



# Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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## **Lexa teen who's blind graduates from unique program**

Jacob Smith of Lexa, near Helena-West Helena, has succeeded in finishing Jump Start, a three-week career development program for high school students who are blind or 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. They were placed 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.

To the degree possible, the DHS Division of Services for the Blind (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 according to their experience, skills and abilities. The high school students can return to Jump Start in successive years and be placed in more advanced jobs as their experience grows.

This was Smith's third year in Jump Start. He worked as a receptionist at Independent Living Resources Center dba as Mainstream and was given the Americans with Disability Act to research between answering phone calls. Last year Smith was placed at St. Edward's Hispanic Outreach Program, because he had taken Spanish in high school, and in 2011 he worked at a library. Smith said he has enjoyed and learned something new in each of his jobs and appreciated the opportunity to build up his resume. Smith graduated from high school this year.

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.

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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. Leslie Jennings Moore of Moore Manners taught the students 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. Smith said he also received valuable training on Job Access with Speech (JAWS) computer software that turns text into speech and identifies graphics.

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. Some students who attend public schools and come from small communities have never interacted with 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 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.