

# Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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## **Oxford teen who's visually impaired completes unique program**

Larissa Delargy of Oxford, near Melbourne in Izard County, was among the 20 teens who completed Jump Start, a career development program for high school students who are blind or severely visually impaired. The program ran from June 7 – June 26.

The unique program, sponsored by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) and the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ASBVI), was attended by students from across the state.

DSB placed students in part-time jobs in the mornings and offered educational and recreational activities in the afternoons and evenings. This is the only program of its kind in Arkansas and is designed to assist students in transitioning from high school to employment or post-secondary education and increase their confidence in social situations. Applications for the Jump Start program are taken in the early spring of each year.

To the degree possible, students are placed in jobs in their fields of interest so they can gain insight into their chosen professions. Students who don't have specific career goals at this point in their lives are given other employment according to their experience, skills and abilities.

Delargy participated in the program last summer and worked at Children First Preschool. She applied to return to Jump Start this year, because she wanted to gain additional work experience. She is



interested in a career working with animals, so she was placed at Chenal Valley Animal Hospital in Little Rock.

“I loved my job,” Delargy said. “I got to sit in on five surgeries. I got to assist in vaccinating five kittens. I helped with deworming. These guys (Animal Hospital staff) were amazing teachers. They took time to explain everything.” She also helped in the recovery room, observed other procedures, and walked the dogs.

Veterinarian Kim Miller said, “It was a real pleasure having Larissa work here. She was really interested in learning what we do.”

In addition to its veterinary practice, Chenal Valley Animal Hospital works with various animal rescue groups. It works with one organization that assists with out-of-state adoptions of dogs and provides transportation for relocation. Other regions have better spay-and-neuter programs and therefore have a shortage of shelter dogs available for adoption. Delargy said her favorite dog Freckles, named for the freckle-like spots on one of its ears, was adopted through this program.

“You can bring an injured wild animal here and there’s no charge to you. They fix it and release it into the wild again,” the teen said. She’s proud of the work the veterinary clinic does.

In addition to job skills, Jump Start students learned independent living skills that many people without visual impairments take for granted, such as banking and money management. Students were taught meal planning and participated in a cooking lesson with Chef Brian Kelly of Little Rock.

Learning how to live independently also means learning how to get around. Students received orientation and mobility training on how to travel using a white cane and learned how to use city buses.

Students volunteered on a gardening project at Our House, an organization that provides shelter, training, and child care for people who are homeless or near homeless.

Working part-time and interacting with other students who are blind or visually impaired increased the students’ confidence, social skills and self-esteem. Some students who came from small communities had never met other teenagers who are blind or visually impaired. Social skills and interactions with others are a crucial part of life, so recreational activities were built into the program. Students went bowling, attended an Arkansas Travelers baseball game, saw a movie, went skating, toured a submarine, and painted their own works of art.

Students practiced skills learned in a class on business and dining etiquette when they experienced fine dining at Savoy 1620 restaurant, enjoyed a meal at Benihana Hibachi Grill, and saw a play at Murry’s Dinner Playhouse. At the end of the three-week program, there was a graduation event on the Mark Twain Riverboat.

Jump Start participants stayed on the ASBVI campus during the week and returned home on the weekends.

After Jump Start, Delargy will enter the 12<sup>th</sup> grade at IZard County Consolidated School this fall.

DSB provides vocational rehabilitation services to adults who are blind or severely visually impaired and whose goal is successful employment. The division also serves youth and older blind individuals. For information about DSB's programs and services, visit the DSB website at <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dsb/Pages/default.aspx> or call 1-800-960-9270, 501-682-5463, or TDD 501-682-0093.

Caption:

Larissa Delargy of Oxford, on the left, and Veterinarian Kim Miller bid goodbye to the dog Freckles, who was adopted out-of-state. Delargy worked at Chenal Valley Animal Hospital during the Jump Start career development program.