



Back on Track

CHANGING THE LIFE COURSE OF YOUTH IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM THROUGH EDUCATION

Youth with disabilities in the juvenile justice system face hurdles in accessing education. Schools often refer to the system without identifying a student's need for special education services or providing the right academic and behavior supports. As many as 65-85% of students in the juvenile justice system have a disability and likely require services to be successful in school, yet many are not receiving those services.

Fortunately, a new partnership between Disability Rights Texas (DRTx) and the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department (HCJPD) is changing the life course for youth in the system. This

program offers a unique opportunity for youth to receive education advocacy services they desperately need but would likely not otherwise know existed.

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of students in the juvenile justice system have a disability

Through the program, HCJPD probation officers refer students to DRTx who are experiencing the following:

- Not evaluated for or receiving 504 or special education services
- Inadequate 504 or special education services
- Lack of appropriate positive behavioral supports
- Several grade levels behind
- Denial of enrollment
- Bullying
- Homelessness
- Truancy

With this innovative program, Disability Rights Texas has been able to work more closely with a population of students and families that does not often reach out to us on their own. We also have been able to tackle common problems that plague juvenile justice-involved youth and youth with disabilities.

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Who We've Helped

Since January 2016, DRTx has provided advocacy services to more than 1,400 youth who are now receiving the educational services they need to succeed in school and life.

Through our individual casework, we have been able to identify pervasive issues within school districts and work with them to make policy changes that provide youth with appropriate educational services and minimize referrals to the justice system.

In December 2018, the *Houston Chronicle* featured an article on youth in the juvenile justice system and included the story of one of our clients, Trevon, who we helped get back on track in school and who recently graduated from high school.

Read Trevon's story at tinyurl.com/DRTxTrevon.



1,400

youth and counting have been served by DRTx since 2016.

Here are a few examples of other young people we have helped.



One 17-year-old didn't receive testing for special education services, despite his grandmother's repeated requests – until he was sent to an alternative education program. A DRTx Education Specialist attended his first ARD meeting and helped him get the services he needed to succeed in school.

After release from detention, one student was told she was too far behind and that she should get a GED or look at other options even though she desperately wanted to resume her studies in a regular high school. A DRTx Education Specialist was able to get her enrolled in school and assist with credit recovery so she could catch up quickly. The student has done well ever since.

One 15-year-old who was on probation was harassed by teachers who shared his private information in front of his classmates who then teased him. The teen was distraught and wanted to drop out. A DRTx Education Specialist met with him about the situation and worked with the school's principal to successfully obtain an agreement for a transfer to a different high school.



Let's Do This Together.

To discuss a potential partnership between DRTx and your juvenile probation program, contact Supervising Attorney and Program Director, Sarah Beebe, at sbeebe@drtx.org or call (832) 681-8211.

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