



# Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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## **Fayetteville teen who's visually impaired graduates from unique program**

Elizabeth Sheeler of Fayetteville has succeeded in finishing Jump Start, a three-week career development program for high school students who are blind or severely visually impaired. She 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.

This was Sheeler's second time in Jump Start. She wants a career in art, so last year she was placed at the Arkansas Arts Council, and this year she assisted with the various art camps at Wildwood Park for the Arts. She said her job last year taught her the business and financial side of art, and her job this year taught her the hands-on aspects of art. Both were invaluable experiences.

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“It was my first time teaching art. Kids have really good, creative minds. It’s interesting to see what each individual comes up with. Jump Start has helped me figure out what direction I want to go.” She’s now interested in art education for children.

Sheeler helped with two art camps at Wildwood. Let’s Rock was a music, art and drama camp for students in the first through fifth grades, led by Amy Braswell, who is a National Board Certified/Milken Educator, which gave Sheeler an award-winning mentor. Go Green was an art and environmental camp for students ages 7-12 led by Carman McBride. Campers learned how they can help to create a better environment for future generations and how to make art out of recycled objects. McBride said Sheeler “was a joy to work with. She brought light and happiness to our camp.” Sheeler also entered information about Wildwood’s Lanterns Festival into a database.

“Elizabeth has been a wonderful asset for our summer team. Whether helping out in the office or assisting our campers expand their knowledge and experiences, she’s been thoughtful and hard-working. This has been a wonderful first experience with the Jump Start program for Wildwood,” said Leslie Golden, Managing Director and Festival Coordinator.

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. They 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.

Since Sheeler is interested in theater, one of her favorite Jump Start activities was seeing a play at Murry’s Dinner Playhouse. Students visited the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and enjoyed a cookout at a park. Students also 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.