



# 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 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

**65-85%**

of students in the juvenile justice system have a disability

for youth to receive education advocacy services they desperately need but would likely not otherwise know existed.

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, DRTx 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.



[www.DRTx.org](http://www.DRTx.org)

## Who We've Helped

Through our program, more than 2,000 youth have received the educational services they needed to succeed in school and life. In 2021 and 2022, an average of 94% of youth served in the program did not reoffend within a year of release from probation.

One youth we helped, Trevon, was featured in a Houston Chronicle article about youth in the juvenile justice system. We helped Trevon get back on track and he went on to graduate from high school.

**Read Trevon's story at [tinyurl.com/DRTxTrevon](https://www.tinyurl.com/DRTxTrevon).**

Additionally, 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.



### 94% don't reoffend

In 2021 and 2022, 94% of youth served did not reoffend within one year of probation.

## 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, Karmel Willis, at [kwillis@drtx.org](mailto:kwillis@drtx.org) or call (281) 836-0476.

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