewide needs assessment. A total of 22 client satisfaction surveys were received during this reporting period, with all clients indicating “Overall, I am satisfied with the services I received.” It should be noted that the surveys received were primarily from one field office and are not representative of the entire state. While the CSNA did not specifically address client satisfaction, the information provided below identifies what Arkansas Rehabilitation Services could do to improve the client experience.

## RESULTS FROM THE COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

### WHAT CHANGES TO ARS SERVICES MIGHT IMPROVE YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH ARS?



The U.S. Department of Labor announced that its Office of Disability Employment Policy chose “Celebrating Value and Talent” as the theme for the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, which was observed in October. NDEAM is an annual recognition of the positive impact of people with disabilities in the American workforce. Arkansas Rehabilitation Services celebrated with events hosted throughout the month across the state, starting with a kick-off event at the State Capitol.



ARS kicked off National Disability Employment Awareness Month with an event at the Arkansas State Capitol.



Region 5 hosted a celebratory event at which Senator Breanne Davis read a proclamation declaring October as Disability Employment Awareness Month.



Staff from the ARS Little Rock Field Office, the iCAN program, the Stay at Work/Return to Work program, and the Business Engagement team held its annual Disability Awareness Training for NDEAM.



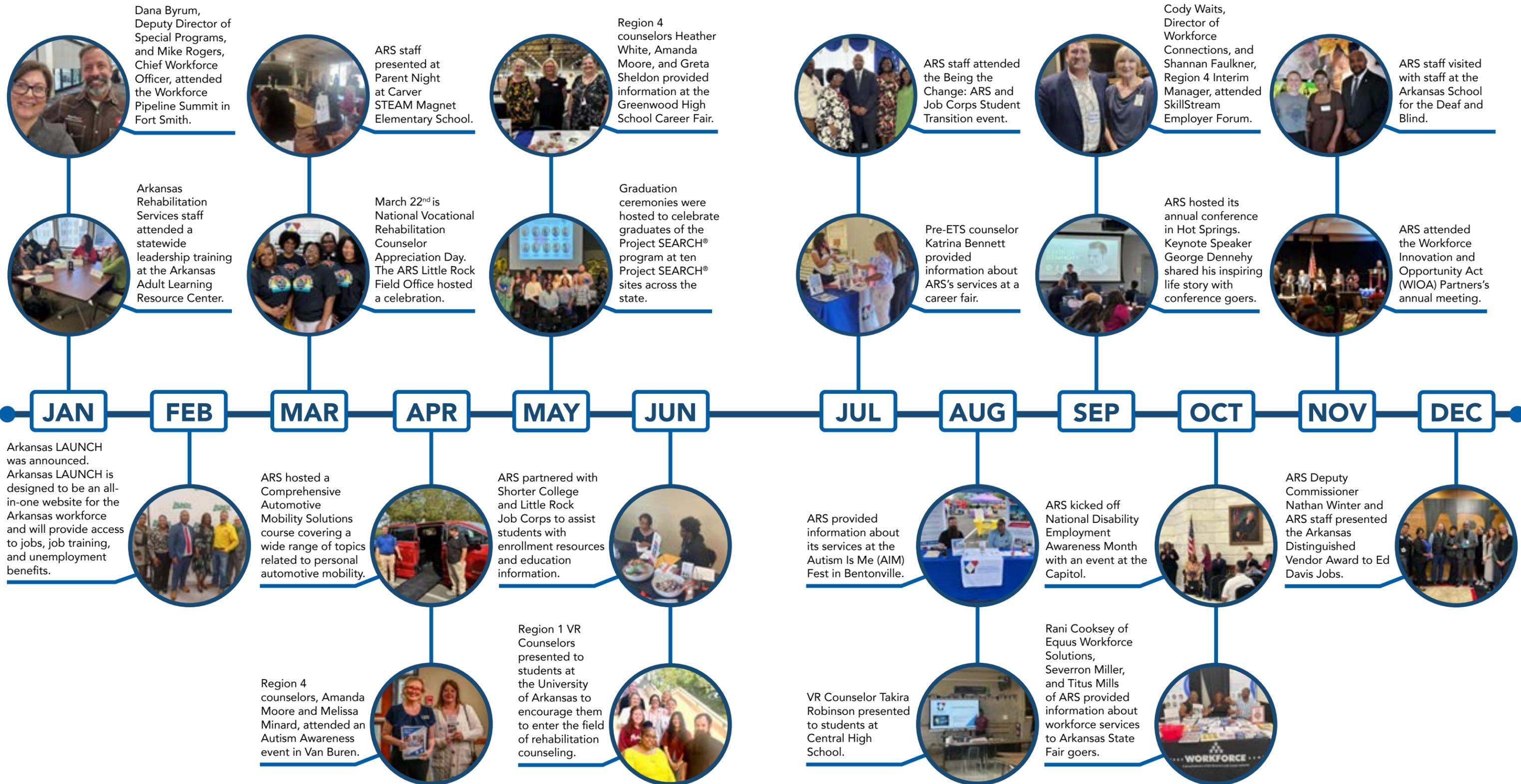
Region 2 hosted a job fair to celebrate National Disability Employment Awareness Month. During the job fair, Beth Tipton of the Batesville Field Office provided information about ARS resources to Midland High School Students.



