

Media Release

Contact:

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

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Pine Bluff teen who's visually impaired completes unique program

Kylon Montgomery of Pine Bluff was among the 20 teens who completed Jump Start, a career development program for high school students who are blind or severely visually impaired. The program ran from June 7 – June 26.



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), was attended by students from across the state.

DSB placed students in part-time jobs in the mornings and offered educational and recreational activities in the afternoons and evenings. Jump Start participants stayed on the ASBVI campus during the week and returned home on the weekends.

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.

Montgomery was placed at the ASBVI's Instructional Resource Center (IRC), which distributes Braille and large print books to public schools. "I liked my job. I learned how important details are. I learned to be more patient, so everything is done correctly. I tended to get in a hurry."

"Kylon worked very hard and was very respectful. He did everything we asked and never had an attitude as you can sometimes have with teenage boys," said Cindy J. Wilkinson, Instructional Resource Center Director.

In addition to mailing books to schools and shelving books, Kylon and another worker were responsible for receiving and moving shipments. "We always appreciate having muscle at this time of the year. The IRC receives about 1,000 boxes of Braille and large print books, and each box weighs anywhere from 20 to 50 pounds. Many of the boxes have to go upstairs and there is no elevator," said Wilkinson. "I see Jump Start as a very valuable learning tool for students who will someday be in the 'real workforce'. If he needs a reference for future jobs or scholarships, we will write a glowing reference as he put forth such a great effort!"

In addition to job skills, Jump Start students learned independent living skills that many people without visual impairments take for granted, such as banking and money management. Students were taught meal planning and participated in a cooking lesson with Chef Brian Kelly of Little Rock.

Learning how to live independently also means learning how to get around. Students received orientation and mobility training on how to travel using a white cane and learned how to use city buses.

Explaining why he applied for Jump Start, Montgomery said, "I wanted to meet new people and increase my leadership skills. It helped me gain more confidence and talk more. I'm not a talker."

Students volunteered on a gardening project at Our House, an organization that provides shelter, training, and child care for people who are homeless or near homeless.

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, attended an Arkansas Travelers baseball game, saw a movie, went skating, toured a submarine, and painted their own works of art.

Students practiced skills learned in a class on business and dining etiquette when they experienced fine dining at Savoy 1620 restaurant, enjoyed a meal at Benihana Hibachi Grill, and saw a play at Murry's Dinner Playhouse. At the end of the three-week program, there was a graduation event on the Mark Twain Riverboat.

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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Photo caption:

Pictured from the left are Kylon Montgomery of Pine Bluff and Antonio Ayers of Little Rock. They worked at the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired's Instructional Resource Center as part of the Jump Start career development program.