

Media Release

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Oxford teen who's legally blind graduates from unique program



From front to back, surrounded by children are Larissa Delargy of Oxford, her supervisor Linnie Haynes, and preschool co-owner Vicki Durham. Not pictured is co-owner Ann Erne. Delargy worked at Children First preschool in Little Rock as part of the Jump Start career development program offered by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind.

Larissa Delargy, 16, of Oxford, near Melbourne in Izard County, was 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.

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.

Delargy was placed at Children First preschool in Little Rock. “It was my first job and I loved it. It was fun. I was almost always outside.” She supervised preschool children in the classroom and on the playground.

“Larissa was a great helper. She interacted well with the kids. She followed directions well. She was very pleasant – every day,” said her supervisor Linnie Haynes. Vicki Durham, owner of Children First pre-school, agreed saying Delargy was consistently in a good mood.

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. Students received orientation and mobility training that taught them how to travel using a white cane. They learned how to use city buses.

“I loved Jump Start. It was always fun. There was something to do every day. It gave me a job,” Delargy said, but most of all “it gave me the opportunity to be around people like me.” In her Jump Start application she had written, “It would be great to talk with people who have been through similar situations that I have.” Her mother Bobbie Jo Smith had written, “I think it would bring great joy to her to finally find out that she is not alone in visual impairment.”

Working part-time and interacting with other students who are blind or visually impaired helped increase the students’ confidence, social skills and self-esteem. 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.

Participants stayed on the ASBVI campus during the week and returned home on the weekends.

This fall Delargy will enter the 11th grade at IZARD County Consolidated School. She is a member of the Future Farmers of America. She enjoys caring for and training her horse and her dog.

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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