Bob Bridgman, Mayor of Texarkana, TX (left), and Alan Brown, Mayor of Texarkana, AR (right), presented the proclamation declaring October Disability Employment Awareness Month for Texarkana to LaVennier Brown, Region 8 Area Manager (center).

# YEAR IN REVIEW

# YEAR IN REVIEW



# ACCESS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

Access and Accommodations programs provided assessments and assistance to 5,928 Arkansans with disabling conditions during FY25. Services provided included occupational therapy evaluations through **Assistive Technology at Work (AT@Work)**, record consultations, and general medical assessments through **Medical Services**, and screening, mental health, and comprehensive assessments through **Psych Services**.

Program/Service	Participants/ Employers Served	Assessments/ Evaluations	Additional Outcomes/Notes
AT@Work	466 participants	55 comprehensive assessments	792 participants received additional technical assistance
Medical Services	1,812 participants	1,807 consults; 5 general medical assessments	Counselors utilized medical information to support client services
Psych Services	1,017 participants	1,017 screening and mental health evaluations; 69 comprehensive assessments	Counselors utilized information to support client services through appropriate accommodations

The **Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work (SAW/RTW)** program served as a bridge between 28 businesses and employees who required accommodation to maintain employment.

“For every person who wants to work, you can. Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work reduced the risk for my employer, streamlined the accommodation process, and supported us both throughout the journey.”

**Kenya Buffington,  
Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work Client**

# ACCESS AND ACCOMMODATIONS



Kenya Buffington resumed work after an injury, successfully transitioned to a new job, and learned to drive a modified vehicle after her injury with assistance from the Stay-at-Work/Return-to-Work program.

“Because of the support I received—and because of people who believed accommodations are worth making—I continue to do what I love, contribute to my community, and continue working toward retirement.”

**Kenya Buffington,  
Stay-at-Work/  
Return-to-Work Client**

**AT@Work** hosted a **Comprehensive Automotive Mobility Solutions (CAMS)** course in April 2025 that covered a wide range of topics related to personal automotive mobility. The training enhanced allied health professionals’ understanding of and ability to advocate for individuals seeking automotive mobility solutions, providing valuable insight into the specialized process of evaluating, selecting, and purchasing appropriate vehicle modifications and equipment.



# ACCESS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

The **Increasing Capabilities Access Network (ICAN)** and **Telecommunications Access Program (TAP)** programs served as resources to help Arkansans with disabilities access available assistive technology. ICAN's reuse program generated significant savings for Arkansas taxpayers. The **Alternative Finance Program (AFP)** provided extended-term, low-interest loans to Arkansans who need to purchase assistive technology.

Program/Service	Participants/Beneficiaries	Financial Impact/Assistance	Highlights
ICAN	1,538 individuals (35 ARS/22 DSB)	\$965,076.77 saved	Provided assistive technology devices and reuse services.
TAP	239 participants (60 ARS)	286 pieces of equipment	Supported communication through adaptive telecommunications devices.
AFP	17 Arkansans	\$654,199.34 in low-interest loans	Enabled purchase of assistive technology for independence at home, work, and community.

