

## **October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month**

### **ARS Client Returns To School And Gains Employment**

Soutchay Nothongkham had already attended the University of Arkansas Fort Smith and stopped just short of completing his Associate's degree before becoming a client at Arkansas Rehabilitation Services. After leaving college, Soutchay learned that one wrong decision can change your life trajectory and set you on a course you never intended. However, Soutchay did not let an adverse situation dictate his future.

A friend referred Soutchay to Arkansas Rehabilitation Services where he learned that he might receive assistance to pay his tuition and help return to college. Soutchay had never been diagnosed with any mood disorders, but admitted that he sometimes struggled with feelings of depression and anger. After completing a RIDAC assessment, Soutchay received his first diagnosis of Unspecified Depressive Disorder. Because of his diagnosis, he qualified for accommodations at college, but he still had to resolve issues with his financial aid. Soutchay appealed the school's decision to withhold his FAFSA funding due to the number of credit hours he had previously completed and won.

In January 2016, Soutchay resumed classes at U of A Fort Smith to earn a degree in welding. He graduated in December 2017 with his Associate's in Welding. This degree, paired with his previous automotive repair skills, quickly landed him a job at Zero Mountain, Inc. in Fort Smith. Soutchay started as a part-time worker and quickly moved up into a full-time position as a mechanic/welder. While working at Zero Mountain, Soutchay has used not only the skills he learned at college but other methods of welding which he describes as "not as pretty" but that gets the job done for the large tractor/trailer rigs he repairs.

Soutchay has been employed by Zero Mountain, Inc. since November 2017. He plans to obtain his CDL license soon; this will make him the only worker in the Zero Mountain garage who holds a CDL and will put him in the unique position of being able to perform tasks for the company that not even his supervisor is qualified to do!



*Soutchay Nothongkham proudly works at Zero Mountain Logistics thanks to help from ARS.*