CHANGING LIVES 2015

Through Education Advocacy

ANNUAL REPORT

Learning Rights Law Center

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Cover page: Desiree, Learning Rights' former client.
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LETTER FROM CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS AND BOARD CHAIR

Dear Friends of Learning Rights Law Center,

Our vision of the future is a world in which all children may pursue a meaningful and equitable education that provides them with a brighter path in which to learn and the means to become successful adults. Your passion and support of this vision makes all the difference in the lives of the children we serve daily.

In this report, you will find information about Learning Rights' clients whose lives have been transformed by our programs. For example:

- We stopped discrimination against Dylan, a perfectly capable six-year old whose school unlawfully refused to enroll him because of his gastrostomy feeding tube.
- We saved Sabrina, a student with undiagnosed dyslexia, who was overlooked, misunderstood and underserved because she was in the foster care system.
- We opened the classroom doors for Desiree, proudly featured on our cover, who was failing in her high school classes when we first met her, but recently celebrated her graduation from the University of California, Berkeley.

Your investment in our mission of education equity enables us to directly serve and empower thousands of students just like Dylan, Sabrina and Desiree.

Learning Rights was founded in 2005 to close the enormous deficit in educational services provided to low-income, under-served children in the public school system of Greater Los Angeles. Since we opened our doors, we have served more than 40,000 at-risk students and their families. However, the need for our services remains critical even today. Hundreds of thousands of low-income children are still being unlawfully pushed out of classrooms and pulled into the downward cycle of poverty.

In 2015, as we celebrated our 10-year anniversary, Learning Rights challenged this ongoing societal inequity by investing in and strengthening our core programs. We chose to grow strategically – by leveraging technology and volunteers to take training and advocacy to the next level. We launched our e-TIGER learning platform, which takes our parent training online, thus breaking the geographic barriers associated with in-person participation. Learning Rights also hired its first Volunteer and Pro Bono Coordinator, enabling us to increase our recruitment and training of skilled individuals who wish to give of their time and talents. Learning Rights heartily thanks the 116 volunteers who this past year helped provide more than 5,200 hours of free services to those students most at risk of educational failure.

As we close out our first decade of service, Learning Rights is keenly aware that we are no longer the new nonprofit in town. In 2015, we grew to a staff of 19 dedicated lawyers, advocates and professionals and we reached more than 18,000 people. Learning Rights is now firmly rooted in the burgeoning education advocacy work happening here in Los Angeles and leading the charge towards education equity for all students.

We look forward to keeping the momentum for change strong in this next year. We truly appreciate your continuing support and enduring loyalty.

Sincerely,

Tina Steck,
Learning Rights Law Center,
Board Chair

Ines Kuperschmit,
Learning Rights Law Center, Co-Executive Director and Co-Founder

Janeen Steel,
Learning Rights Law Center, Co-Executive Director and Co-Founder

WHO WE ARE

Connie, pictured here with her children, attends Learning Rights' TIGER classes. Photo by David Hinden.

MISSION

Learning Rights Law Center seeks to achieve education equity for low income and disadvantaged students in the public education system in the greater Los Angeles area. We change the lives of at risk students who have disabilities, face discrimination or are involved in the dependency or juvenile justice systems by providing free legal services, education advocacy, and community training.

VISION

We believe that every child has a right to learn. Since 2005, Learning Rights Law Center has been promoting and protecting the individual right to education for children in the Greater Los Angeles area. The focus of our direct legal representation and education advocacy is to get low income and disadvantaged children the education services and support they need to succeed in school. The purpose of our education training and community outreach programs is to empower families and provide a basis for true grassroots education reform. Our vision is a world in which all children may pursue a meaningful and equitable education that provides them with a brighter future and the means to become successful adults.

Zion, Learning Rights' client, shown here with his siblings. Photo by David Hinden.

WHAT WE DO

Learning Rights advocates, trains and partners with stakeholders, legislators and educators, serving as a catalyst for a healthier, more inclusive learning environment that is free of discrimination and prepares every child to succeed.

In 2015, we provided legal guidance to a number of stakeholders, including CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates), the Child and Family Guidance Center, the Los Angeles Public Defender's Office, and countless others. Through our LAMCE (Los Angeles Medical-Legal Collaborative for Education) Program, we provided legal consultations to more than 90 children and health care providers at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. Learning Rights also worked with Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court as well as Children's Law Center of Los Angeles to identify foster youth who had unmet mental health needs and educational access issues.

Last year, Learning Rights participated in the Los Angeles Special Education Task Force, which examined the special education system, identified systematic issues and recommended the best ways to deal with them. We also collaborated with Mental Health Advocacy Services and Western Center on Law & Poverty to create the Mental Health Task Force. Our work there focused on the lack of services provided to students with mental health issues since the state enacted Assembly Bill 114. In April 2016, the Mental Health Task Force jointly published a report regarding the status of mental health services in schools (Failing Grade: How California's School Districts Have Abandoned Children with Disabilities) and helped introduce SB 884 (Beall) Bill, which would amend the current AB 114 Bill.

In 2015, Learning Rights also teamed up with Loyola Marymount University's (LMU) School of Education, which helped us film several e-TIGER parent training videos. The LMU School of Education will be incorporating e-TIGER online modules into their regular teaching curriculum and will support Learning Rights in recording all of the remaining videos. LMU also hosted the TIGER parent graduation in 2015.

With the help of these partners, Learning Rights ensures that students who are denied access to school intervention, children receive support services such as speech, behavior, or occupational therapy, as well as access to necessary healthcare when medical conditions such as asthma, epilepsy or cancer exist. As a result, students experience increased academic and social functioning and have a better chance of achieving economic self-sufficiency and cycling out of poverty.

Frank, shown above, was helped by Learning Rights. Learn more about Frank on page 12. Photo by David Hinden.

Through Learning Rights' TIGER Program and Education Rights Clinics, Learning Rights trained and mentored students and their families about their rights so that they could identify issues early on and would be empowered to take action and advocate with greater effectiveness at the school, district, and eventually, at the county and state levels. Last year, more than 2,500 parents, students and other family members benefited from those two programs.

In 2015, Learning Rights' advocacy resulted in more than $2.6 million worth of free services (e.g. speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, counseling) for students who had been wrongfully denied such educational support.