The **Governor's Commission on People with Disabilities (GCPWD)** promoted public awareness about issues affecting individuals with disabilities through a billboard campaign in FY25. Fines collected from people who park illegally were used to fund 19 \$1,000 scholarships for students with disabilities.



# SUCCESS STORY

Melinda Laster was recently hired as the Director of Cardiopulmonary/Respiratory at Forrest City Medical Center. Her journey to this leadership role is a testament to her determination, resilience, and the power of support. When Melinda first came to Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, she faced significant barriers that made it difficult to pursue her career goals in healthcare. She had been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD) and anxiety, conditions that often made it challenging to stay organized, focused, and confident. These struggles affected both her academic performance and her self-esteem. Despite these challenges, Melinda's passion for helping others in the medical field never wavered.



Melinda Laster

She expressed a strong interest in both nursing and respiratory therapy, and with the guidance of ARS, she began charting a path toward a dual-focused career in healthcare. Through individualized vocational counseling, academic support, and financial assistance for tuition, books, and other expenses, ARS equipped Melinda with the tools and strategies she needed to manage her ADD and anxiety while pursuing her education. Her perseverance paid off. In December 2024, Melinda earned her associate's degree in nursing and respiratory therapy. Just a few months later, in April 2025, she passed the NCLEX-RN exam and accepted her leadership position as Director of Cardiopulmonary/Respiratory at Forrest City Medical Center. Today, Melinda oversees critical operations in cardiopulmonary and respiratory care, leading teams of healthcare professionals and ensuring the highest standards of patient care. Beyond her professional accomplishments, she has grown into a confident leader and strong self-advocate.

**“The journey was not without its challenges, but thanks to the unwavering encouragement and resources provided by Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, I was able to stay focused and determined. I owe special thanks to my caseworker, Kimberly Wilson, whose commitment, professionalism, and personal care made a lasting impact on my success. She went above and beyond to ensure I had the tools, training, and confidence needed every step of the way. Kimberly, your support helped turn my goals into reality, and for that, I am forever thankful. To Arkansas Rehabilitation Services: thank you for believing in me and investing in my future. I am proud of where I stand today—and I carry your support with me as I continue to serve my community in healthcare.”**

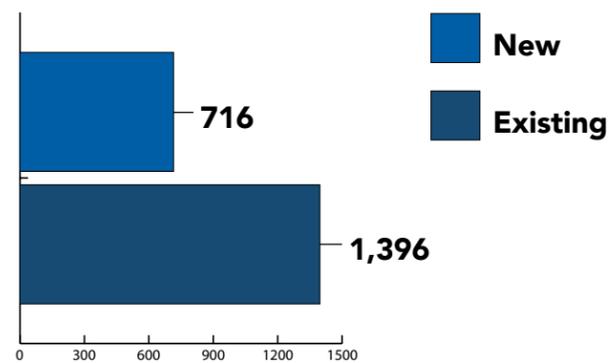
Melinda Laster, Former Client

# BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

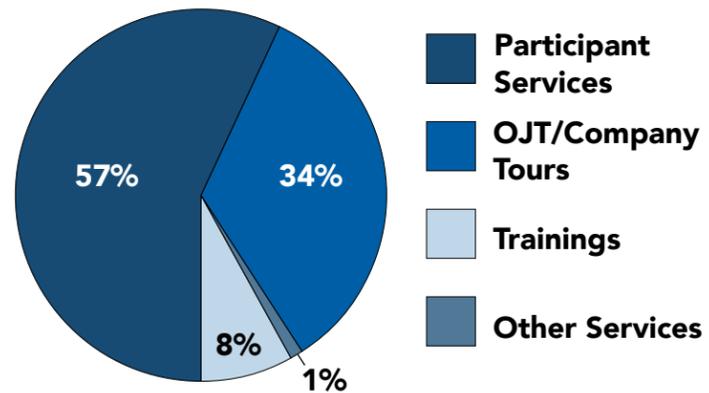
In the past year, the Business Engagement team has focused on expanding strategic employer partnerships, building employer capacity, supporting retention, and advancing our mission of connecting individuals with disabilities to meaningful employment while supporting employers in building all-encompassing workplaces. Business Engagement accomplished these priorities by considering the needs of businesses and participants to achieve the best outcomes for both customers. Through the expertise of the Business Engagement Representatives, 2,112 business leaders learned of ARS services, disability and accommodation best practices, and hiring incentives for people with disabilities.

