



DJJ SPOTLIGHT:

DEVONTE PATE AND THE DETERMINED DJJ CASEWORKERS

As the first person in his family to finish high school, Devonte Pate knew about the role of willpower and determination in the struggle to reach life's goals. But now came the question: Would he ever cross the stage to graduate? The rest of his classmates made the trip without him back in December.

Fortunately, Devonte's personal resolve would not go unnoticed. The Department of Juvenile Justice knew about his struggle and recognized his pursuit of success. This is the story about the conclusion of Devonte Pate's long quest for education and the DJJ team that was there to help him finally make that once in a lifetime trip to collect his high school diploma.

September 2011 was a time of mixed emotions for Devonte Pate.



He was nineteen and going home in time for the holidays. And that created a curious dilemma for Devonte, in fact one that might have made many students at Eastman Youth Development Campus (YDC) wish they could trade places then and worry about finishing school later.

However, Devonte had recently completed his high school requirements during his commitment at the Eastman YDC. And that was the catch: The official graduation ceremony that Devonte had been looking forward to for so long was still four months away in December. But Devonte's release date was scheduled for right now in September.

Here was a guy who had worked hard to better himself and obtain a level of education that no one else in his family had ever been able to achieve. After all he'd overcome, Devonte would be missing out on graduating with his peers and fellow students at the official DJJ high school ceremony. Disappointment was running deep.

But according to schedule, Devonte Pate did go home in September and back at Eastman, the graduation ceremonies went on without him in December. As much as he missed graduating with his classmates, Devonte then realized something even worse: he might have missed all chances to graduate in any kind of ceremony at all.

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Our thanks to former DJJ resident Devonte Pate for permission to use his name in the telling of this story.

Additional special thanks are in order to Ira Caslin-Smith, Carleena Brown, Lester Wright, Coy Satterfield, Dr. Rufus Johnson, Dr. Audrey Armistad, and Joan E. Carroll.

DEVONTE PATE AND THE DETERMINED DJJ CASEWORKERS

That's where a pair of DJJ Juvenile Probation and Parole Specialists stepped in with some willpower of their own. Determined DJJ caseworkers Ira Caslin-Smith and Carlena Brown put together their plan to use the District Four Staff Appreciation Picnic in Griffin, Georgia for a small but special presentation for Devonte in front of his family and friends. Devonte Pate would have his formal graduation after all.



The Court Services Staff helped Devonte's caseworker's bring together guests from the District Four Office, including case managers, clerical staff, and community resource people. Suddenly, Devonte even had RSVP's from VIP's like Regional Principal Dr. Rufus Johnson, Regional Director Margaret Cawood and DJJ Board Member Sandra Heath Taylor.

Only two days before the occasion, Devonte was unaware organizers were still trying to track down a graduation tassel and diploma cover to make his special day complete. No one at DJJ ever expected a search for a tassel could be such a hassle.

How did DJJ caseworkers track down a single tassel under deadline? With team work. Caseworkers Caslin-Smith and Brown enlisted the help of DJJ Student Support Services Director, Coy E. Satterfield and Dr. Audrey Armistad's Administrative Assistant, Joan Carroll.

D J J S P O T L I G H T



After an exhaustive search, Joan Carroll at DJJ Central Office finally made contact with Mr. Lester Wright at Stone Mountain High School. And Mr. Wright in Stone Mountain was able to track down the tassel that would be placed on Devonte's cap for the exercise. But with the presentation only a day away, there was still the problem of how to get that tassel delivered on time. That's when Ms. Carroll made another contact with Dr. Rufus Johnson, the Regional Principal who lives near the Griffin CSO and he also helped with the project.

Finally, on June 7, 2012, the plan conceived by caseworkers Caslin-Smith and Brown all came together: Since they couldn't bring Devonte Pate back to his high school graduation in Eastman, they had found a way to bring a one of a kind graduation ceremony to him.



Devonte Pate received the attention and recognition he deserved for his academic achievement as he was presented his high school diploma by Dr. Johnson at the District Four Staff Appreciation Picnic at Griffin Park.

Graduate Devonte Pate might have left Eastman YDC and his peers behind, but his accomplishments had touched and inspired other members of the DJJ family who helped make his dreams of a formal graduation ceremony come true.

D J J A N D E D U C A T I O N

As Georgia's 181st school district -- the Department of Juvenile Justice places a premium on education. DJJ offers youth in our custody the opportunity to earn a high school diploma from a school system that fully meets the strict standards of the Georgia Department of Education.

DJJ students receive 330 minutes of regular or special education instruction each day and vocational classes are also available to youth committed to the department's care.

Classes are taught by Certified Instructors, including Special Education Instructors in all classrooms.

The department has 27 schools located at the Regional Youth Detention Centers (RYDC) and the Youth Development Campuses (YDC) throughout the state. The high quality curriculum taught at DJJ schools is accredited by both the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and the Correctional Education Association (CEA).

With the Commissioner of the Department of Juvenile Justice serving a key role as School Superintendent -- and with full support of the DJJ Board functioning as the system's Board of Education -- DJJ strives to create positive new experiences in learning so our youth will realize education provides a key to a positive future.





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