HOW WE DO IT

OUTREACH

Learning Rights' outreach activities connect families of students with education-access issues to the necessary programs and services. In 2015, Learning Rights' staff attended more than 70 community events, outreaching to more than 16,000 individuals including students, parents and stake-holders.

ADVOCATING FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM PROGRAM (ACAP)

Learning Rights offers counsel, advice and direct representation to students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). In 2015, more than 50% of Learning Rights' clients had ASD.

TRAINING

Learning Rights' chief training and organizing Program - TIGER (Training Individuals for Grassroots Education Reform) - is a year-long program that helps low-income parents and other care takers advocate for their children with disabilities, while also bringing about social change within the education system. In 2015, TIGER helped more than 1,400 low-income parents, children with disabilities and other family members.

COURT-INVOLVED YOUTH

Learning Rights' Court-Involved Youth Program ensures that youth hailing from the foster care or juvenile justice systems are provided with equal access to public education through advocacy and direct representation. Approximately 15% of Learning Rights' clients were court-involved in 2015.

EDUCATION RIGHTS CLINICS

Through in-person, one-on-one meetings, Learning Rights counsels and advises low-income parents and develops individualized action plans that each parent can use to address their child's education issues. In 2015, Learning Rights helped more than 1,100 low-income parents, children with disabilities and other family members or community stakeholders via this self-help program.

LOS ANGELES MEDICAL-LEGAL COLLABORATIVE FOR EDUCATION (LAMCE)

Learning Rights partners with Children's Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA) to assist patients with education-access issues and to train health care providers to identify these young people and connect them to the services they need to thrive later in life. In 2015, Learning Rights provided legal consultations to more than 90 children and health care providers.

SCHOOL ACCESS

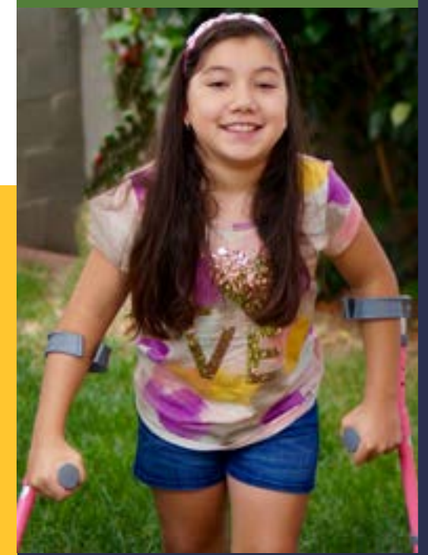
This program is designed to ensure that low-income children who face discrimination due to language barriers, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, homelessness or other special physical or mental health needs receive an equal access to public education. In 2015, Learning Rights provided more than 400 legal consultations to clients who did not have adequate access to school-based services.

LEGAL ADVOCACY

Legal advocacy helps families enforce their right to directly communicate violations of education law to key school district administrators, or state and federal government agencies. By taking unresolved conflicts out of the individual schools and into administrative bodies charged with ensuring compliance with the law (e.g. the California Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, and Office of Administrative Hearings Special Education Division), students get another chance to obtain education access before having to resort to litigation. In 2015, Learning Rights filed a total of 106 Requests for Administrative Hearing resulting in $2.6 million worth of education services being granted to students.

CIVIL RIGHTS LITIGATION

Learning Rights employs litigation as a strategy when issues are systemic or cannot be solved locally. In 2015, Learning Rights filed and settled a civil rights case that protected the rights of a student with seizures to participate in choir and receive accommodations for her medical issue. The school district had not conducted trainings, nor had necessary seizure policies and protections in place, resulting in broad discrimination.



THE NEED

Children play in last year's TIGER Town Hall. Photo by Azra Variscic.

In Los Angeles County alone, there are more than 1 million students enrolled in the K-12th grade public school system living in poverty. Poverty and lack of education are very closely related. In California high schools, high-poverty students lose nearly two weeks of learning time annually because of teacher absences, emergency lockdowns and other disruptions compared with their more affluent peers in other schools. Those students' achievements are hampered from the very beginning. A recent study conducted by the National Center for Education paints a harrowing picture: at only four years of age the educational divide is already pronounced with 72% of kids at or above poverty being proficient in numbers and shapes, compared to only 45% of those below poverty. Low-income students are also nearly three times as likely as more affluent peers to suffer stress from violence, immigration, caring for family members, lack of healthcare, hunger and unstable housing. New brain research shows that these traumatic events have stifling effects on brain development, impacting classroom behavior and the brain's ability to learn.

In 2015, all of Learning Rights' clients were low-income and came from some of Los Angeles' poorest neighborhoods. Many of our students are at great risk of not receiving an appropriate education because they are double- and even triple-hampered by the intersection of poverty, race, and also disability. More than 100,000 students in Los Angeles County have disabilities ranging from autism and dyslexia to cerebral palsy and deafness.

COMPARED WITH CHILDREN WHOSE FAMILIES HAVE INCOMES OF AT LEAST TWICE THE POVERTY LINE DURING THEIR EARLY CHILDHOOD, POOR CHILDREN COMPLETE TWO FEWER YEARS OF SCHOOL, EARN LESS THAN HALF AS MUCH MONEY AND ARE NEARLY THREE TIMES AS LIKELY TO HAVE POOR HEALTH.

In 2015, a large majority of Learning Rights' clients had one or more disabilities, and more than 50% of them had Autism Spectrum Disorder. Nearly 40% of students with disabilities do not graduate from high school, yet 85% of them are estimated to be

WITHIN THE U.S. JUVENILE CORRECTIONS SYSTEM, SOME 30 TO 70% OF YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE DISABILITIES. MANY OF THESE YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE NEVER BEEN ASSESSED OR DIAGNOSED WITH DISABILITIES AND HAVE NOT RECEIVED PROPER EDUCATIONAL SUPPORTS – INTERVENTIONS THAT MIGHT HAVE - AND STILL COULD - MAKE A DIFFERENCE[2].

capable of completing high school. Given the dire outcomes for students with disabilities, it is not surprising that life-long poverty is rampant among individuals with disabilities: 28.4% of those with disabilities live in poverty, while only 12.4% of those without disabilities are impoverished[1]. In addition, the school-to- prison pipeline is real. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Justice reported that 49% of females and 39% of males in jail reported a disability.

