



**Finding and Addressing Gaps to  
Optimize Workflow with Rachel and Tanya**  
(No AI was used to create this title!)

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**Housing and Transportation Team**

# Run of Show

- Who is Disability Rights Texas?
- Who are Rachel and Tanya?
- Workflow and decision-making gaps
- How do we address these gaps?
  - Strategies to save time + money, and better serve people with disabilities
- Peer roundtable discussions
- Let's bring it all home – Housing Accommodation Bingo

# About Disability Rights Texas

- Part of the national Protection and Advocacy (P&A) System established in 1977 through federal law.
- Nonprofit legal firm with the mission to protect and advocate for the rights of Texans with disabilities to ensure their equal participation in society.
- Free legal advocacy services provided to Texans of all ages with a wide variety of disabilities.
- Watch our explainer video to learn more: [www.DRTx.org/WhatWeDo](http://www.DRTx.org/WhatWeDo)

# Services Offered

- Provide direct legal assistance to people with disabilities whose rights are threatened or violated.
- Protect rights of individuals and groups of people with disabilities through courts and the justice system.
- Inform policy makers about how issues impact people with disabilities.
- Educate people with disabilities and family members about their rights.
- Make referrals to programs and services.

# Key Focus Areas

- Accessibility
- Alternatives to Guardianship
- Community Integration
- Disaster Resilience
- Early Childhood Intervention
- Education (K-12)
- Employment
- Healthcare
- Housing
- Institutional Rights and Civil Liberties
- Transportation
- Voting

# DRTx Housing Services

- Address housing discrimination by governments, HOA's, housing providers, and others against persons with disabilities in Texas via:
  - litigation, negotiations, formal and informal advocacy, policy, and other creative means.
- We help people request accommodations so they can enjoy their homes as would a person without a disability (**equitable housing**):
  - Break lease early (DRTx online letter generator)
  - Have a support animal
  - Payment plan (DRTx online letter generator)

# Rachel Cohen-Miller

- Over a decade doing housing discrimination work.
- 9+ years at Disability Rights Texas working with and for a diverse group of people with disabilities.
  - Litigated cases in State and Federal courts against HOA's, cities, landlords, and others.
  - Creative solutions to systemic issues.
    - Addressing debt, evictions, and housing stability.

# Why Rachel Cares

- Person with Disabilities
- Lifetime interacting with People with Disabilities
- Housing
- What roles do I play?
  - Spouse, Parent & Bonus Parent, Child, Teacher, Soap Maker, etc...



# Tanya Lavelle

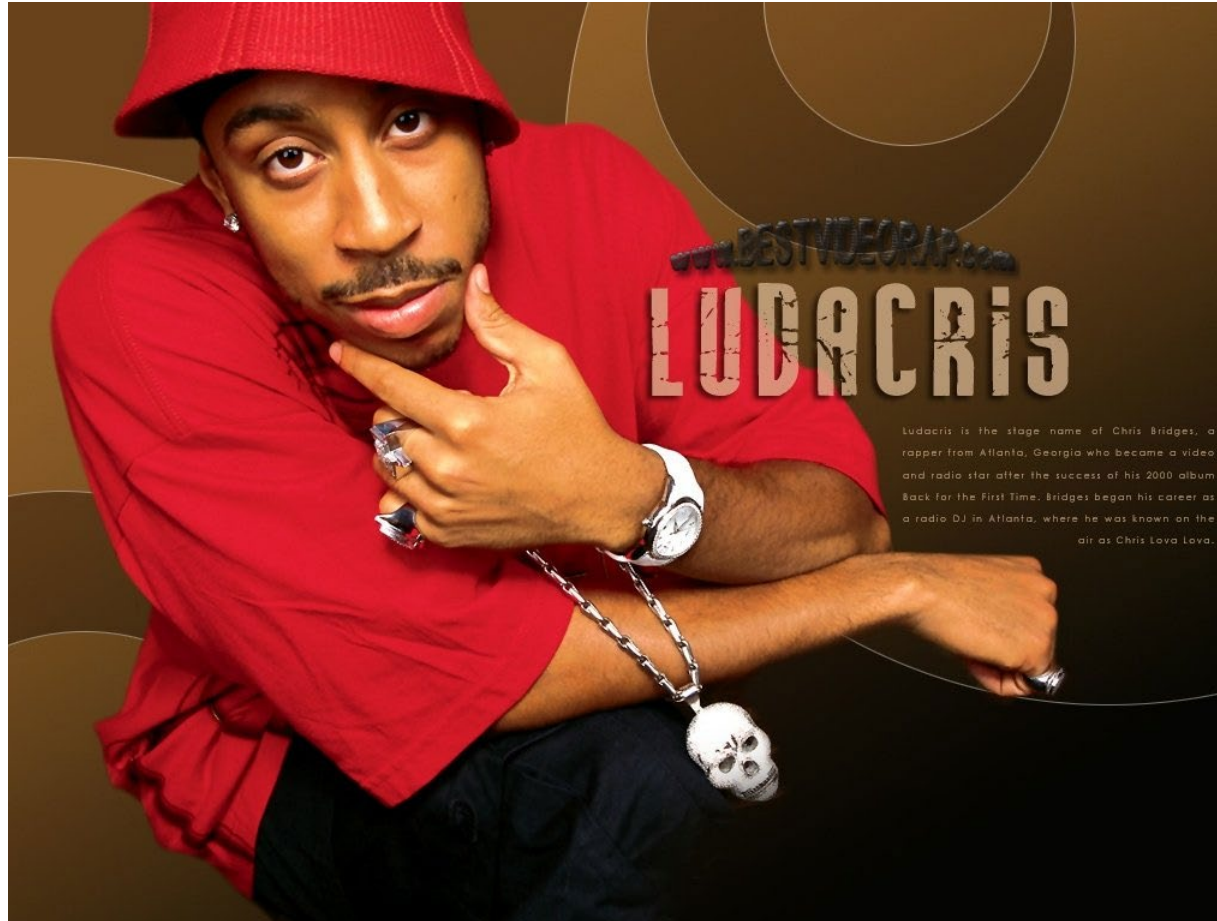
- 13+ years of experience in the policy space
  - Almost 5 years at DRTx
- Focus on the intersection of housing and healthcare
- Just wrapped my 7th Texas Legislative Session
  - Worked on legislation to expand affordable housing, preserve eviction protections and improve disaster response for people with disabilities

