

Media Release

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Jonesboro teen who's visually impaired participates in unique program



From the left, State Rehabilitation Technologist Elizabeth Whitaker, intern Billy Edings, of Joiner, and Jump Start student Jalan Vaughn, of Jonesboro, work on training materials for consumers served by Department of Human Services Division of Services for the Blind. Jump Start is a career development program for high school students who are blind or severely visually impaired.

Jalan Vaughn, 18, of Jonesboro is among 20 teens accepted into Jump Start, a career development program for high school students who are blind or severely visually impaired. The program will run 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), is attended by students from across the state.

Vaughn participated in the program last year and applied to return this year. “It was fun and I wanted to meet different people. I have a social anxiety. Last year being in Jump Start

helped that, but I still need (to be more comfortable in social situations).”

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

By mutual request, Vaughn again will be working in the technology section at DSB, said his supervisor Elizabeth Whitaker, State Rehabilitation Technologist. Vaughn will be installing software and hardware; troubleshooting computer issues; and assisting consumers who come to the technology lab to gain computer skills and increase their employability.

In addition to job skills, Jump Start students will learn independent living skills that many people without visual impairments take for granted, such as banking and money management. Students will participate in a hands-on cooking lesson with Chef Brian Kelly of Little Rock.

"I use most of what I learned last year. With cooking, I incorporated what I learned into making breakfast and dinner. A year from now I'll go to college and it'll be a good help with that," Vaughn said. He wants to study computer animation in college.

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

Students will volunteer 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 will increase the students' confidence, social skills and self-esteem. Some students who came from small communities have 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 are built into the program. Students will go bowling, attend an Arkansas Travelers baseball game, see a movie, go skating, tour a submarine, and paint their own works of art.

Vaughn is eager to try the lessons on ballroom dancing, but says it's really out of his comfort zone. "I'm not really a dancing person."

Students will get opportunities to practice skills learned in a class on business and dining etiquette when they experience fine dining at Savoy 1620 restaurant, enjoy a meal at Benihana Hibachi Grill, and see a play at Murry's Dinner Playhouse. At the end of the three-week program, they will have a graduation event on the Mark Twain Riverboat.

Participants will stay on the ASBVI campus during the week and return home on the weekends.

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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