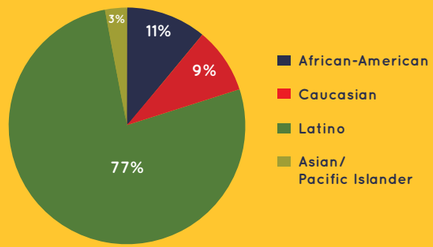
Tens of thousands of Los Angeles' low-income students have additional educational risk factors such as having a medical or mental health condition, being court-involved, or being an English language learner. Of the almost 30,000 foster youth in Los Angeles, less than 50% are likely to graduate from high school and only 3% are likely to graduate from college. By third grade, 80% of foster youth have had to repeat a grade. Such poor educational outcomes lead to poor job prospects and help explain why over 40% of individuals in homeless shelters are former foster youth. In 2015, more than 15% of Learning Rights' clients were court-involved youth.

Child poverty costs the United States hundreds of billions of dollars per year. Many of those children, without adequate education, supports and placements, end up homeless or incarcerated, and taxpayers are left footing the bill. Current poverty levels, combined with the growing wealth gap, threaten to destabilize our democracy and limit the upward mobility of children for future generations. Education is the best way to prevent poverty and secure a productive future for all children.

Getting into the right public school and obtaining the specialized support services to meet the unique educational needs of at-risk kids and students with disabilities is a legitimate challenge for any parent. It is an even bigger challenge for low-income parents. On top of limited literacy skills, most low-income parents do not have the type of formal education needed to navigate the real complexities of special education and large school bureaucracies. More than 30% of parents who participated in the 2015 TIGER Training Program had only an elementary school education. In addition, because school districts face extreme budget cuts and a shortage of qualified school staff, they easily become non-compliant with the laws they are required to follow.

The need for Learning Rights' services remains at an all-time high. In 2015, despite having served more than 18,000 low-income children, their families and other community stakeholders, our client wait lists rarely dropped below triple digits. We remain one of the few legal service nonprofits dedicated exclusively to education rights – rights which, when enforced, will serve as a pathway out of poverty. As Horace Mann wrote, "Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery."

2015 LEARNING RIGHTS' CLIENTS' ETHNICITY



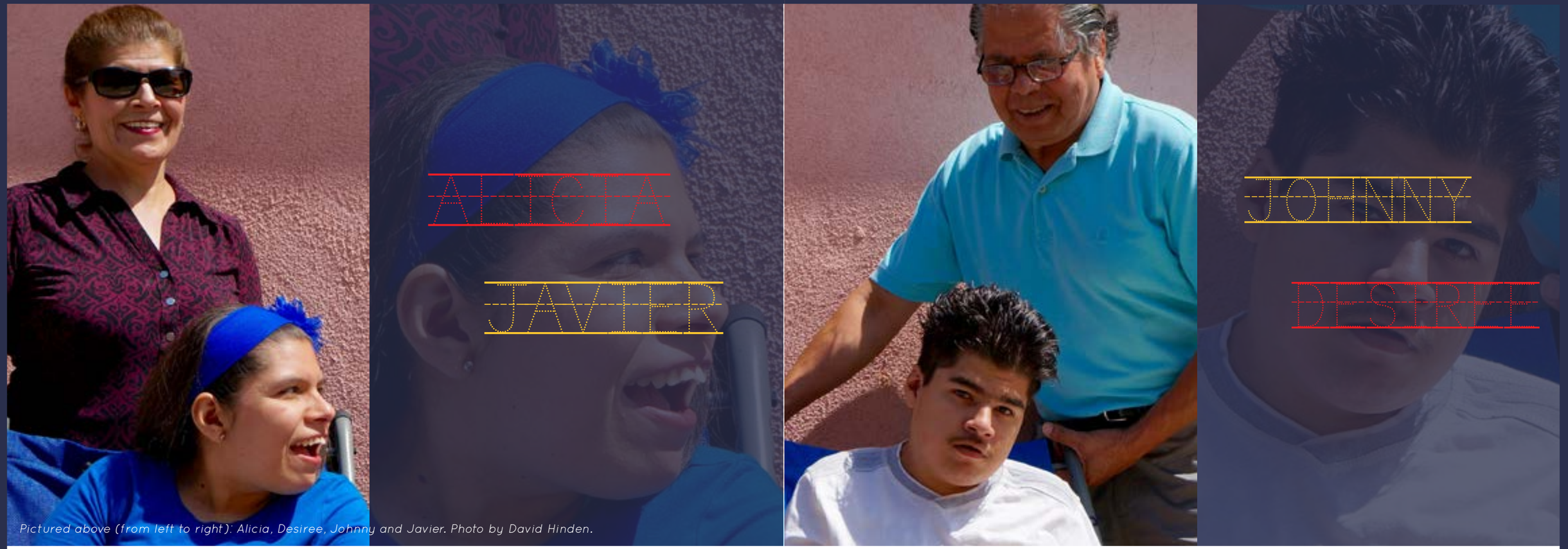
LEARNING RIGHT'S CLIENTS' DISABILITIES *

- Autism - 50%
- Orthopedic Impairment - 4%
- Cerebral Palsy - 4%
- Visual Impairment - 4%
- Epilepsy - 7%
- Deaf of Hard of Hearing - 4%
- Learning Disability - 28%
- Speech and Language Disorder - 27%
- Intellectual Disability - 15%
- Emotional Disturbance - 20%
- ADD/ADHD - 20%

** Majority of the clients have one or more disabilities*

[1] *Fulfilling the Promise: Overcoming Persistent Barriers to Economic Self-Sufficiency for People with Disabilities, United States Senate, Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions, Tom Harking, Chairman, September 18,2015*

[2] *Exceptional Children, 2005; Vol.71, No. 3. Pp. 339-345. Youth With Disabilities in Juvenile Corrections: A National Survey*



Pictured above (from left to right): Alicia, Desiree, Johnny and Javier. Photo by David Hinden.

Alicia was one of our first parents who completed the TIGER parent training program. Alicia and her husband, Javier, have two children, Johnny and Desiree, both of whom have cerebral palsy, seizure disorders and use wheelchairs for mobility.

