



Media Release

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Bella Vista teen who's visually impaired graduates from unique program

Chevy Moore of Bella Vista, has succeeded in finishing Jump Start, a three-week career development program for high school students who are blind or severely visually impaired. He was among 21 students from across the state who were accepted into the program, which 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 in Little Rock 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. Moore said he hopes to participate in Jump Start again next year. Although this was his first time in Jump Start and his first job, he was placed in the office of the Governor's photographer, Kirk Jordan.

Moore, who will be in the 11th grade at ASBVI in the fall, said he had worked on the school yearbook and had access to good camera equipment there, but "learned a lot about cameras and settings" under Jordan's instruction. He said he hopes to use his Jump Start job money to buy a good camera, since he doesn't have one

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now. He would like a career in photography. His favorite part of Jump Start was the people he's met, especially getting to meet Governor Mike Beebe through his job.

"He's a friendly, engaging young man," Jordan said of Moore. "It's been good for him to see how things are done in a professional environment."

"With visually impaired people, it's very important for the people to learn to use focus controls" rather than straight auto focus, to have more control and be more precise with the foreground of a photo, Jordan said, talking about things he had taught Moore.

Jordan said Moore was a superfast worker and made good decisions as a photo editor. He was assigned to clean out the photo files. "He actually took photos at the Governor's School for the Governor's website. He's exceedingly friendly and comfortable with people. He even came out before I did and took candid photos."

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. Students were taught computer skills and business and dining etiquette. Students also toured the State Capitol and received hands-on training using accessible voting machines.

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 saw a play at Murry's Dinner Playhouse, 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. At the end of the program, 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.