

Media Release

Contact:

**Kandy Cayce, DHS Division of Services for the Blind
(501) 682-0332**

For Immediate Release

June 24, 2016

Teens who are blind or visually impaired complete unique program



Pictured are students from Pulaski County who participated in the Jump Start career development sponsored by DHS Division of Services for the Blind and the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. From the left on the first row are Darrel Springs, Makaya Walderns, Xaivier Davis, Markesha Tenner, and Javon Cooper. On the back row from the left are Mianthony Jones and Redrick Berry. Not pictured is Jonathan Ramos.

Teenagers from across Arkansas graduated from Jump Start, a career development program for high school students who are blind or severely visually impaired, this week. The program ran from June 5 – June 24.

Students are selected from applications taken in the early spring of each year to attend 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).

DSB places students in part-time jobs in the mornings and offers 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.

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.

Little Rock students included Darrel Springs, extra help, Arkansas Department of Health; Javon Cooper, factory worker, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind; Jonathan Ramos, extra help, Arkansas Department of Health; and Markesha Tenner, disk jockey, Power 92 radio station. Other Pulaski County students were Xaivier Davis of North Little Rock, day care aide, Children First Pre-school; Mianthony Jones of Jacksonville, vending assistant, DSB Vending Facility site at the DHS Central Office; Rederick Berry of Mabelvale, extra help, Arkansas Department of Health; and Makaya Walderns of Woodson, clerical worker, Eye Care Arkansas.

Students from other parts of the state were Zane Smith of Bentonville, assistant, the Law Offices of Peter Miller; Taliayha Davis of Rison, trainee, Velvatex Beauty School; Sierra English of Alma, day care aide, Children First Pre-school; Shurshawna Lewis of Fordyce, social media trainee, Mass Communications; Shateria Thompson of Fort Smith, activities assistant, Highlands of Little Rock at Midtown, a therapy and living center; Kylon Montgomery of Pine Bluff; library ambassador, William J. Clinton Presidential Center and Park; Selendria Rauls of Pine Bluff, day care aide, Children First Pre-school; Nathan Arant of Paragould, factory worker, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind; and Kara Hubbard of Carlisle, computer assistant, the technology lab at DSB. Keith Ivory of Jonesboro, vending assistant, DSB Vending Facility site at the Capitol Mall Building, also attended the program, but had to leave early due to another commitment.

Students heard job information presentations from Goodwill Industries, Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind, Easter Seals, and Medlinc, a medical training and staffing company. They toured the West Rock Coffee factory and World Services for the Blind, which offers several career training programs. Representatives from the University of Arkansas at Morrilton presented information about choosing a college, financial resources, and balancing campus life and studies. The students visited Central Baptist College in Conway.

Students toured the Arkansas Career Training Institute (ACTI), formerly known as the Hot Springs Rehabilitation Center. While in Hot Springs, they explored Garvan Woodland Gardens and rode on the Belle of Hot Springs Riverboat.

Jump Start students learned independent living skills that many people without visual impairments take for granted. They learned money management, banking, stress management techniques, self-advocacy, and meal planning. They participated in a cooking lesson with Chef Brian Kelly of Little Rock. Students received orientation and mobility training on how to travel using a white cane.

The students volunteered at Our House, an organization that provides shelter, training, and child care for people who are homeless or near homeless, and Arkansas Rice Depot, a statewide hunger and disaster relief organization.

Working part-time and interacting with other students who are blind or visually impaired increased 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 went bowling, saw a movie, painted their own works of art, and saw a play at Murry's Dinner Playhouse.

After a class on business and dining etiquette, students practiced the skills they learned at Sonny Williams' Steak Room and Benihana Hibachi Grill.

Jump Start participants stayed on the ASBVI campus during the week and returned home on the weekends. At the end of the three-week program, there was a talent show and a graduation event held at the Ron Robinson Theater, part of the Central Arkansas Library System.

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.

Please see a link to a video story on Jump Start at:

<https://youtu.be/UjYFgcZrWJA>