Alicia started advocating for Johnny and Desiree while they were very young. She and Javier made numerous requests to their school district that their children be placed in some general education classes at some point in the day. Until then, the children had always been educated in segregated bungalows. Alicia and Javier believed in inclusion, that their children would learn more alongside typical peers, and that both Johnny and Desiree should be able to participate in (and not just observe) the general education class. The school district refused, but Alicia did not give up. The district continued to ignore their requests, telling the parents "the education provided to your children is the best." However, both kids remained segregated all day and continued to show a number of signs that called for increased support, including poor endurance, impaired motor control, limited flexibility, and impaired posture, among many others. Desperate for her children to get help, Alicia found out about Learning Rights' TIGER Program, where she enrolled and learned all about her children's education rights. Alicia successfully included her children into an elective class of their choice – like rest of the students. Desiree was able to take photography classes, which remains her passion to date. Johnny was able to take computer classes. He was so happy to be in the computer lab, that at the beginning of each class, he would happily turn on all the computers for all of his classmates!

TIGER training has enabled Alicia and her husband to advocate on behalf of their children in every possible context. In addition to advocating for her children's rights in the school setting, Alicia handled their transitional and health needs after they graduated and prepared for post-secondary life. The same skills Alicia and Javier employed at the school, they later used when working with their Regional Center (government-funded institutions in charge of providing help and a wide range of services to individuals with developmental disabilities and their families). For example, Alicia and her husband filed several requests for a Fair Hearing when Regional Center services were simply denied without explanation or reduced without notice. In one such case, South Central Los Angeles Regional Center (SCLARC) cut therapeutic swimming for almost all of the children in the entire Regional Center. Alicia reviewed and filled out the necessary paperwork, and ultimately ended up representing herself at the hearing, where she won her case. She was allowed to have the swimming program reinstated for her children by convincing the administrative law judge that it was an appropriate service in the children's Individual Program Plan (IPP). In another case, Alicia requested a specialized stroller because she found it nearly impossible to fold and carry the wheelchair Johnny and Desi were using; after her request was initially denied, she made another request and the stroller was provided.

Alicia and Javier have always worked as a team. Javier can be shy, but Alicia is not afraid to speak up for her children's rights. Javier is mainly in charge of the paperwork and arranging appointments and Alicia does the talking. Javier remembers feeling intimidated the first time he stepped in front of a judge while advocating for his children: "I remember the Regional Center bringing in about 15 different experts and on our side were just Alicia, Johnny, Desiree and I. But in the end, we won."

Armed with our TIGER training, Javier and Alicia won every single appeal they sought for their children. They feel ready for any future challenges that may come their way. In addition to advocating on behalf of their children, they are active in the community, helping other parents advocate better on behalf of their children. They also lead two TIGER Community groups. This kind of self-advocacy and grassroots community training is a perfect example of how TIGER prepares families to advocate, for life.

Frank, playing in the park. Photo by David Hinden.

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT 1 IN EVERY 68 CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES IS DIAGNOSED WITH ASD. AN AUTISM DIAGNOSIS CAN OCCUR AT A YOUNG AGE, AT 18 MONTHS OR EVEN YOUNGER, AND AN ASD DIAGNOSIS AT AGE TWO BY AN EXPERIENCED PROFESSIONAL CAN BE VERY RELIABLE. AN EARLY DIAGNOSIS AND EARLY INTERVENTION CAN BE LIFE-CHANGING.

FRANK

Frank's parents came to Learning Rights because they were concerned with his behavior and speech, as well as language development. Frank, a six-year-old with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), would not play or interact with other students, nor did he possess the language skills to speak with his peers. At the time, they did not know Frank had ASD and they did not know the reasons behind his worrisome behavior. They felt like bad parents and were embarrassed to go out in public, so they spent the majority of their time in the confines of their house. Increasingly isolated from their community, Frank's parents asked for help from their local school, but their inquiries went ignored. His parents believed that Frank's school should provide adequate education services to their son, but they didn't know how to initiate or formalize their requests.

Learning Rights was able help and zealously advocated for Frank and his family. As a result, Frank has made substantial improvements in school with the support of additional services, including a one-to-one behavioral aide. Since starting at a new school, he progressed from being unable to communicate his wants and needs, to talking. Frank's parents immediately felt how life-changing it was to have a son who could, for the first time in their lives, talk.

Frank has recently learned how to play social games such as Connect Four, and he now plays alongside his peers. He continues to make incredible educational gains in behavior and communication. Frank's parents credit Learning Rights with Frank's enormous improvements and they now take him outside to play with other children.

SABRINA

We first met Sabrina when she was twelve. She lived in a group home for foster youth and was attending an on-grounds non-public school for kids with emotional disabilities. Sabrina's academic needs were poorly understood. The school reported that Sabrina was out of control on a daily basis. Sabrina's habit of staring off and not responding (which was later thought to be a symptom of her seizure disorder) got her into frequent trouble with school staff who interpreted this as an act of defiance. Shortly after Learning Rights started advocating on Sabrina's behalf, she got a formal assessment for the first time in her life.

Although schools are required by law to conduct a formal assessment for each child placed in special education so that their special needs might be evaluated and the right types of services provided, Sabrina had never been assessed. She was summarily dumped into a segregated special education school. After an independent educational evaluation was conducted, it was discovered that Sabrina did indeed have a seizure disorder, as well severe Dyslexia. The school had no idea what Sabrina's real needs were and assumed she was emotionally disturbed. Learning Rights concluded the school staff was biased and labeled Sabrina emotionally disturbed simply because she was a foster youth.

Through our advocacy, Sabrina was transferred to Frostig, a well-regarded school in the community specifically tailored for children with learning disabilities. There, she was able to get evidenced-based interventions and an array of services that she needed to thrive. From week one, the school reported what a sweet and lovely girl Sabrina was and how much of a pleasure it was to have her there.

Sabrina successfully graduated with a high school diploma and is a prime example of how any child with a disability, when supported by appropriate services and interventions, can thrive. Sabrina also applied to and was accepted into college, something she thought she would never achieve.

