

## Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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### **Crittenden County teens graduate from program for the blind and visually impaired**



**As a participant of the career development program Jump Start, Paige Clem of West Memphis did office work at Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind.**

Paige Clem of West Memphis and Destin Miller of Marion were 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.



**From the left, Jump Start participants Destin Miller of Marion and Markissha Tenner of Little Rock were placed in jobs at the non-profit St. Francis House. Miller served as Tenner's mentor.**

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.

Clem, who's visually impaired, and Miller, who's blind, said they participated in Jump Start for a third time, because they had wanted to gain additional work experience and other skills.

Miller was placed at St. Francis House, a social work non-profit in Little Rock. Miller, who recently turned 18, will be a senior at ASBVI this fall. When she graduates from high school, she plans to major in social work or rehabilitation counseling at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Phyllis Jones, Social Work Administrator who supervised Miller, said, "Destin was great. She has a good work ethic. St Francis House serves 80 to 120 people per day." Miller learned how the organization screened applicants and provided a wide range of services. Miller mentored a new, younger Jump Start student there, and they worked receiving, sorting and hanging the large volume of clothes donations that steadily came into St. Francis House.

Clem, 18, was placed at Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind and did office work, including filing, data entry, and pulling accounts payable. She said "taking Accounting I and II in high school was helpful" for her job at the Lighthouse. She graduated from ASBVI in May as valedictorian and plans to attend the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville in the fall and major in criminal justice.

"She's done a lot of good work for us. She has filled the gap during vacancies," said her supervisor John McAtee, Chief Financial Officer, explaining Clem had also done a vocational internship at the Lighthouse through ASBVI during her last school year.

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.

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.

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.

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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