

## Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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



**From the left, Jalan Vaughn of Jonesboro checks computer software with State Rehabilitation Technologist Elizabeth Whitaker, who was his supervisor during the Jump Start career development program offered by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind.**

Jalan Vaughn, 17, of Jonesboro 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.

“Jalan Vaughn worked in the technology section at DSB. He was assigned a number of tasks, all of which he performed very well. His contributions made a difference, and he will be missed,” said his supervisor Elizabeth Whitaker, State Rehabilitation Technologist. Vaughn installed software and hardware; did troubleshooting for computer issues; and organized items in the technology lab.

Unlike most of the Jump Start students, Vaughn had previous job experience. During school last year, he worked for the Instructional Resource Center at ASBVI, which distributes Braille and large print books to public schools.

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. Vaughn said, “I learned how to go to the bank and make transactions and deposit money. I went to my first ATM yesterday. That was cool.”

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.

His favorite parts of Jump Start besides work were cooking and rock climbing. “Before I wasn't a terrific cook,” Vaughn said, smiling. Rock climbing helped him overcome a phobia. “I have a height fear. It was very scary.” Vaughn said he liked Jump Start because “there's never a dull moment. I've made some new friends.”

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.

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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