The Business Engagement team’s primary expectation is to deepen engagement with high-growth industries and establish systematic pathways to employment for unserved and underserved populations. The goal is to develop five to seven strategic employer partnerships in priority sectors, including Manufacturing, Healthcare, AgTech & Forestry, and Logistics & Distribution. These partners will commit to hiring at least three to five VR participants annually, moving beyond transactional placements to consultative relationships where ARS Business Engagement serves as a trusted workforce development resource.

## Expansion of Employer Network: New and Returning Employers



## Business Services Provided in 2025



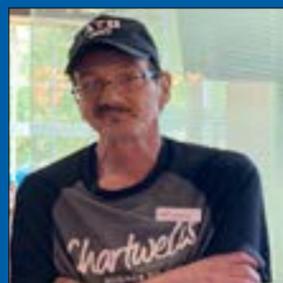
### Success Story



**Keith Bruce**

Keith Bruce began in November 2023 as an Associate Project Manager with support from the Business Engagement team and was recently promoted to Project Coordinator at Paramount Metal in Little Rock.

### Success Story

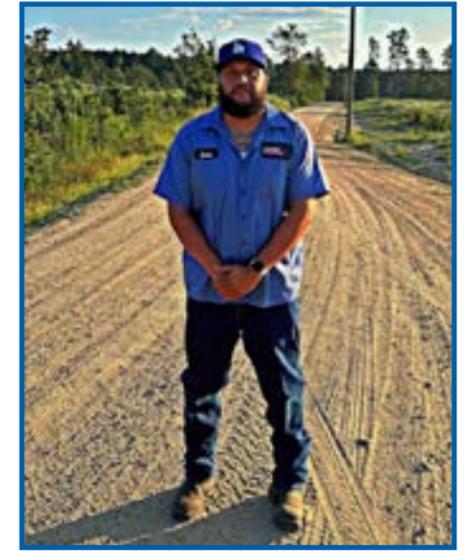


**James Hunt**

James Hunt, who is employed at Arkansas Tech University, stated that he was very appreciative of ARS’s commitment to helping him find competitive employment. He told Business Engagement Representative Bouvier Battles, “You are a true servant of this agency.”

# SUCCESS STORY

After many years of working in plants and warehouses—often exposed to chemicals — Dennis Norful began experiencing respiratory challenges that led him to reconsider his career path for health reasons. Seeking a fresh start, he reached out to Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, where he was paired with a counselor who introduced him to the program’s many resources and opportunities. With encouragement and guidance from his counselor, Mr. Norful chose to pursue a career in trucking and enrolled at Pine Bluff Truck Driving School to earn his Commercial Driver’s License (CDL).



**Dennis Norful**

The transition was not easy — adjusting to an entirely new environment and learning a new skill set presented challenges — but with determination and continued support from ARS, he persevered. Mr. Norful successfully earned his CDL, accomplishing a goal he had long considered but never pursued until it became essential for his health and future. Today, he has entered the trucking industry and is building a new, rewarding career. He also honors the memory of Larodrious Carter, a classmate from trucking school with whom he shared his goals and aspirations. Mr. Norful’s journey is a testament to resilience, determination, and the power of support in helping individuals create healthier, more fulfilling futures.

Shaq’Ke Robinson, a VR client since 2018, is a secondary teacher, head football coach for boys, and head basketball coach for girls at the Arkansas School for the Deaf. He began working at the school in January 2024 and is a role model to the students. Shaq’Ke Robinson lost his hearing at three and has been a beacon of perseverance. Overcoming the challenges of being the only deaf student at Henderson State University (HSU) for almost six years, he became the first deaf student to graduate from HSU. His academic achievements, including a bachelor’s in physical education and a master’s in sports management with an almost perfect GPA of 4.0, are a testament to his determination.



**Shaq’Ke Robinson**

Shaq’Ke’s journey inspires everyone, earning him the Campbell Trophy Semifinalist and a place on the Reddie football team for his outstanding sportsmanship, attitude, and inspiration. He had interpreters at each football practice and game, ensuring effective communication with coaches and players.

