

## Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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### **Newark teen who's blind graduates from unique program**



**Andrew Summers of Newark plays a guitar for David Rosen. Summers worked at Rosen Music Company in Little Rock as part of the Jump Start career development program offered by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind.**

Andrew Summers, 17, of Newark, near Batesville, 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.

Summers had attended Jump Start last year and worked at Senior Citizen Activities Today Inc. (SCAT), where he entertained the seniors with his guitar playing each morning and did office work. This year he was placed at Rosen Music Company, which provides sales and service for musical instruments. He was able to meet a variety of amateur and professional musicians. "It (working at the store) was very amazing, like a dream."

"He learned inventory. He got a sense of what goes into a full service retail music store. Each instrument has its own set of support supplies. Andrew was good and really dependable," said owner David Rosen.

Rosen re-introduced Summers to playing the piano and taught him some songs. Summers surprised his mother, who had been trying to get him more interested in piano, when she walked in on him playing at home. (Participants stayed on the ASBVI campus during the week, but returned home on the weekends.) "Mom just about fell backwards," Summers laughed.

"Andrew likes to compose music and is now blending piano and guitar. Andrew has a lot of skills," said Rosen.

"The Jump Start program was the most beneficial thing he has ever been a part of aside from our church," his mother said. Summers is the son of Mark and Crystal Summers of Newark.

Summers also learned part of music history. Rosen's father Marty developed a fiberglass process used in the manufacture of percussion instruments under the name Romco Drums. Romco is a contraction of Rosen Music Co.

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. "I'm still stubborn and struggle with using the cane," Summers said, but he was helped by a guest speaker at Jump Start who talked about being picked on for using a cane and having to overcome bullying and being self-conscious.

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. Summers was in this

situation until he attended Jump Start last year. Social skills and interactions with others are a crucial part of life, so recreational activities were built into the program.

Students this year 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.

After high school, Summers plans to finish college and attend seminary school to become a minister. He hopes to incorporate his interest in music into his ministry.

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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