

EQUAL JUSTICE WORKS®

Helping Lawyers Help Community



Christine Nishimura

**Disability Rights
Texas
Austin, TX**

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**Greenberg
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and

**Texas Access to
Justice Foundation**

Equal Justice Works is the national leader in creating public interest opportunities for law students and lawyers. Collaborating with the nation's leading law schools, law firms, corporate legal departments, and nonprofit organizations, Equal Justice Works offers a continuum of opportunities that provide the training and skills that enable attorneys to provide effective representation to underserved communities and causes. Equal Justice Works is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization. For additional information about Equal Justice Works, please visit:
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FELLOWSHIP SUMMARY

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Christine provided legal advocacy, as well as teacher and attorney training, to ensure minority special education students at risk of entering the juvenile justice system receive academically and culturally appropriate literacy programs and other necessary special education services in order to improve educational and life outcomes.

NEED ADDRESSED BY PROJECT

After working as a teacher, and experiencing the educational inequality that exists in this country, especially for minority students, Christine knew that she wanted to do more to protect children from falling behind and falling victim to the "school-to-prison" pipeline. The majority of children who enter the juvenile justice system are considered functionally illiterate, and many of those children suffer from learning disabilities. The ability to help keep these kids in the classroom and out of jail has inspired Christine to commit all of her time and energy to the educational needs of children.

FELLOWSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

In the past two years, Christine has:

- Provided representation to over 100 clients, including full case services to 58 clients
- Filed 10 state agency and administrative complaints against various school districts for their failure to implement students' individual education programs, failure to identify students' special education needs, and failure to educate students in the least restrictive environments
- Conducted training for over 200 parents, students, teachers, and attorneys on special education issues, such as eligibility for specific learning disabilities, appropriate accommodations and modifications for students, and how to support students transitioning out of high school

POST-FELLOWSHIP PLANS

Now that the fellowship is complete, Christine plans to:

- Continue working at Disability Rights Texas as a full time staff attorney on the Education Team
- Prepare for systemic litigation on the state's systematic failure to evaluate and identify students with specific learning disabilities
- Develop a four-part special education series to teach parents about their rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and train pro bono attorneys to provide short-term advice to parents
- Apply to present at the 2015 Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates conference about multicultural reading programs, issues facing minority students, and parents' rights to receive information in their native language