Shaq’Ke stated that ARS supported him with financial assistance, accommodations, etc. Also, HSU provided interpreters and resources to help him prepare as a person with a disability to work and lead a productive and independent life. Shaq’Ke would like to thank ARS for being a big help in leading him to success and becoming employed.

# FIELD SERVICES

ARS Field Services has adopted the motto: VR NOW!! This motto encompasses providing rapid service, improving our workforce participation rate, and promoting a positive culture amongst our staff and those we serve. All eleven Regions have set goals to align with VR NOW!! which positively impacts our federal performance measures. VR NOW!! has a direct impact on our increase in referrals, along with the increased use of our digitized short referral form using a QR code for instant access to request services. This process also includes an updated version, not only allowing a referral to be initiated but also enabling direct service application. Other states have taken notice, and we have provided training on the online referral and application process.

Field Services remains committed to expanding outreach, resources, and specialized support to ensure that youth with severe disabilities receive the comprehensive services they need for successful transitions and long-term independence. We are progressing toward a completely paperless process within our case management system, designed to increase efficacy and fiscal management, including the use of auto-budgeting and wage interface to streamline labor participation tracking and reporting.

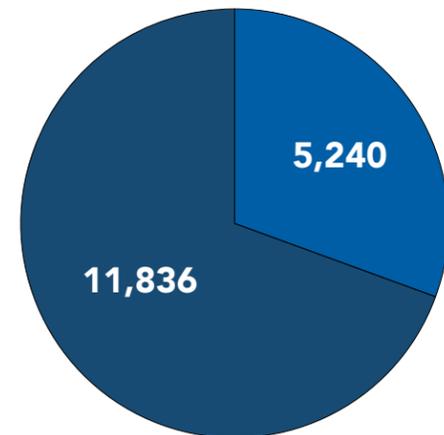
## AWARE Case Management System

The use of our case management system, AWARE, has been elevated by launching the AWARE sign. This allows participants to sign necessary documents from their computers, phones, and any electronic device with signing capability. This feature also enables field services to incorporate any forms requiring signatures, helping us transition to a paperless process and increase access for participants.

## Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind Partnership

The Arkansas School for the Deaf and the Arkansas School for the Blind merged into a single institution known as the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind, providing an opportunity to implement VR NOW!! Field Services moved from providing one specialized counselor to providing services locally. This is done by assigning a vocational counselor in each of the eleven field offices so that a participant has a counselor to work with when they return home, increasing the rate of follow-through to successful employment. These counselors are also involved in monthly training directly related to serving this population, which has led to improved outcomes.

## Total VR Clients Served 2025



■ Total Served ■ Referrals

“Through this experience, I learned that sometimes, the right people enter our lives just when we need them most, and I feel incredibly blessed to have discovered Ms. Rochelle and the resources that ARS offers.”

Oracio Martinez,  
ARS Client from Region 9

# FIELD SERVICES

## Jobs Corps Service Transition

The Department of Labor suspended services to Job Corps centers nationwide in June of 2025. As a result, ARS Field Services initiated immediate on-site visits to Job Corp sites in the state to help students complete applications and begin the process of determining eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services, supported employment or independent living program initiatives.

## Pre-Employment Transition (Pre-ETS) Services

ARS provides Pre-ETS services to students with disabilities ages 14 to 21. During PY2024, approximately 1,500 students received services through the Workplace Opportunities Leading to Future Employment (WOLF), Working for Independence Now (WIN), and Seamless Transition in Arkansas (STAR) programs. Students participating in work-based learning totaled over 73,000 hours, with ARS field counselors and Business Engagement staff continuing to work to develop additional on-the-job training and apprenticeship opportunities.

The Juvenile Justice Program (JJP) provided services in five facilities across the state. ARS is in the process of expanding and modifying services for youth in the juvenile justice system.

## Youth Leadership Forum (YLF)

YLF 2025 was a week-long program designed to empower students with disabilities through leadership training and community building. Participants stayed in college dorms, attended workshops, and connected with peer mentors. The schedule blended practical learning, such as self-advocacy, goal setting, work readiness, and independent living, with social activities, including mock interviews and a luncheon. The students also completed a community action project, which involved locating resources across the state. The environment was encouraging and inclusive, fostering strong friendships and personal growth. By the end of the week, participants left with greater confidence, skills, and a deeper sense of what the future could look like.



