



Arkansas Division of
Workforce Services

Arkansas Rehabilitation Services

ARS Success Stories

March/April 2025

Keith Bruce

Keith Bruce graduated from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (May 2023) with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Construction Management. He is employed at Paramount Metal Systems, where he works as an Associate Project Manager. Keith Bruce was referred to Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) after graduating high school. He attended and graduated from Quest Academy Public Charter School in May 2019. Keith expressed interest in attending the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR), where he planned to major in construction management. Keith's experience at UALR offered him an opportunity to receive various academic awards. Additionally, Keith was offered a summer internship with a construction company in Texas, where he received first-hand experience in construction management. This experience provided the on-the-job training needed to secure his current position as an Associate Project Manager. ARS was able to assist Keith in obtaining his vocational goals through a variety of services that included: evaluation, counseling and guidance, job search, job placement, and follow-up. Additionally, ARS provided tuition assistance each semester from 2019 -2023 while Keith attended school at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. "ARS was critical in obtaining my Bachelor of Science Degree in Construction Management and securing my professional position as a project manager with a local construction firm, Paramount Metal Systems. Having the financial assistance, academic support, and professional guidance from ARS ensured my successful completion of a much-needed milestone...my college graduation. I graduated in four years and with a 3.0 GPA. I am and will be forever grateful to ARS!





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Warrenesha Arnold

Warrenesha Arnold is a bright, determined woman set to complete her MBA at the University of Arkansas – Fayetteville in Spring 2025. Her path has been anything but easy, marked by resilience, perseverance, and strong community support. Since her teens, Warrenesha has lived with dyslexia. The daily challenges of managing her mental health often made schoolwork, social situations, and deadlines feel overwhelming. At times, higher education seemed out of reach. But Warrenesha refused to give up. After earning her undergraduate degree with honors, she recognized her passion for nutrition and business. She initially pursued a master's in nutrition, aiming for stable employment, but later shifted to the MBA program at U of A Fayetteville—and was accepted. She knew it wouldn't be easy, but she was ready. During her graduate studies, Warrenesha leaned into her strengths. She mastered time management, prioritized her mental health, and developed coping strategies like mindfulness and journaling. She also learned to be compassionate with herself, recognizing that growth isn't always linear. Warrenesha used every resource available—counseling services, academic accommodations, and faculty support. When financial barriers arose, Arkansas Rehabilitation Services became a crucial part of her journey. One of her biggest wins was contributing to group projects and presentations, including a small business venture. Public speaking remained a challenge, but through practice and persistence, she built confidence. By her second year, Warrenesha was known for leading with empathy, collaboration, and determination—not perfection. She also embraced self-care, learning that rest, support, and mental well-being were just as essential as hard work. As she approaches graduation, Warrenesha reflects on academic success and personal transformation. Her journey is a testament to resilience, self-belief, and the power of embracing one's unique strengths. In Spring 2025, when she walks across the stage to receive her MBA, it won't just mark an academic milestone—it will celebrate triumph over adversity.





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Jacob Welcher

Jacob Welcher came to ARS in October 2022 as a Pre-ETS student. He actively participated in the WOLF program at Fayetteville High School and transitioned into the school's Transition program. Jacob applied for and was accepted into the 2024–2025 Project SEARCH program at Arkansas Children's Hospital Northwest (ACNW). During his time with Project SEARCH, Jacob completed two internships and was later offered a position in the ACNW cafeteria as a Food Service Worker. He officially became employed in February 2025. Jacob shared the following about his experience:

"My experience at Project SEARCH was helpful. I learned how to do many things, like professional conversations and resumes. In my first internship in maintenance, I learned how to pressure wash and make repairs. In my second internship in the kitchen, I learned how to stock foods and put them away. I also learned how to use the griddle, which I had never done before.

I feel like I grew social skills with my coworkers and while working with people out in the community. I got hired in the kitchen after my second internship, and it made me feel good because I knew I accomplished something. After my first paycheck, I was proud of myself!"





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Oracio Martinez

(Submitted by Mr. Martinez.)

Life often has a way of leading us down unexpected paths, and for a time, I found myself wandering aimlessly, lost in a wilderness of confusion and despair. It was a period characterized by uncertainty, poor choices, and an overwhelming sense of stagnation. I felt like I was spiraling out of control, trapped in a cycle that seemed impossible to break. But amidst this chaos, a glimmer of hope appeared in the form of an opportunity that would forever change my life: the chance to attend barber school.

At first, the idea of becoming a barber seemed surreal. I had never considered this path before; it was simply a flicker of possibility amidst a backdrop of turmoil. Yet, as I stepped into the world of barbering, I was welcomed by the warmth and guidance of Mr. Jason Fries, a mentor whose impact would prove invaluable. From our very first interaction, Mr. Fries saw potential in me that I had long been blind to. He understood the struggles I had faced and helped me recognize that my past did not define my future.

Under Mr. Fries' mentorship, I began to refine my barbering skills and expand my knowledge in ways I never thought possible. He taught me not only the technical aspects of the craft—how to wield scissors and clippers with precision—but also the importance of connecting with clients and understanding their needs. Mr. Fries instilled in me the values of discipline, hard work, and dedication, urging me to approach every haircut as an opportunity to positively impact someone's day.

As I continued my journey of transformation, I discovered the invaluable support of AR Rehabilitation, a program dedicated to helping individuals like me find their footing in new careers. It was there that I met Ms. Pam Rochelle, a compassionate and driven advocate who





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March/April 2025

Oracio Martinez continued:

recognized my potential and believed in my dreams. With her guidance, I navigated the scholarship application process and secured the financial support I needed to pursue my passion for barbering. Ms. Rochelle's unwavering encouragement and belief in my abilities were pivotal in my journey, helping me to overcome the barriers that once felt insurmountable. I am deeply grateful for her mentorship and the opportunities provided by AR Rehabilitation, which helped me gain the skills necessary for success and reaffirmed my belief in the power of community support. 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 AR Rehabilitation offers.

As I honed my skills, The self-doubt and negativity that had once consumed me began to dissipate, replaced by a newfound confidence and passion for my work. For the first time in a long time, I felt a sense of purpose. Each day at barber school was not just about learning a trade; it was about rediscovering myself and my worth. I was no longer lost—I was on a journey of self-discovery and growth.

Now, as I stand on the threshold of a career that I love, I am filled with excitement for the changes to come. I look forward to utilizing my skills not just to create stylish haircuts but also to foster connections within my community. I understand the profound impact that a simple haircut can have on a person's self-esteem and confidence. I aspire to be more than just a barber; I want to be a source of positivity and empowerment for those around me.

Reflecting on my journey, I am grateful for Mr. Fries's support and guidance. He believed in me when I struggled to believe in myself. His mentorship has not only refined my technical abilities but also shaped my character. I am now committed to giving back to my community, using my skills to uplift others and help them find their own paths to fulfillment.

In conclusion, my journey from feeling lost to finding my passion in barbering has been transformative. I am filled with gratitude for the assistance I received from Ms. Pam Rochelle at ARS and the opportunity to learn and grow under the guidance of an exceptional mentor. As I embark on this new chapter of my life, I am excited about the future and the positive changes I can make in my community, one haircut at a time. My story is a testament to the power of second chances and the incredible impact that an agency like ARS provided to me and mentorship can have on someone's life. I am ready to embrace this journey and all the possibilities it holds.

Oracio Martinez