# Why Tanya Cares

- Person with invisible disabilities
- Personal experience with a fractured health services system
- Dragged into housing advocacy
  - a learned passion
- What roles do I play?
  - Spouse, parent, activist, baker, musician



# Barriers to Housing are...



# What Kind of Barriers?

- Communication issues
- Internal process issues
- Staff do not know the law
  - Because that's not what they were trained to understand!
  - This is not a staff failure.
  - This area of law is not one talked about a lot
  - Not many attorneys know it so do not feel bad!!!



# What are Some Disability-related Gaps in Homeless Services?

- Awareness of housing rights and protections for people with disabilities
- Communication
- Knowledge of housing assistance programs
- Knowledge of service needs / requirements
- Gaps will vary based on your role
  - Service navigators will see things on the front end, housing providers will see it on the back end

# Housing Rights for People with Disabilities - What is the Law?

- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
  - Federal funding
- Americans with Disabilities Act
  - Governmental entities
  - Places of public accommodation
- Fair Housing Act
  - Applies to most entities that provide housing - any person or entity that can control your housing
  - Helps people find or get funding for housing

# What do the Laws Require?

- Changes to policies, procedures, or programs to make sure people with disabilities get to access the programs.
  - There are limits to what can be changed
- Cannot discriminate because of disability (among other things).
- Housing providers **CANNOT** ask you if you have a disability.
  - They can ask for proof for certain policy changes, but cannot ask you what your specific disability is.

# Reasonable Accommodations (RA)

- RAs are changes to policy, rule or procedure as long as the change is necessary and reasonable.
  - Necessary? Disability-related issue is stopping you from getting housing of your choice.
    - Fridge that opens the opposite way ✓
    - \$8,000 WiFi-enabled fridge ✗
  - Reasonable? Will not cost landlord too much money, cause them too much paperwork, or change their operations.
    - Grab bars in the shower ✓
    - Lowering kitchen bar area ✗
- **One of the primary tools in our toolbox at DRTx**

# Communication

- People with disabilities may need different types of communication to live independently
- Providers may not be aware of a person's communication limitations
  - Service providers will know what a person's needs are, but may not know how they translate to a housing environment
  - Housing providers may not know that PWD could need more assistance
- Breakdowns in communication can cause avoidable issues
  - Difficulty maintaining housing stability
  - Disruption of workflow – keep having to spend time trying to contact the same person.