## Transition Employment Program (TEP)

The transition employment program is a one-week camp for high-school students who have completed the 11<sup>th</sup> grade to discover their skills, abilities, interests, strengths, and career goals. TEP is a comprehensive pre-employment transition service that provides career guidance and teaches employability skills. Students have the opportunity to complete inventory assessments, work-based learning, OSHA training, job exploration counseling, self-advocacy, workplace readiness training, and more.



# FIELD SERVICES

## Arkansas Career Development Center

The Arkansas Career Development Center offers a range of services to youth and adults with disabilities, including training in a variety of in-demand industries.

In FY25, Arkansas Career Development Center students achieved over

# 423

credentials and certifications.



Welding students with hearing impairments at the Arkansas Career Development Center receive accommodation from their instructor and interpreters.

## Project SEARCH®

At the 2025 Project SEARCH® Graduation at Mercy Hospital Fort Smith, 11 students completed the nine-month internship, during which they learned hands-on work skills, soft skills, strengthened interpersonal relationships, and developed advocacy skills. Arkansas Rehabilitation Services works with 10 Project SEARCH® sites across Arkansas that align community and business together to increase awareness and help students achieve their employment goals.

## Vocational Counselor Recruitment and Retention

It is essential for long-term outcomes for ARS to recruit and retain qualified vocational counselors. The recent pay plan significantly increased the salaries to a nationally competitive level, providing the opportunity to increase the talent pool for counselors and internship and practicum students alike, along with associated marketing materials.

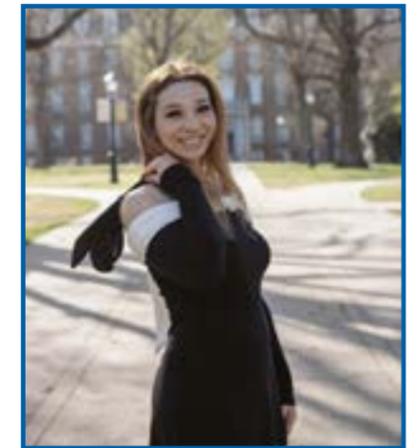
**I would like to recognize and appreciate the exceptional team of professional and caring people of ARS. Our partnership has allowed many clients a wonderful and rewarding career in healthcare.**

**Julie Valdez, Medlinc Inc.**

# SUCCESS STORY

Nadia Harris received services through ARS Transition Services. With their support, she graduated from the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith with a bachelor's degree in General Studies. ARS also assisted with the cost of her Praxis exam and study supplies.

After passing the Praxis exam, Nadia entered the ArPEP program. This two-year pathway enables bachelor's degree candidates to become licensed and employed as classroom teachers while completing the requirements for a Standard Arkansas Teaching License. ARS provided financial assistance for her participation. Nadia has accepted a teaching position at Greenland Middle School and started in August 2025 as a seventh and eighth-grade science teacher. To help her prepare for her first year, ARS also supported her in obtaining classroom supplies and setting up her room.



**Nadia Harris**

**When I first started working with ARS, I didn't have much of an idea of how my journey would look. Fast forwarding to now, I have my dream job and have become more confident in my future and what my purpose looks like. ARS and my counselor, Teshia, have been so supportive throughout my journey — financially, emotionally, and mentally — by providing resources whenever and wherever possible. Working with my counselor, Teshia, has been such a great experience, and I am so blessed to have had her support over the past few years.**

**Nadia Harris, Former Client**

As a client of Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS), Litzy Aldaco embarked on a transformative journey toward achieving her career goals. With ARS's support, she successfully completed her education at DeSigner Barber Academy and utilized necessary accommodations to pass her state board exams — earning her license as a professional barber.

Now employed and excited about this new chapter in her life, Litzy is grateful for the opportunity to build a stable future for herself and her son. She expresses her heartfelt appreciation to ARS for their invaluable assistance in helping her achieve this milestone and looks forward to thriving in her new career.



**Litzy Aldaco**

**Arkansas Rehabilitation Services is under  
Arkansas Workforce Connections, a division  
of the Arkansas Department of Commerce**



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