



HARRIS COUNTY JUVENILE PROBATION DEPARTMENT

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Chief Juvenile Probation Officer

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Henry Gonzales
Assistant Executive Director

July 2, 2018

Re: Harris County Juvenile Probation Department Education Advocacy Program Partnership
with Disability Rights Texas

Introduction

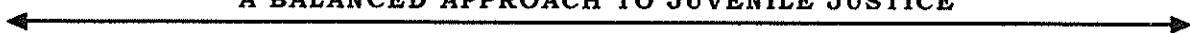
Harris County Juvenile Probation Department is proud to announce an innovative program with a disability rights organization to provide education advocacy services to youth involved with the juvenile justice system.

Program Background

In November 2015, Harris County Juvenile Probation Department (HCJPD) established a partnership with Disability Rights Texas (DRTx) to help improve educational outcomes for probation-involved youth. Nationally, 60-70% of youth in the juvenile justice system have a diagnosable mental health condition and almost 30% have a serious disorder that requires immediate, significant treatment (National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice, 2006). These students are entitled to important protections and behavioral supports at school, but many have never been properly identified, or received the services that allow them to make academic and behavioral progress. As a result, students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be expelled as their peers who do not have disabilities and are frequently referred to juvenile court for incidents that occurred at school. Parents of youth in the juvenile justice system are often unaware of their rights or how to collaborate with schools and advocate for their child to ensure appropriate educational services. For these reasons, a partnership with Disability Rights Texas, the federal protection and advocacy organization for people with disabilities, was a natural fit for HCJPD.

Program Services

Through this partnership, Disability Rights Texas (DRTx) receives referrals from probation-officers who request assistance with a myriad of education issues. From these referrals, DRTx provides



tiered advocacy services ranging from technical assistance to the officers to help them troubleshoot common school problems, to directly assisting youth and their families with obtaining the education services they need to be successful. Over the past two and half years, DRTx has provided services to over 700 probation-involved youth. Those advocacy efforts have resulted in an increased number of evaluations for special education services, improved disability services at school, facilitation of reentry into community schools and identification of appropriate education programs for youth who are struggling academically, enhanced protections for youth who have experienced bullying, and securing homeless services and appropriate truancy prevention measures.

Program Outcomes and Benefits

The services provided by DRTx have helped youth successfully complete their conditions of probation and even resulted in early termination of probation for some youth. In addition, DRTx's advocacy has kept youth in community placements and reduced further involvement with juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. In this way, DRTx's advocacy services have proved to be an effective cost savings measure for HCJPD.

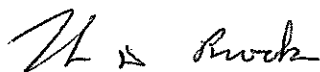
DRTx has also served as a liaison between HCJPD and local school districts to help bridge the gap between the two systems. By raising awareness with school districts around some of the most common barriers to success probation-involved youth encounter in schools, and discussing ways districts can improve programming for this population of students, we are beginning to see systemic changes in school districts' approach to education of our youth.

Conclusion: Education Advocacy as a Best Practice

Both DRTx and HCJPD are excited about the positive benefits this partnership has yielded and encourage other probation departments and legal service organizations to consider forming this kind of partnership as a best practice for serving juvenile-justice involved youth.

If you have questions about this program, please feel free to contact Latashia Crenshaw, Director of Education Support Services, at 713-222-4343 or latashia.crenshaw@hcjpd.hctx.net.

Sincerely,



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