

## CFCR's Mission Moments Newsletter



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In honor of **World Mental Health Day** earlier this month, we wanted to raise awareness for the mental health struggles that children in our community face and shine a light on the work we do to give them a voice when they're in crisis. Our team represents children who have been placed in a psychiatric hospital or treatment facility due to mental health issues. **There are thousands of children in our community that need these services and need someone to help guide them and protect their rights.** The Council is proud to serve these children and we hope you will share this newsletter with your friends and family to help us raise awareness for children's mental health. Thank you for your support!

## A Hidden Crisis



Children's mental health is a global crisis that is hidden from view in many ways. Worldwide, 10% of children and adolescents experience a mental disorder, but the majority of them do not seek help or receive care. Families that need specialized care can often end up in severe medical debt.

**Depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents**, and suicide is the fourth leading cause of death in 15-19 year-olds. According to the [World Health Organization](#), the pandemic has severely affected the mental health of young people and they are now disproportionately at risk of suicidal and self-harming behaviors.

**These aren't easy things to talk about, but they're important to understand so that we can do the most we can to help the children in our community.**

Mecklenburg County is not immune to this hidden crisis. More than a third of our high school and middle school students reported feeling so sad or hopeless that they stopped doing some usual activities. **25% of middle schoolers have seriously thought about killing themselves and 12% of high schoolers have attempted suicide.** This data is from the 2019 [Mecklenburg County Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#). Given what we know about how the pandemic has affected mental health, it is unlikely those numbers have improved in the last three years.

The year this data was published our mental health team served 427 children in 864 cases. **This past year we have served 1,074 children in 1,933 cases**—that's twice as many children we were able to help, but also twice as many children needing representation during a crisis in a four-year period.

Multiple factors can affect [children's mental health](#)— their home life, bullying in school, relationships with peers, violence, and more. Adolescents that have experienced trauma are at a [higher risk](#) to experience mental health disorders and mental illness. **Ensuring they have access to safe and appropriate mental health care is essential to improving outcomes for children throughout their lifetime**, including improved interpersonal relationships, career achievement, and financial security.

Mecklenburg County has identified mental health as its #1 priority issue in its [Community Health Assessment](#). **We must come together as a community to ensure we are supporting these children and giving them every possible opportunity to heal and succeed.** Please consider a donation to the Council to support our Mental Health Practice and the children we serve.

## Donate Today

Please contact our Advancement Director Amy Vavra at [amyv@cfcrights.org](mailto:amyv@cfcrights.org) for more information on ways to donate and to get involved.

# Council Changemakers

This month we want to spotlight our Mental Health Staff Attorney  
Anthony Masters

**ANTHONY  
MASTERS**

Staff Attorney,  
Children's Defense Team



### What led you to the Council and how long have you been here?

When I was in undergrad I had a hard time deciding between studying law or psychology and I ultimately chose to become a lawyer. After law school I took a residency at the Public Defender's Office where I often worked with children. Soon after, I found this opportunity to become a Staff Attorney at the Council focused on helping kids with mental health issues and ensuring their rights are being upheld and I immediately knew this job was meant for me. I've now been here a little over a year.

### Tell us about your role here

I'm the only Staff Attorney at the Council solely focused on our mental health practice, which is part of our larger Children's Defense Team. On any given day I'm meeting with children at the facilities they're in, calling their doctors to get updated recommendations on their progress, and contesting hearings as appropriate. I work closely with our team's social worker Cathy King to ensure kids get all the support we can give.

### What do you enjoy most about working at the Council?

I get to be a part of these kids' lives at the moment they need me most— I'm able to give them a voice when they're too scared to speak. Often after their cases close they ask me if they'll ever see me again, and I tell them that even though they probably won't, that's a good thing- that means they're transitioning to a better place and don't need me anymore.

### What do you wish people knew about the Council?

I wish more people knew that these kids exist in our community— most people don't know there are kids in these facilities and psychiatric hospitals getting mental health treatment. I wish more people knew that mental health is a real health issue- mental health is health.

### Outside of work, how do you like to spend your time?

When I'm not spending time with my seven nieces and nephews, I love to go hiking with my partner or running on my own.

### Where are you from or where did you grow up?

I grew up in Florida and moved to the small, quiet town of Advance, North Carolina when I was 15.