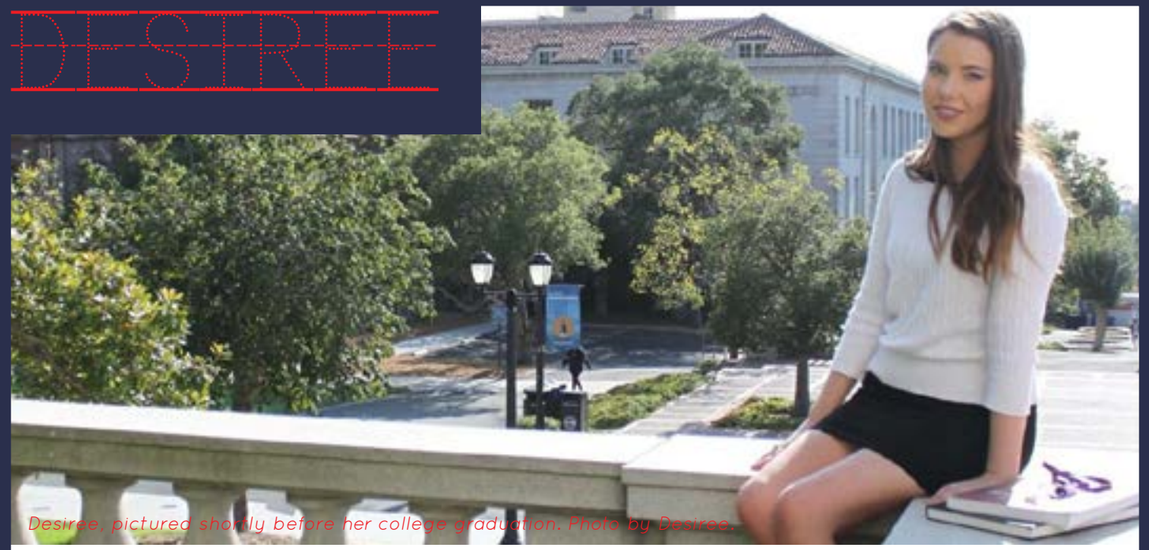
Sabrina defies the typical tragedy that befall foster youth whereby they are presumed damaged as a result of early childhood trauma and forced into highly restrictive and segregated schools for kids with emotional disturbance. These schools are frequently neither safe nor rehabilitative, and fail to identify the unique needs of each student.

Sabrina, pictured below. Photo by David Hinden.

LAST YEAR, 100% OF CLIENTS SERVED THROUGH LEARNING RIGHTS' COURT-INVOLVED YOUTH PROGRAM WERE DIRECTLY REFERRED FROM THE LOS ANGELES JUVENILE COURT THROUGH THE 317 (E) EDUCATION PANEL.

Emboldened by her educational success, Sabrina decided to make other positive changes. Apart from her seizure medications, the doctors at the group home over-medicated her with a range of psychotropic cocktails to wake her up, calm her or get her to sleep. When she was 18, she chose to stop taking all medications, and discovered she had outgrown her seizures.

DESIREE



Desiree, pictured shortly before her college graduation. Photo by Desiree.

Desiree was a 16-year old honors student attending Eastside High School in Lancaster, California, when we first advocated on her behalf in 2009. Since early childhood, Desiree has had Charcot-Marie-Tooth Disease (CMT), a genetic degenerative neurological disorder that affects a person's legs and arms. Over time, the nerves to the extremities degenerate, thus weakening the muscles in those areas due to loss of stimulation. Physical activity as simple as standing or walking is often fatiguing to individuals with CMT because of their diminished strength. Additionally, exposure to cold weather is dangerous since they are highly susceptible to hypothermia.

Because of her CMT, and because walking up and down stairs would have been too fatiguing and detrimental to her health, Desiree had to rely on the use of an elevator at school in order to get to her classes. The elevator that Desiree was required to use opened from the outdoors and generally remained locked and inaccessible to students. As a result, Desiree had to rely on school security personnel and teachers to unlock the elevator and allow her access every time she needed to get to class.

Typically, Desiree had to stand and wait outdoors in the mornings before classes, even in colder weather, for a security officer to open the elevator so that she could attend class. Many times, however, there was no security officer to open the elevator when she was on the ground floor, and even the teachers with keys were not allowed to open the elevator when she needed them to. As a result, Desiree was forced to stand and wait for extended periods of time - anywhere from 20 minutes to 2 hours. Being late to class, or missing class altogether, became a regular occurrence. Once, Desiree was even left trapped on the 2nd floor during a fire drill. Desiree's parents asked the school officials for a key to the elevator as an accommodation for her disability; however, their multiple pleas were denied.

This constant tardiness and inability to independently move around campus caused Desiree to miss a significant amount of instruction. Desiree, who up until then had been a star student, got an "F" for the first grading period and was forced to switch out of honors classes (most of which were on the second floor) despite her academic abilities. Desiree also became anxious about going to school and started to dislike being there.

Learning Rights, with pro bono help from Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP, defended Desiree from school discrimination because of her medical condition. Through advocacy, school officials were required to provide Desiree with her own key to the elevator, which enabled her to get to her classes on time. In addition, since she was no longer exposed to long periods of standing or cold weather, she experienced far less fatigue. Her simple but critical access to the elevator enabled Desiree to improve not only her academic record but her overall well-being.

Desiree, now 22, graduated from the University of California, Berkeley in 2015. She carries her old key to the elevator to remind her of the struggles she went through and how far she's come since then.

Dylan, pictured below. Photo by David Hinden.

IN 2015, LEARNING RIGHTS PROVIDED CONSULTATION TO MORE THAN 30 HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS AT CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL LOS ANGELES.

DYLAN

When Dylan's mother attempted to enroll him in a Head Start Program (a program providing comprehensive early childhood education to low-income children) at her local school district, she was told that Dylan was not allowed on campus. Dylan, six years old, has "short gut syndrome." This medical condition requires the use of a central venous line, known as a G-tube, and an ileostomy (an opening in the abdominal wall). Although this condition affects Dylan's nutrition and toileting, it does not impact his ability to learn or any other aspect of his life. In fact, Dylan is an active and curious child, who loves to play with other children.