# How Can we Help Providers Communicate?

- Ask if there is something that will make communications easier for client.
- Consider whether someone is actually being understood:
  - Background noise, audio quality, or internet connection issues
  - Difficulty understanding or processing information – give ‘em a minute
  - Issues with focus or attention
- Make sure communications are accessible:
  - Audio/video/language considerations
  - Does someone require an interpreter or attendant?

# Workflow Issue:

Ever have a call or meeting so unproductive that it throws the rest of the day off? We certainly have...

## Group Discussion with Prizes:

- What goes wrong in those calls or meetings?
- Anything work for you to bring them back?

# Two Broad Categories

## 1. Not Responsive:

- In other words, the other person is not responding to you when you attempt to communicate.
  - Is not responding to questions

## 2. Responsive but not engaging in productive communication:

- Continually gives you information that is not relevant
- Will not stop talking about the same thing
- Is not responding to your questions
- Continually yells or is abusive to staff and refuses to stop when asked

# ID Root Cause

- Environment
- Difficulty understanding or processing information?
- Language barrier?
- Issues with focus or attention?
- Stress / anxiety?
- Something else?

# Fix Non-Responsive Meetings or Calls in 4 Steps!

1. Eliminate potential distractions
2. Eliminate technology issues
3. Give the person time to process
4. Change your question

# Step 1: Eliminate Potential Distractions

- Is the person unable to focus on the conversation?
  - Ask; if so, what can be done to make this conversation productive?
    - move the conversation somewhere quieter.
    - move the meeting to a later day/time.
    - ask if there is something else that would work?

# Step 2: Eliminate Technology Issues

## 1. Is this a call with audio quality issues?

- Does the person have access to a phone without the issues?
- Reschedule for a time when they will have better audio or find another way to get info.

## 2. Is there an internet connection issue?

- Can the person go to a place with better internet? If not, is there another way to get the info needed?

# Step 3: Give the Person Time to Process

1. Sometimes people don't respond to a question immediately.
2. Don't assume that someone does not understand what you have said right away.
3. Give people 10 or 15 seconds to process what you've said!
  - ☐ Ask if they need more time to respond.

# Step 4: Change your Question

- If, after you have given the person 20 seconds to respond they still do not answer, ask:
  - Do you want me to repeat the question?
  - Would you like me to ask the question in another way?
    - If yes, ask questions that only require a yes or no answer.

# 6 Steps To Salvage A Call/Meeting if Conversation is Not Relevant

1. Acknowledge issue
2. Offer referrals or resources
3. Bring it back to the goal
4. Move to another topic or question if there is one
5. Set a time limit for current call or ask if answering written questions is better
6. End the call

# Step 1: Acknowledge the Issue

- Acknowledge what they told you
  - “You have told me that you have experienced X”
  - reiterate what they have said in their own words



# Step 2: Provide Referrals (if any)

- If you have referrals for this particular issue, ask the person if they would like you to check if there are any referrals you can give them to potentially address that issue
  - If Yes: tell them how long it will take you to get them the info, and how you will get the info to them.
  - If No, continue to the next step.

# Step 3: Back to The Purpose

- Explain:
  - what your org does,
  - what you have done so far,
  - what our next steps are; and
  - what you need from this meeting or call to move forward.
- Ask if the person can give you that information during this meeting.

# Step 4: What else do you need?

- Sometimes changing the topic can bring someone back into a conversation.
- If you have other things to find out from the person, ask those questions. If it works and the conversation becomes productive, get the answers to the questions you had to skip at the end!
- If this does not work, it's boundary time!

## Step 5: Tough Love

1. Explain that your time is limited and ask if the person can answer the remaining questions within the \_\_\_\_ minutes that you have left to talk at this time.
2. Can also ask if it would be easier for them to answer the questions in writing via email or on paper.
3. Find another date / time to get the information.

## Step 6: End the Call

Ending calls / meetings is not a bad thing. Sometimes communications are not productive and it may be useful to start again fresh.

# 5 Steps To Salvage A Call / Meeting Where Conversation is on Repeat

1. Acknowledge issue
2. Bring it back to the goal
3. Move to another topic or question if there is one
4. Set a time / way to follow up with them
5. End the conversation

# Step 1: Acknowledge the Issue

1. Acknowledge what they told you: “you have told me that you have experienced X.”
  - Use their own words

# Step 2: Back to the Goal

1. Using simple sentences and terms, reiterate the goal of this conversation and what you need from the person.
2. Get person's confirmation that they will answer your questions so you can move the process forward.

# Step 3: Change Topics

- Sometimes changing the topic can bring someone back into a conversation.
- If you have other things to find out from the person, ask those questions. If it works and the conversation becomes productive, get the answers to the questions you had to skip at the end!
- If this does not work, it's boundary time.