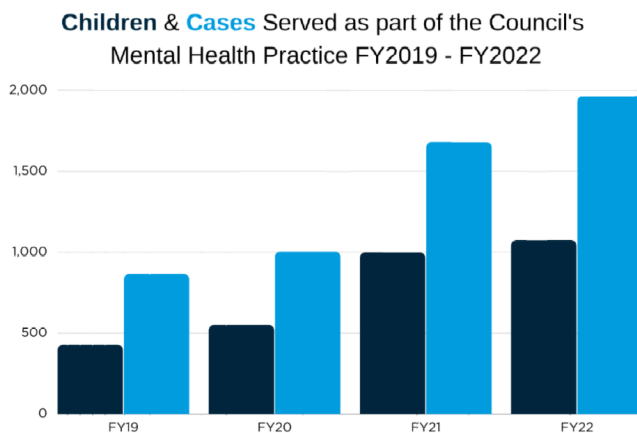
## What We Do

Our [Children's Defense Team \(CDT\)](#) serves as court-appointed attorneys for children between the ages of 6 and 18 who have been placed by the courts in a locked facility like a psychiatric hospital to receive mental health treatment. CDT also represents all children alleged to be delinquent in Mecklenburg County.



Our Mental Health Practice is part of CDT and **represents children experiencing severe and persistent mental health needs** who are confined to the highest level of care— locked facilities. We ensure their needs are met and their constitutional rights are protected during some of their most vulnerable moments.

The need for our services is increasing. As you can see below, **we are serving twice as many children in crisis as we were just four years ago.**



**Our programs, structure, and services are not duplicated anywhere else in North Carolina**, and we are the only specialized juvenile public defender in the state. We are also the only specialized team coupling attorneys like Anthony with social workers to ensure that our children in crisis are getting the best possible representation and care at **no cost to them or their families**.

## How You Can Help

Over the past year, it is clear the children in our community are in crisis- **half of all children the Council served were represented by our Mental Health Practice**. We need more investment in this team so that we can continue to meet the needs of children in our community and give them a voice when they need it most.

**The Council receives no money from the county or city for the services we provide to Charlotte's children.** We rely on generous individual donors, corporate sponsors, and foundations to fund our work. You can support us by donating, volunteering with our teams, and helping us spread the word by telling your friends and family about us.

**Give:** You can [donate online](#) or by sending a check to: ATTN: Council for Children's Rights, 601 East 5th Street, Suite 510, Charlotte, NC 28202. Email [advancement@cfcrights.org](mailto:advancement@cfcrights.org) with any questions and to learn more.

### Give to the Council

**Spread the Word:** We need your help to grow our network and let more people in Charlotte know about us and our work. You can support us by forwarding this email to your friends and family who may not have heard about us yet!

**Volunteer:** We have [multiple opportunities to volunteer](#), most notably with our Custody Advocacy Program (CAP). We are also looking for community members and philanthropists to help accelerate our fundraising efforts. If you're interested in learning how you can get involved, email [advancement@cfcrights.org](mailto:advancement@cfcrights.org).

## Volunteer Training

Become a [Custody Advocate Volunteer](#) with the Council by joining our live volunteer training session on November 30th!

**Custody Advocacy Training**  
**Wednesday, November 30, 2022 8:30 AM – 5:00 PM**

Alston & Bird, LLP  
 7.75 Hours of CLE or CPE Credit (Approval Pending)

The Custody Advocacy Program (CAP) of Council for Children's Rights (CFCR) advocates in family court for the best interests of children caught in the middle of high-conflict custody cases. You can become a part of this unique and rewarding program that seeks solutions for children during a very difficult time in their lives. CAP volunteer attorneys and custody advocates receive intensive training covering various aspects of this specialized program, including: the nuts and bolts of child custody cases to which CAP gets appointed; the local family court rules; divorce and its effects on children; child development; investigating and making best interest recommendations; and expectations of the family court judiciary.

This training is for attorneys who are interested in pro bono representation of children, as well as paralegals and any other non-attorneys who are interested in serving as custody advocates.

**Learn More & Register for Training**

There are also online trainings to become a CAP Volunteer if you can't make the live session. Email [volunteer@cfcrights.org](mailto:volunteer@cfcrights.org) for more information.



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