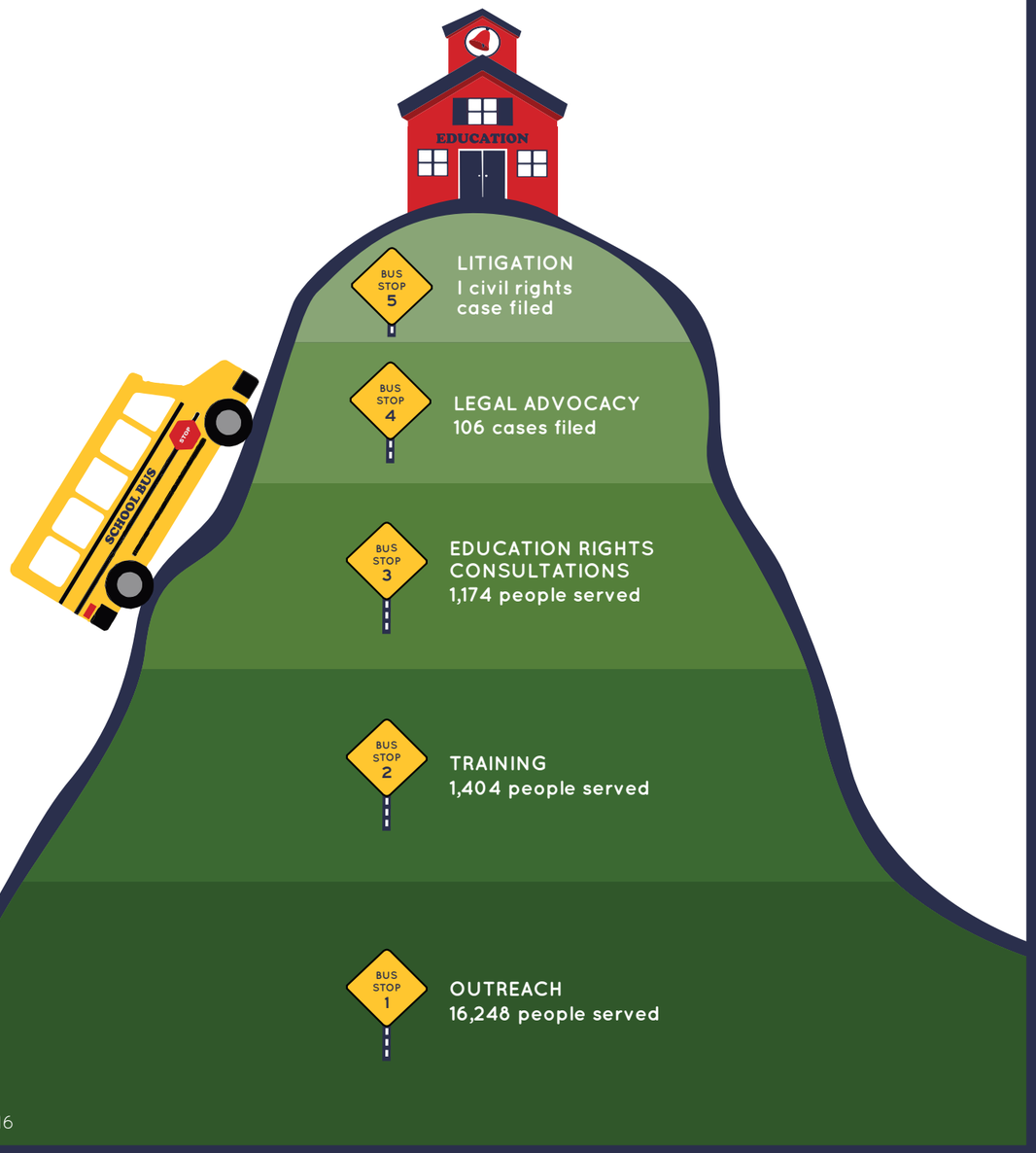
The school refused to enroll Dylan, stating that it did not have the requisite license to handle his medical needs. In addition, the school charged Dylan's mother with the responsibility of figuring out the complex licensing issue. Dylan's mother tried every avenue to enroll her son in school. She even offered to have Dylan's personal home care nurse accompany him and stay with him during school hours, but the school continued to deny his right to attend school.

Dylan's school was discriminating against him based on his medical disability. Dylan's pediatrician and social worker at Children's Hospital of Los Angeles (CHLA) worked to connect Dylan to Learning Rights' services through our Los Angeles Medical-Legal Collaborative for Education (LAMCE) Program. The program delivers an integrated medical-legal approach to ensure the health of patients from birth to 22 years who are receiving medical care at CHLA. Before he turned to Learning Rights' LAMCE Program, Dylan waited more than a year to be enrolled in school. Dylan is now able to attend school with the accommodations he needs in order to stay safe and get the education he deserves.

THE LAMCE PROGRAM SAFEGUARDS THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN LIKE DYLAN. OUR LAMCE WORK ENSURES SCHOOL RE-ENTRY AFTER AN EXTENDED HOSPITALIZATION OR ILLNESS, NECESSARY HEALTH ACCOMMODATIONS TO ENSURE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT, AND ENFORCEMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND DISABILITY LAWS SO THAT CHILDREN WITH MEDICAL NEEDS CAN CONTINUE LEARNING.

