

## Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**  
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### **Camden teacher who's legally blind earns achievement award**



**(from left) Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Tarrie Barnes of the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) presents an achievement award to Kimberly Finney of Camden. Finney, a teacher with the Camden Fairview School District, has been named the area's outstanding Consumer of the Year by DSB.**

Kimberly Finney of Camden has been named the area's outstanding Consumer of the Year by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind (DSB). She is a teacher with the Camden Fairview School District.

Finney is one of 13 people in Arkansas to receive an area award. She was chosen from the area that includes Ouachita, Union, Columbia, Ashley, Calhoun, Chicot and Bradley counties.

Finney, who's legally blind due to Albinism, is a teacher, a military wife, a mother, and a student working on her second master's degree.

Albinism affects the pigmentation of the skin, hair, and eyes and causes reduced sharpness in eyesight; rapid, involuntary eye movements (nystagmus); and increased sensitivity to light.

Finney's employer, the Camden Fairview School District, has been named as an area Employer of the Year as an outstanding business partner for its commitment to promoting the employment of persons with vision impairment.

The COY award presentation falls during October's Blindness Awareness Month, as well as National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

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The award presentation was made at the annual Distinguished Service Awards (DSA) banquet of the Camden Lions Club on October 27, at the Southern Arkansas University Tech Charles O. Ross Center in Camden. Terry Wallace, known as The Voice of Oaklawn, was the celebrity guest speaker.

“I see it as an ability, not a disability. I always find ways to compensate. So it’s no big deal to my students. I’m more aware of my students’ needs because of my disability, so it’s really helped me in my career,” Finney said.

Finney said she appreciated DSB services. DSB paid for her college expenses that were not covered by scholarships. She participated in DSB’s Jump Start, a career development program for high school students who are blind or visually impaired that prepares them to transition from high school to employment or post-secondary education. Students are placed in part-time jobs in the mornings and participate in recreational and educational activities in the afternoons and evenings. They also learn independent living skills.

“I worked at Rhea’s Drug in Little Rock and they requested me back the next year. That was huge to me. The big fear of kids is (finding and succeeding at) work. I can’t say enough about Jump Start,” Finney said. “It’s a wonderful thing to get the opportunity to learn – and being around people who are going through the same struggles.”

Finney says she looks for “little blessings along the way.” Her husband was deployed to Iraq one day after their wedding. Their son was born three days before his father was deployed to Afghanistan.

A tornado hit both her home and her parents’ home in April. The roof fell in on top of her while she slept. Her son was in another room unhurt. “I went into his room and he was still asleep,” she said. “A large tree fell in the middle my parents’ home and affected the whole house like a ripple effect, but they were not hurt. No one in town was hurt.”

This is the seventh 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. An overall state winner will be selected at the end of the year.

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.