

## Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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### **Pine Bluff teen who's visually impaired graduates from unique program**



**Anthony Coleman of Pine Bluff operated a sewing machine making sleeves for military uniforms at Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind during his participation in the career development program Jump Start offered by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind.**

Anthony Coleman, 19, of Pine Bluff was among teens graduating from Jump Start, a career development program for high school students who are blind or severely visually impaired, which ran from June 8 – June 27.

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), is attended by students from across the state. Twenty-one students

were accepted into the program this year.

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 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.

Coleman was placed at Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind, which manufactures clothing and equipment for the military and office products for other groups. He ran the hemming machine for making military t-shirts. He said, "I liked it more than I thought I would. It taught me a lot of patience. It's tedious work. Sometimes the machines would break down. I had a great supervisor. She kept me laughing and talking, and I'm not an outgoing person." He said she brought him out of his shell; one of his favorite things about Jump Start was getting to know his co-workers at the Lighthouse.

This was Coleman's third year to participate in Jump Start. He said he came back "because there's always room to grow work experience wise." In his previous years at Jump Start he worked at the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired's Instructional Resource Center, which distributes Braille and large print books to public schools.

"I'm a hard worker, pretty open and laid back. I'll always put 100% into any job," Coleman said. "I'd like to say thank you to everyone involved in the Jump Start program."

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, banking, and money management.

Learning how to live independently also means learning how to get around. Students received orientation and mobility training that taught 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 helped increase 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 saw a play at Murry's Dinner Playhouse, experienced fine dining at Savoy 1620 restaurant after a class in business and dining etiquette; and enjoyed a cookout. Students volunteered at Arkansas Rice Depot, a statewide foodbank network and disaster relief organization; visited the farm and headquarters of Heifer International, a non-profit which provides livestock to impoverished families and teaches them sustainable agricultural practices; and toured the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center, which focuses on Arkansas's African-American history and culture. Students also toured the State Capitol and received hands-on training using accessible voting machines. At the end of the three-week program, they had a graduation event.

Participants stayed on the ASBVI campus during the week and returned home on the weekends. Coleman is the son of Rick and Kim Coleman of Pine Bluff.

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.

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