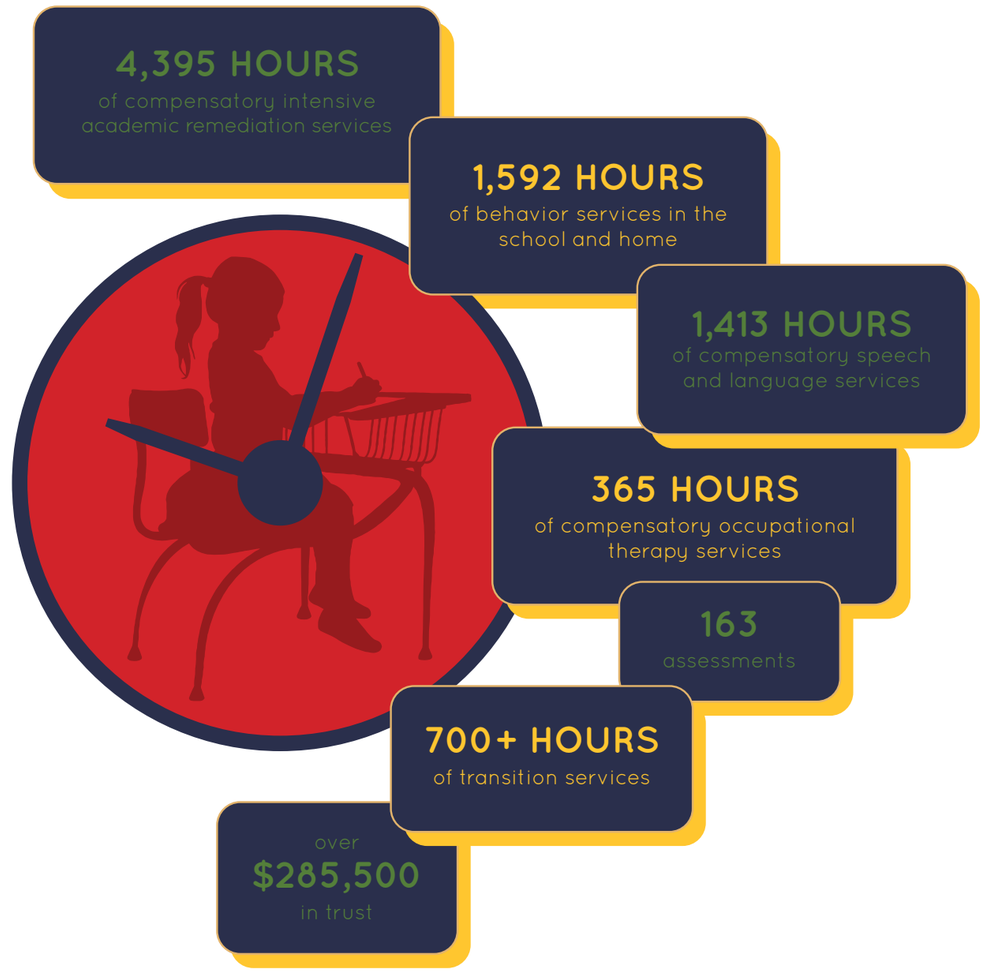
LEARNING RIGHTS LAW CENTER

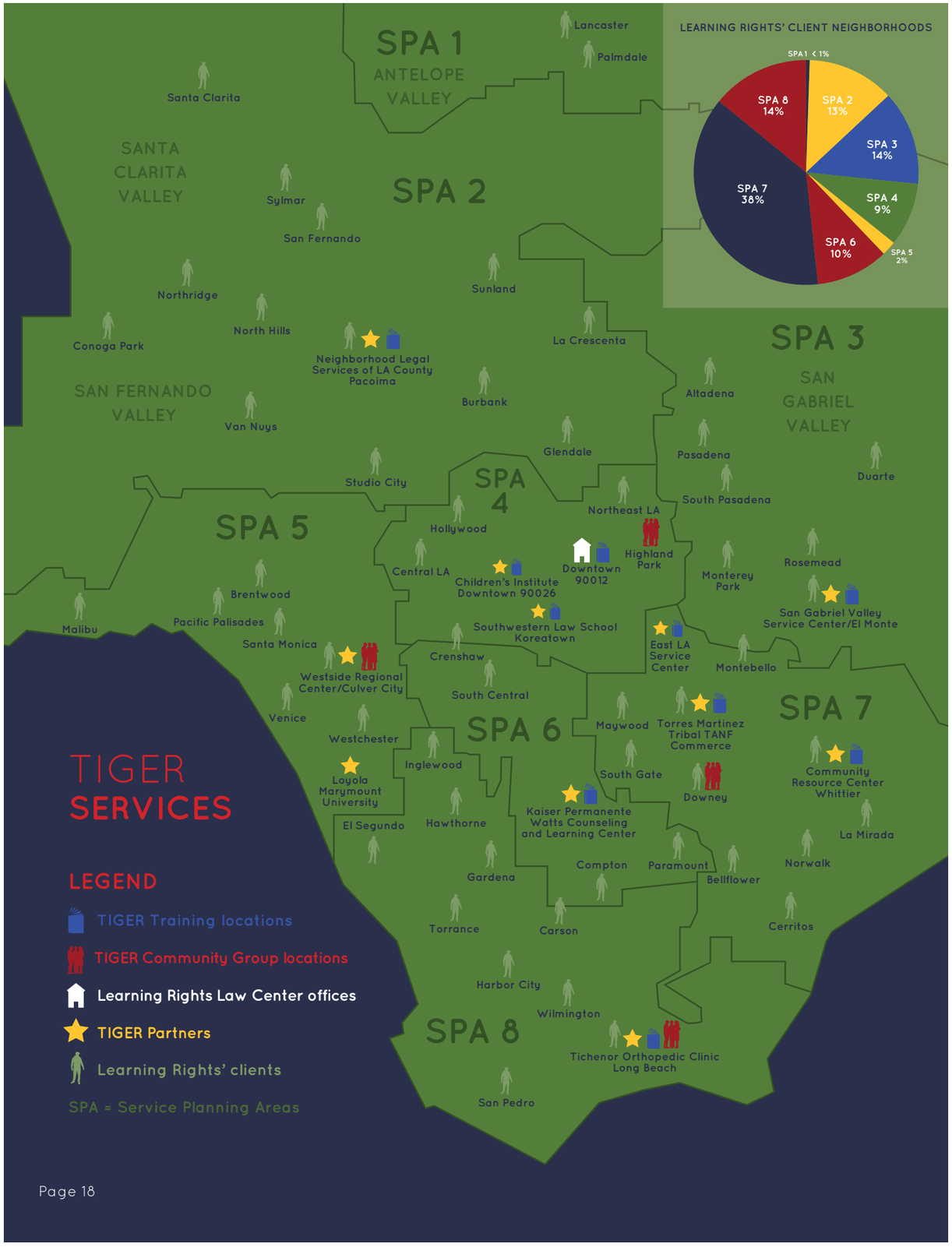
The Road to Education Equity 2015



SERVICES PROVIDED IN 2015

In 2015, Learning Rights' advocacy resulted in thousands of hours of compensatory education services and therapies - and more than $2.6 Million worth of free services - being awarded to poor and disabled students.





