

Media Release

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For Immediate Release

July 1, 2014

El Dorado teen who's visually impaired graduates from unique program



From the left, Jarrod Hall of El Dorado and Javon Cooper of Little Rock worked at the Billy Mitchell Boys and Girls Club in Little Rock during the Jump Start career development program offered by the Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind.

Jarrold Hall, 16, of El Dorado 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.

Hall had never worked before, but had thought about a summer job working with children, perhaps at a hospital, or cooking somewhere. He was placed at the Billy Mitchell Boys and Girls Club, where he supervised children and assisted them with recreational activities. He was proud that he had been able to teach a young girl how to shoot a basketball.

Hall said his work experience at the Billy Mitchell Boys and Girls Club will help him get a job in the future. In fact, next month Hall will start work at the Boys and Girls Club in El Dorado. He said the experience working with children has already helped him when he's taken care of his four-year-old nephew. "Jump Start was a good experience for me. My favorite parts were being paid and the activities."

"It's been wonderful. He's a good worker. Jump Start is a really good program," said his supervisor Steven Riffle, Unit Director of the Billy Mitchell Boys and Girls Club.

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.

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

Hall is the son of David and Angela Hall of El Dorado. He will enter the 11th grade at El Dorado High School in the fall. He plans to attend college after high school and hopes to own his own business, such as a bakery or flower shop, someday. He would also like to travel to another country. His hobbies are cooking and basketball.

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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