



Media Release

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West Memphis, Marion teens who are blind and visually impaired benefit from unique program

Paige Clem of West Memphis and Destine Miller and Kyler Reschke, both of Marion, were among 21 students from across the state who were accepted and participated in Jump Start, a three-week career development program for high school students who are blind or severely visually impaired that ran from June 9 – June 28 this summer.

Students learned skills to prepare them for life after high school. The DHS Division of Services for the Blind (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.

Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired has partnered with DSB to put on the program, sharing resources and opening up dorms. Participants stay on the ASBVI campus during the week and return home on the weekends.

To the degree possible, DSB placed students in jobs in their fields of interest, so they could gain insight into their chosen professions. Of course, some students didn't have specific career goals at this point in their lives and were given other employment. Students can return to Jump Start in successive years and be placed in more advanced jobs as their experience grows.

This was the second year Clem, who's visually impaired, and Miller, who's blind, participated in Jump Start. It was the first time Reschke, who is blind, had come to Jump Start. Due to a death in the family, he had to conclude his participation after the second week of the program, but was able to participate in many of the

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activities and worked in the Business and Technology Unit of the DHS Division of Services for the Blind (DSB).

Miller will be a junior at ASBVI this fall and later plans to attend UALR and major in social work. She said she wants to work with “children who’ve had a hard background”. During Jump Start she was placed at St. Francis House, a social work non-profit in Little Rock. Phyllis Jones, Social Work Administrator who supervised Miller, said she gave Miller enough work making folders that she thought would last the entire three weeks of Jump Start, but Miller completed the task in only three days. After that they agreed Miller would work sorting and hanging the large volume of clothes donations that steadily come into St. Francis House. Last year Destine worked at Onsite Therapies Clinic.

“Destine is so sharp you only have to tell her something once. I was very impressed with her. She’s willing to do anything you need her to do,” Jones said. “Jump Start is a good program that teaches them the things they need to know when they get out on their own. The students are willing to work and can do anything. Don’t limit them.”

Clem was placed at Rhea’s Drug, where she bagged prescriptions, answered the phones, checked out customers, stocked medicine orders, and shelved merchandise. Last year she worked in an eye doctor’s office. “I’ve gotten a lot of work experience that I wouldn’t have had otherwise. It gave me something to put on a job application, and all students need that.” Clem will be a senior at ASBVI this fall and later plans to attend UALR, then move to New York for a master’s degree. She hopes to work for the FBI.

“Paige is great. She’s very bright,” said her supervisor Joe Searcy, pharmacist. “I’ve enjoyed all of the students I’ve had working here through Jump Start. They’re very capable.”

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, and money management. They were also taught computer skills and resume writing. Apart from working, Clem and Miller both said their favorite Jump Start activity was seeing a play at Murry’s Dinner Playhouse. Miller also enjoyed the cooking sessions and sharing her dessert recipes.

Learning how to live independently also means learning how to get around. Students received orientation and mobility training that teaches 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 is an important part of the program because it increases the student’s confidence, social skills and self-esteem. Social skills and interactions with others are a crucial part of life, so recreational activities are built into the program.

Students visited the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and enjoyed a cookout at a park. Students toured Heifer International Headquarters, a non-profit which provides livestock to impoverished families and teaches them sustainable agricultural practices, and the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center, which focuses on Arkansas's African-American history and culture. Students visited the State Capitol and received hands-on training using accessible voting machines. At the end of Jump Start, they had a graduation event.

Applications for the Jump Start program are taken in the early spring of each year and are available from DSB counselors and through the DSB website at <http://humanservices.arkansas.gov/dsb/Pages/default.aspx>. People also can call 1-800-960-9270 or 501-682-5463 for information.