



## Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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### **Nurse overcomes barriers, regains vision, wins award**

Registered Nurse Lacara McKay of Texarkana lost her eyesight and almost had to give up her dream career of nursing and helping others.

Suddenly one weekend McKay became totally blind. She was diagnosed with diabetic retinopathy. She decided to continue on faith and complete her advanced nursing degree. She said if her eyesight could not be restored, she would still be able to teach nursing.

As a result of her determination, success, and service to others, McKay has been named as the area's Consumer of the Year by the Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB). She is one of only 13 people in Arkansas who will receive an area award. She was chosen from the area including Miller, Pike, Little River, and Sevier, Howard, Nevada, Hempstead, and Lafayette counties. An overall state winner will be named at the end of the year. The recognition of McKay comes during October's Blindness Awareness Month, as well as National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

"I'm overwhelmed. I'm nearly speechless," said McKay about winning the award. "I should be nominating you all (at DSB). Without you, I would have been completely blind now. I had no insurance or enough money to pay for medical treatment to restore my vision. It's just like a miracle."

Her vision has fluctuated a great deal requiring numerous treatments. McKay said through DSB services she had laser surgeries and a vitrectomy, a procedure to remove blood from the middle part of the eye. She had kenalog injections to decrease inflammation in her eyes. She was diagnosed with a macular pucker (distortion) and had a retinal membrane retractomy to remove scar tissue. She said she knew enough through her nursing career and training to be very proactive in her medical treatment

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choices and sometimes would debate treatment options with her doctor. She also received orientation and mobility training from DSB to help her travel independently.

“This consumer said she would not be stopped. She obtained her PhD in nursing this year, and was determined not to let her visual problems prevent her from achieving her vocational goal. This was a great accomplishment,” said Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Dawna Fultz, who nominated McKay.

When she completed her doctorate in nursing, McKay was hired by L.L. C. Healthcare of Louisiana. The company sends nurses to temporary assignments around the United States. McKay recently worked in Florida and may decide to be placed there long-term. Her employer has been named an Employer of the Year by DSB and recognized as a business partner that hires people with disabilities.

This is the fourth year that DSB has given Consumer of the Year awards to recognize individuals who have managed their rehabilitation plans, gained marketable skills, secured good jobs, and become role models for others. At the end of the year, the DSB Board will select an overall state winner from the area winners who were nominated. The announcement will be made at the board meeting Dec. 9, and will be followed by a reception.

DSB provides vocational rehabilitation services to individuals 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, call 1-800-960-9270 or 501-682-5463 or visit the DSB website at <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dsb/Pages/default.aspx>.