# Step 4: Set up Follow Up

- Acknowledge that you have heard what they have said.
- Explain that you need time to look at what you have and what you still need from them, and you will follow back up with them.
- Find out what the best way to follow up is:
  - Schedule a call?
  - An in-person meeting?

# Step 5: End the Call

- Ending calls / meetings is not a bad thing.
- Sometimes communications are not productive. It may be useful to start again fresh.

# Understanding Housing Assistance Programs

- Housing assistance programs play a critical role in keeping people with disabilities stably housed
- There are lots of programs managed by a variety of groups
  - Local, state, federal entities
  - Non-profit/for-profit organizations
- Very easy for both service and housing providers to miss
- Not knowing available housing assistance programs can cause avoidable issues
  - Service providers can spend tons of time trying to find placement options when programs may already exist
  - Housing providers could be filling units via assistance programs

# How Can we Connect the Housing Program Dots?

- Service providers can help inform housing providers of the available programs serving their clients
  - These programs can help housing providers bolster their bottom line
  - Relieve anxieties of housing providers by service-provider involvement
  - Make it easier for service providers – more options = less digging!
- Housing providers can participate in said housing programs
  - **Voucher programs are open to anyone who wants to take them**
  - Programs specifically for people with disabilities are available
    - Section 811; Supportive Housing Rental Assistance Program (SHR); Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA)

# Service Needs / Requirements

- People with disabilities may require services to stay stably housed:
  - Therapy/medication management
  - recovery assistance
  - housing coordination services
- Service providers work to connect people with appropriate services on the front end so that they are prepared for independent living
- Housing providers may not know that tenants with disabilities have these services in this first place, and this can cause avoidable issues.

# Overall Theme? It's not Change, it's Preparation!

- Partnership between service providers and housing providers can stop a lot of issues before they start:
  - Service providers can educate housing providers about what to expect for specific clients
  - Housing providers can recognize issues related to disability/know who to contact if they need assistance
  - Reciprocal education of available housing programs for people with disabilities
- Education and understanding means less work for everyone, fewer evictions of people with disabilities
- MUCH better outcomes!

# Reasonable Accommodations Keep People Housed

- RA to preserve rights – permit a person
- RA for communication issues – allow for an intermediary to help communicate, or allow communications w/landlord in writing.
- RA for supportive services – might need some leeway

# Table talk! How can we Help?

- Single mother has an 8 year old son with autism.
  - His stimming behaviors can be noisy, including banging on the walls.
- Neighbor files a noise complaint with the landlord.
- Landlord moves to evict.



# Discussion Questions

- What can we do on the front end to create housing stability?
- Solutions to the eviction request?
- What can we do on the back end to prevent an eviction?

# Table Talk Part Deux – How can we Help?

- Client lost their job after symptoms associated with their mental illness started to get worse
  - they were unable to complete activities of daily living (ADL)
  - their anxiety was spiking when they tried to leave the house; and
  - they were out of work for months
- Client was evicted and now, despite steady work, client has an eviction on their record.



# Discussion Questions Part Deux

- What can we do on the front end to create housing stability?
- Solutions to the eviction request?
- What can we do on the back end to prevent an eviction?

# How to Apply for DRTx Services

- Statewide Intake Lines:
  - 1-800-252-9108
  - 1-866-362-2851 (Sign Language Video Phone)
  - 512-271-9391 (Purple 2 Video Phone)
- Online Intake: [Intake.DRTx.org](https://Intake.DRTx.org)
- Self-advocacy resources, information about our services: [www.DRTx.org](https://www.DRTx.org)



# Case #1

- A client is blind and their home is cluttered.
- Their landlord did an inspection and moved to evict them due to the state of their home.
- How did DRTx help this client?
  - We arranged for someone to come clean client's apartment to deal with the clutter.
- Final outcome?
  - The landlord rescinded the eviction notice and client remained stably housed.

# Case #2 (a hypothetical)

- An older client with dementia draws a bath and forgets to turn it off, causing water damage to theirs and their downstairs neighbor's unit.
- Landlord wants to evict due to the damage.
  - Since the client is elderly there's a strong chance that they would be moved from independent living to a facility.
- How could you keep them housed?

# Case #3

- Client gets SSI each month.
- Has not had stable housing for years.
- Had an eviction from 3 years ago where they ended up in a facility and did not pay their landlord rent while they were there.
- How do we get them housed?