

CFCR's Mission Moments Newsletter



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We hope this newsletter finds you well and that your 2023 is off to a happy & healthy start! We couldn't be happier to kick off the year with a stellar new Research & Policy Team that will challenge the systems that foster inequities amongst our community's children. This team identifies the root cause of issues our children are facing, finds and promotes innovative solutions, and collaborates with key community and state-wide stakeholders to effect real change. Additionally, we're pleased to share some great examples of Council in the news that we hope you'll take a few minutes to read about.

Also— Tax Letters are in the mail! If you made a donation in 2022 and would prefer an electronic copy, please email advancement@cfcrights.org and we'll send it your way. Thank you so much for your support!

The Root of the Issue:

Understanding Council's Systems Advocacy



An important part of Council's mission is addressing community-wide issues through systems advocacy, research, and policy work. You have probably heard us talking about how our systemic advocacy can have outsized impacts for the children we serve, but you might be wondering: what does that mean exactly?

It means that we find the root causes of the challenges our children are facing and then find creative and innovative ways to fix them. **Our calling is not only to pull people out of the river, but to go upstream to find out what is pushing them in.**

We do this in a few unique ways. While other teams take on the task of providing direct services to children, our Research and Policy Team (RAP) builds on their work by tackling the challenge of the system at large— the very systems that bring our child-clients to us in the first place.

Our Research and Policy Team advocates for systemic changes with a deep understanding of children's multitude of needs. With several high-priority policy focuses and community goals, **RAP's overarching mission is to improve outcomes for children across agencies and infrastructure.** In order for the Council to make well informed and evidence-based decisions and plans, RAP collects and utilizes data on local children, all relevant literature, and the needs of the community at large.

This approach can yield exponential results for children in our community. When we win a systems advocacy case, we not only help the specific child in that case but also all similarly situated children. **That means that any other child experiencing that same issue, whether they were directly represented by us or not, will benefit from the results.**

A great example of this was a case we won last year. Our team filed a complaint with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) against a local school district on behalf of two students enrolled in a virtual academy who were being denied their special education services. We also asked the state to investigate whether this was occurring for other students as well— unfortunately, it was.

DPI found in our favor and required the school district to provide compensatory education services to our two clients as well as all other students similarly impacted. **Our work on behalf of two students has now benefited so many more at no cost to them or their families.**

The Research and Policy Team supports our agency and our community's youth in an essential way that no other team at the Council does. **When we can inform new policies being made and challenge existing policies that result in inequities amongst children, we can improve outcomes for generations of future children.**

We are very excited to share that **we've recently brought on a new Director of Impact and Policy, Robert Pinka, who will lead our Research and Policy Team.** We also just hired a new Policy Advocate to support our work to advance educational equity for children experiencing foster care in North Carolina. Be on the lookout for news and updates from this team over the next few months!

Growing this team is essential to the exponential impact we can have for future generations of our community, and we can't do it without your support. **Please consider a donation today to challenge the systems that harm our community's children and help us build new ways forward that empowers the potential of all children.**

Donate Today

Please contact our Advancement Director Amy Vavra at amyv@cfcrights.org for more information on ways to donate and to get involved.

Council Changemakers

We are pleased to introduce our new Director of Impact and Policy Robert Pinka!

ROBERT PINKA

Director,
Impact and Policy



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

I was introduced to the work of Council through my data evaluation work with [Leading on Opportunity](#) here in Charlotte. When I heard that Council was looking for a new Director of Impact and Policy, I knew that this was the role I had been waiting for. I started a little over a month ago and couldn't be happier with my decision.

Tell us about your role here

I'm currently leading both our internal and external evaluation work. I'm in charge of (a) figuring out how the impact of our lawyers' and advocates' work can be better measured, (b) understanding the challenges that our children face in the community and what resources are available for them, and (c) identifying interventions where Council's expertise can inform system-wide changes that can improve the lives and outcomes of all children in both the greater Charlotte area as well as North Carolina as a whole.

What excites you most about your new role?

I'm most excited about being so close to the work. Working primarily in research and data, it can become easy to disassociate from the communities we serve—the work can become an exercise in efficiency rather than advocacy. However, at Council, I'm working for children, the most vulnerable population there is, so I am always conscious of the people that the statistics and numbers I work with represent.

What inspires you about Council?

I'm most inspired by the level of dedication that is omnipresent in our office. From the infectious energy our defense team, to the fierce protectiveness of our custody team, and the thought and care put into the work of our education law team, there is no shortage of motivation at Council.

What do you wish people knew about Council?

I wish people understood the depth and breadth of the work that goes into every person's job in the organization. To represent a child in court is to advocate for their success in life. It takes a tremendous amount of time getting to know these kids; meeting with caretakers, family members, teachers, therapists, and anyone else who can provide insights into what is best for the child. We aren't trying to win cases, we are trying to ensure that every child has a chance to flourish.

What book or podcast would you recommend to a friend?

I can talk about books forever; I'll literally talk your ear off so I can't tell you my favorite. I also love hearing about what other people are reading even if I don't share those interests. That said, one of my favorite podcasts is 3 Books with Neil Pasricha. He interviews celebrities, CEOs, authors, and everyday heroes to discuss their three most formative books. Every episode is enlightening!

Where are you from or where did you grow up?

I'm originally from Long Island and I spent most of my formative years in New York City. After growing weary of the grueling tempo, I made the move down south and landed in Charlotte, NC.

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

Outside of work, I love to eat and move. I love going to the gym, cycling, hiking, practicing yoga; basically anything that will burn the calories that I will inevitably put right back in! On the weekends, I love to check out new restaurants and cook elaborate meals for my friends and family.

Council in the News

We are so proud of our Education Law Program for all that they do in fighting for our students with disabilities. **Our team members are experts in their field and are committed to informing policymakers and the wider community of the challenges children with special educational needs are facing.** The two articles below are great examples of our work and how collective systemic advocacy can effect real change:

NC Health News: [Schools struggle to retain special ed teachers. Advocates say invest more in them.](#)

Disability Rights North Carolina: [New Lawsuit Asserts North Carolina Discriminates Against Disabled Children in Foster Care](#)

How You Can Help

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.

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!

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 with any questions and to learn more.

Donate to Council



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