



## Media Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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### **Three-week program gives blind teens crash course in life**

Remember your first job, your first paycheck or leaving home for the first time?

If you do, then you have an idea what it's like for the 18 teenagers who are participating in Jump Start, a three-week career development program for high school students who are blind or visually impaired. They are getting a crash course in growing up. The program is designed to expose them to the world of work, assist them in transitioning from high school to employment or post-secondary education and increase their confidence in social situations. This is the only program of its kind in Arkansas. The Arkansas Department of Education estimates there are 215 teenagers who are blind or visually impaired in Arkansas.

For some students, it may be their first time learning with others who are blind or visually impaired. "The students are getting hands-on training, assistance, and experiences in every area from employment to daily living," said Tanya Van Houten, Division of Services for the Blind Jump Start coordinator and rehabilitation teacher. "In the years I've been doing Jump Start, I've seen students come in with very little skills in everything from social adjustment to independent living to work experience and develop so they're confident, enjoying their jobs and getting around independently."

The DHS Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) arranges part-time jobs for the students in their fields of interest so they can gain insight into their chosen profession. Students from all across the state participate in this unique program. Charles "Eric" Yarberry II of Ward, near Cabot, aspires to become an attorney, so he is working at the law firm of Chisnall, Nestrud and Julian in Little Rock. Wesley Hillman of South Bend, near Jacksonville, said on his Jump Start application that he is interested in careers for history students, perhaps in a museum. He is working at the Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site.

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Aundrea Sheeler would like a career in news media, so she is working at KARK Channel 4. Bobby Coleman of Little Rock expressed interest in becoming a teacher or working at a school, so he is working at the Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired's Instructional Resource Center, which distributes Braille and large print books to public schools. Brian Jordan of Little Rock is working at Mr. B's Coffee Shop in the Pulaski County Courthouse. Jordan wants to manage a string of vending machine locations through DSB's Vending Facility Program (VFP), and Mr. B's is owned by a VFP vendor.

Eric Yarberry is attending Jump Start for the first time. "I decided to participate in Jump Start for the job experience. I like my job. The people I work with know I'm capable, so I could get reference letters from them. I'm now more familiar with DSB services and what they can do for me. Jump Start prepares us. It puts us in a mindset about what it's like to work."

Eric plans to attend The University of Arkansas at Little Rock in the fall and major in political science with a minor in business. He wants to be a "small town lawyer." Eric said the highlights of his job have been his co-workers and going to court with the attorneys. "I love the people I work with and I've been to courthouse five times."

In addition to job skills, Jump Start students are learning independent living skills that many people without visual impairments take for granted, such as meal planning, cooking and clothing care. Metropolitan Bank taught students about budgeting their money, banking, preventing identity theft and credit card management.

Learning how to live independently also means learning how to get around. Students are receiving orientation and mobility training that teaches them how to travel using a white cane. In addition, they have 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. 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 have attended an Arkansas Travelers baseball game, hiked over the Big Dam Bridge, gone to Wild River Country and attended a dinner/dance on the Arkansas Queen Riverboat. At the end of the program, they will have a cookout at Murray Park and celebrate with a graduation cake provided by Community Bakery.

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Students will tour the State Capitol on Thursday, June 30, at 1:30 p.m. and then receive hands-on training for voting machines in the Supreme Court room.

The Jump Start program, which has been existence since 1999, is held during the last three weeks of June each year. The last day of the program is July 1. Applications are taken in the early spring of each year and are available from DSB counselors and through the DSB website at <http://www.arkansas.gov/dhs/dsb/NEWDSB/index.htm>. People also can call 1-800-960-9270 or 501-682-5463 for information. Arkansas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired has partnered with the state to put on the program, sharing resources and opening up dorms. Participants stay on campus during the week and return home on the weekends.

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Reporters may also contact DSB Director Mrs. Katy Morris, 682-0360, and Mr. Jim Hill, ASBVI Superintendent, 296-1810.