LEARNING RIGHTS IN THE NEWS

SUIT BY FORMER DOWNEY HS STUDENT ALLEGES SHE WAS REMOVED FROM CHOIR BECAUSE OF EPILEPSY! *SEPTEMBER 21, 2015*

JOVEN DISCRIMINADA POR SUFRIR ATAQUES EPILÉPTICOS! *OCTOBER 22, 2015*

S.L., pictured above, was discriminated based on her medical needs. Photo by Ciro Cesar, LA OPINION.

Los Angeles, CA - Plaintiff S.L. and Defendant Downey Unified School District have reached a settlement ending a two year legal battle in the case brought by S.L. alleging that that she faced disability discrimination at Downey High School. S.L., who has Epilepsy, alleged that the school failed to plan for and respond appropriately to her seizures, failed to accommodate her related academic needs, and excluded her from the school's competitive Jazz Choir.

On August 20, 2015, U.S. District Court Judge Dean Pregerson, ruled that Downey High School failed to plan for and appropriately respond to S.L.'s seizures during her first year of high school, finding that:

"[I]t seems obvious that if seizures occur suddenly and care must be rendered right away, the staff in closest proximity to the disabled student ought to know how to provide such care... Given that Defendant was on notice of Plaintiff's disability, and given the minimal effort that would have been needed to ensure teachers and staff could carry out the basic instructions in the prior-year [seizure] care plans, the Court concludes that summary judgment for Plaintiff is appropriate as to liability for failure to provide reasonable accommodation during and before Plaintiff's freshman year. . . ."

As Plaintiff S.L. explains: "Nothing can bring back my high school years, and give me the same chances that other students had. But I hope that my case will raise awareness about epilepsy, and what schools need to do to respond. Every school will have students like me. Every school should be prepared for students like me. We all just want a fair shot at an education, and we want to feel safe at school."

Learning Rights' publications 2015

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TIGER

TRAINING INDIVIDUALS FOR GRASSROOTS EDUCATION REFORM: TRANSFORMING CHILDREN'S LIVES, THEIR SCHOOLS AND ENTIRE COMMUNITIES

To understand the need for the TIGER Program and its impact in the community, one must understand the history of special education. Before the turn of the 20th century, the philosophy towards students with special needs was to segregate them out into separate schools, a practice widely thought to be in their "best interest." Homeless students, English language learners, or those hailing from the foster care or juvenile justice systems did not even stand a chance at receiving equal access to public education. Schools exclusively for students with disabilities were the norm until the mid-20th century. After the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 landmark decision in Brown v. Board of Education, parents, advocates, and students challenged the idea of "separate but equal" in multiple educational settings. Emboldened by the Brown decision, educators and advocates subsequently argued that school segregation was not only stigmatizing to students of color but also to students with disabilities and other education-access issues.

Unfortunately, parents and other caretakers of students most at risk of education failure often do not know their rights and participate in the education system without the information necessary to make informed decisions. Limited English-language proficiency and socioeconomic barriers may also make navigating the education system daunting and decision-making difficult. Educational services and protections disappear, and safety nets cease to exist. This makes decades of advancement in education rights null for countless parents and their children. Without the help we can provide, those low-income students never receive the education they deserve. As a result, they lose their chance at achieving economic self-sufficiency and cycling out of poverty.

In 2005, Learning Rights Law Center created TIGER to address this critical societal need. The only program of its kind on the West Coast, the TIGER Program uses intensive, year-long training and mentorship to help low-income parents become better education advocates on behalf of their children. Parents also learn how to promote change in their local school districts. Learning Rights transforms the educational landscape by focusing on three core components of the TIGER Program: teaching parents of children with education-access issues; engaging the community via community groups; and leveraging engagement into reform. To date, TIGER has helped over 3,000 families residing in economically-marginalized communities in Los Angeles County and beyond.

Parents who have learned how to advocate better on behalf of their children share this knowledge with other parents through monthly TIGER Community Group meetings. Through Community Groups, the participants end up playing an integral role in their communities – supporting one another, sharing resources, and mentoring leaders. Four current TIGER Community Group leaders head the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) in their own community. CACs serve to maintain an ongoing interaction between educators and parents and to advise the District on the development of its Special Education Local Area Plan. Their efforts and impact are starting to be recognized. The National Legal Aid & Defender Association and National Legal Service Program bestowed the TIGER Community Group Parent Leaders with its 2015 "Client Contribution Award" for their extraordinary efforts in advancing justice and civil rights of children in their communities.

Leveraging engagement into reform is vital to the sustainability of TIGER's work in the community because it allows TIGER to have an impact long after students have left the Program. Parents work towards reforming the system. They engage in legislative advocacy and develop their own change agenda. In return, their work informs Learning Rights' programs.

IN 2015, LEARNING RIGHTS EXPANDED TIGER FURTHER BY ADDING BEGINNING TIGER TRAINING GROUPS IN LONG BEACH AND IN PACOIMA, SAN FERNANDO VALLEY, AS WELL AS THE TIGER COMMUNITY GROUP IN LONG BEACH.

E-TIGER: BREAKING DOWN GEOGRAPHIC BARRIERS

LEARNING RIGHTS IS PROUD TO ANNOUNCE THE LAUNCH OF E-TIGER – A MULTI-MODAL ONLINE TRAINING SERIES ABOUT EDUCATION RIGHTS THAT WILL ALLOW US TO SCALE THE TIGER PROGRAM. THE E-TIGER TRAINING MODULES ARE CURRENTLY AVAILABLE ONLINE THROUGH THE LEARNING RIGHTS' WEBSITE. EACH CURRENT MODULE REPRESENTS A CHAPTER OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION TOOLKIT, THE TEXTBOOK WE DESIGNED FOR THE IN-PERSON TIGER TRAINING. THE MODULES WILL REPLICATE THE TIGER PROGRAM'S IN-CLASS INSTRUCTIONS, PROVIDING A FULLY INTERACTIVE ONLINE LEARNING EXPERIENCE. THE E-TIGER PORTAL WILL HELP US BREAK GEOGRAPHIC AND SCHEDULING BARRIERS ASSOCIATED WITH TRADITIONAL, IN-PERSON, TEACHING AND EXPAND THE CURRENT REACH OF THE TIGER PROGRAM.

CURRENT TIGER CLASSES:

Beginning TIGER (8 locations)
Intermediate TIGER (3 locations)
Advanced TIGER (1 location)
Advanced Practicum (1 location)
e-TIGER (online)

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