



# Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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## **Helena, West Helena teens who are visually impaired graduate from unique program**

Tyroneshia Branscomb of West Helena and Eddie Carter of Helena have succeeded in finishing Jump Start, a three-week career development program for high school students who are blind or visually impaired. They were among 21 students from across the state who were accepted into the program, which ran from June 9 – June 28 this summer.

Students learned skills to prepare them for life after high school. The DHS Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) placed students in part-time jobs in the mornings and had educational and recreational activities in the afternoons and evenings. This is the only program of its kind in Arkansas.

Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired has partnered with DSB to put on the program, sharing resources and opening up dorms. Participants stay on the ASBVI campus during the week and return home on the weekends.

To the degree possible, DSB placed students in jobs in their fields of interest, so they could gain insight into their chosen professions. Of course, some students didn't have specific career goals at this point in their lives and were given other employment. Students can return to Jump Start in successive years and be placed in more advanced jobs as their experience grows.

This was Branscomb's first time to participate in Jump Start and was her first job, aside from some babysitting. She was placed at the graphic arts department of the Arkansas Times newspaper. Branscomb will be a senior in the fall and later plans to be an artist. She decided to participate in Jump Start because "I had heard it was a good program, and I wanted the work experience. I learned how to manage money and how it

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feels to have a job – to get up every morning and go to it every day. I learned things that will help me in the future.” Branscomb designed logos and gained experience with various computer programs.

“This was my first experience with a Jump Start student,” said her supervisor Patrick Jones, Art Director for the Arkansas Times, Savvy Kids, and Arkansas Wild publications. “Because of the different ways this connected to me personally, I was thrilled to have the chance to place an intern from the program in our office. Having been a commercial artist and photographer for all of my adult life, it was exciting to imagine that a visually impaired teenager was of the opinion that even though life had handed her a significant challenge, that wasn't going to affect her pursuit of being a working artist. It's been a pleasure getting to know Nesha and seeing some of her drawings and sculptures, as well as having to opportunity to pass on knowledge from my career in the field of graphic design and photography.”

Eddie Carter was placed at the ASBVI Instructional Resource Center, which distributes Braille and large print books to public schools. “I want his parents and other people to know how well he did,” said Cindy Wilkinson, Director of ASBVI's resource center. “He was an enormous help. He worked hard with no grumbling.” Elaine Gerard, another supervisor, agreed, saying “he showed initiative and had a good attitude.” Carter will enter his senior year at ASB in the fall and later hopes to major in physical education.

Apart from working, Carter said his favorite Jump Start activities were touring the State Capitol and receiving hands-on training using accessible voting machines; visiting the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center, which focuses on Arkansas's African-American history and culture; and having a fine dining experience at Savoy 1620 restaurant after a class in business and dining etiquette.

In addition to job skills, Jump Start students learned independent living skills that many people without visual impairments take for granted, such as meal planning, cooking, clothing care, and money management.

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

Working part-time and interacting with other students who are blind or visually impaired is an important part of the program because it increases the student's confidence, social skills and self-esteem. Social skills and interactions with others are a crucial part of life, so recreational activities are built into the program.

Students saw a play at Murry's Dinner Playhouse, visited the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, and enjoyed a cookout at a park. Students toured Heifer International Headquarters, a non-profit which provides livestock to impoverished families and teaches them sustainable agricultural practices. They were also taught computer skills and resume writing. At the end of the program, they had a graduation event.

Applications for the Jump Start program are taken in the early spring of each year and are available from DSB counselors and through the DSB website at <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dsb/Pages/default.aspx>. People also can call 1-800-960-9270 or 501-682-5463 for information.