



# Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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## **West Central Arkansas woman achieves goals, wins service award**

Kayla Todd of Paris has not let being blind since birth prevent her from achieving her educational and employment goals. Now she is employed as a benefits counselor and encourages other people with disabilities to achieve their goals.

She helps Arkansas residents with disabilities understand and use the work incentives provided by the Social Security Administration. "I help people with disabilities who are receiving benefits find out about balancing benefits with work." Todd shows people how they can earn more money by working than they can through Social Security disability payments. She says some monthly benefits and medical insurance can be maintained while people attempt to enter or return to the work force and become self-sufficient.

As a result of her determination, success, and service to others, Todd 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 an area that includes Sebastian, Montgomery, Scott, Polk, Logan, Johnson, Yell, Crawford, and Franklin counties. An overall state winner will be named at the end of the year.

"It's a real sense of accomplishment and frankly an honor to be chosen," said Todd. The award presentation will be made September 29, at 11 a.m., at Sources for Community Independent Living Services Inc. in Fayetteville, where she is employed at Project AWIN (Arkansas Work Incentives Network, a program Sources Inc. operates with funds from the Social Security Administration).

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Sources Inc. will be recognized as the area Employer of the Year by DSB. “What an honor. This is truly exciting news,” Executive Director Jim Mather said of the business partner award.

“Kayla is an extremely knowledgeable and articulate community work incentive counselor. She leads by example and encourages others to enter work roles and understands the importance of employment. Kayla is an excellent employee and a valuable member of the Sources team,” said Mather, who is her supervisor.

“Kayla Todd is a role model for all individuals in Arkansas who are blind and visually impaired. Kayla has demonstrated that an individual who is blind can obtain an education and enter the workforce. Kayla and I have a long history together, and I’m very proud to have her as the Consumer of the Year for the nine-county West Central Arkansas area,” said Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Tina Shores, who made the nomination.

Todd graduated Magna Cum Laude from the University of the Ozarks in Clarksville, attended the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, and earned a master’s degree in counseling with an emphasis in rehabilitation from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, graduating with a 4.0 GPA in 2010. She is a nationally Certified Rehabilitation Counselor, a Licensed Professional Counselor, and a certified Community Work Incentive Coordinator.

“DSB counselor Tina Shores provided outstanding service and support, and made a real difference in my life,” said Todd. She said DSB paid for her tuition and books and provided the technology she needed, including a computer, scanner, Braille notetaker, and specialized software to enable her to access information.

“So many people contributed to my success – my family, my DSB counselor, and Hettie Lou Martin, the state advisor for the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), who was a strong supporter and role model for me. I’m proud to say I was a public school student,” said Todd, who participated in the FBLA business education club in high school and later in the college version, Phi Beta Lambda.

Her mother was a local FBLA leader and her sister also participated in the club. “My mother and sister are really big supporters and role models for me. They gave me the belief that I could accomplish anything if I put my mind to it,” she said. Now Todd judges FBLA competitions at the district and state level and does workshops and motivational speaking “as a way of giving back.”

Todd is a member of the National Rehabilitation Association; the Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Association; the National Federation of the Blind; and the National Federation of the Blind of Arkansas. In her leisure time, she enjoys shopping and going to movies.

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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>.