

Media Release

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Northeast Arkansas teens who are visually impaired attend program



Nathan Arant of Paragould was among the teens graduating from Jump Start, a career development program for high school students who are blind or severely visually impaired. The program, based in Little Rock, ran from June 5 – June 24.

Keith Ivory of Jonesboro also attended the program, but had to leave early due to another commitment.

Students are selected from applications taken in the early spring of each year and come from across the state to attend 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).

DSB places students in part-time jobs in the mornings and offers 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.

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.

Ivory was placed as a vending assistant at the DSB Vending Facility site at the Capitol Mall Building, and Arant was placed as a factory worker at Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind. This was their first Jump Start experience and, apart from mowing yards, their first jobs and first paychecks.

"It's exciting. Now it's official, instead of me doing it on my own (with yard work)," Ivory said about having a job. "I like to always keep working (be busy). I learned people skills – how to talk to people and be a friendly person."

"I need to keep Keith here. He's pretty good. He's fully capable and caught on quick," said Vending Manager James Edds. "He loads machines, stocks shelves, waits on customers, and takes money. Actually, several times I had him working for me at the vending stand in the State Capitol." State and federal laws allow licensed blind vendors to run snack bars and hot food arrangements in state and federal buildings.

Arant worked for the Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind, which manufactures clothing and equipment for the military and office products for other groups. He started with folding and packing shirts and then began labeling shirts, processing 3,000 daily, according to Inventory Manager Bobby Edwards. "He did good. He was on time and stayed on task. He catches on fast."

“It felt pretty good actually,” Arant said, explaining he preferred working indoors with air conditioning as opposed to mowing, and he liked learning “how the work environment is.”

Jump Start students heard job information presentations from Goodwill Industries, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind, Easter Seals, and Medlinc, a medical training and staffing company. They toured the West Rock Coffee factory and World Services for the Blind, which offers several career training programs. Representatives from the University of Arkansas at Morrilton presented information about choosing a college, financial resources, and balancing campus life and studies. The students visited Central Baptist College in Conway.

Students toured the Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI), formerly known as the Hot Springs Rehabilitation Center. While in Hot Springs, they explored Garvan Woodland Gardens and rode on the Belle of Hot Springs Riverboat.

Jump Start students learned independent living skills that many people without visual impairments take for granted. They learned money management, banking, stress management techniques, self-advocacy, and meal planning. They participated in a cooking lesson with Chef Brian Kelly of Little Rock. Students received orientation and mobility training on how to travel using a white cane.

The students volunteered at Our House, an organization that provides shelter, training, and child care for people who are homeless or near homeless, and Arkansas Rice Depot, a statewide hunger and disaster relief organization.

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, saw a movie, painted their own works of art, and saw a play at Murry’s Dinner Playhouse.

After a class on business and dining etiquette, students practiced the skills they learned at Sonny Williams' Steak Room and Benihana Hibachi Grill.

Jump Start participants stayed on the ASBVI campus during the week and returned home on the weekends. At the end of the three-week program, there was a talent show and a graduation event held at the Ron Robinson Theater, part of the Central Arkansas Library System.

When he completes high school, Ivory plans to get an organizational management degree from Central Baptist College in Conway. His favorite part of Jump Start was the college-related activities.

Arant graduated from Paragould High School in May. He was in the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) club. His hobbies are basketball, video games, hunting, and fishing.

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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Photo captions

Top: Pictured are Nathan Arant of Paragould, seated, and Inventory Manager Bobby Edwards. Arant was placed at Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind as part of the Jump Start career development program sponsored by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind for students who are blind or visually impaired. DSB places students in part-time jobs in the mornings and offers educational and recreational activities in the afternoons and evenings.

Bottom: Keith Ivory of Jonesboro listens to representatives from the University of Arkansas at Morrilton present information about choosing a college, financial resources, and balancing campus life and studies. Ivory was part of the Jump Start career development program sponsored by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind for students who are blind or visually impaired. DSB places students in part-time jobs in the mornings and offers educational and recreational activities in the afternoons and evenings. Ivory was placed as a vending assistant at the DSB Vending Facility site at the Capitol Mall Building.