

CFCR's Mission Moments Newsletter

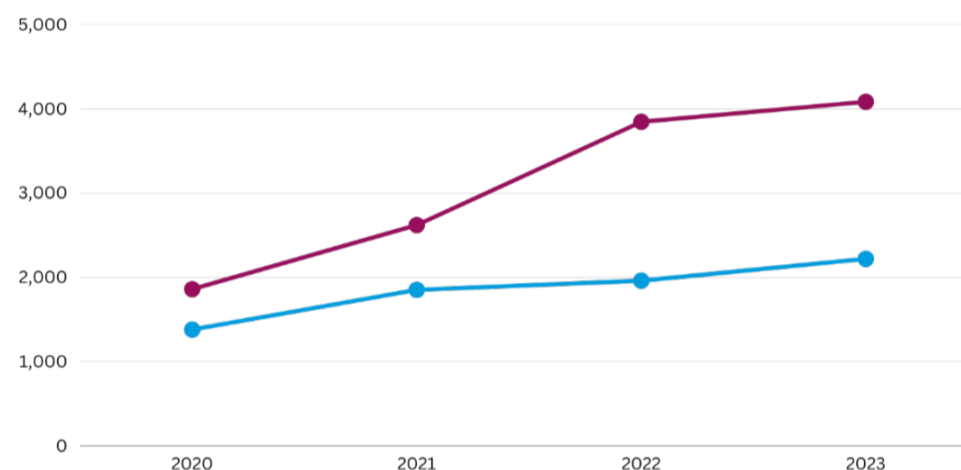


From Heather Johnson <advancement@cfcrights.org>
To <sjohnston@tuesdayforumcharlotte.org>
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Late August means a few things— summer is winding down, kids are getting ready for back to school, and Council just closed out our impact data from the 2023 fiscal year. **This past year, Council served an incredible 2,222 children in 4,086 cases.** While we're proud we were able to serve 13% more children this year than last year, it is clear that the need for our services are increasing.

Council is serving more Children in more Cases than ever before



The detrimental effects of the pandemic on children's learning, behavioral issues, and mental health have been exponential and long-lasting. **The resources to help these children not only catch up, but survive, are just not there.**

Schools are struggling to attract and retain licensed Special Education teachers, behavioral specialists, and counselors— and are increasingly relying on suspensions as a solution to any kind of problem. **Mecklenburg County Schools lead the state in expulsions— 46% of all expulsions in the state happen in our community.** Sadly, North Carolina [leads the country](#) in suspending students with disabilities. Exclusionary discipline is ineffective and leads to worse outcomes for students over time, it should not be our go-to solution for struggling students.

Many of the trends we're seeing create cyclical situations where children are falling through the cracks— children experiencing mental health issues are acting out at school and getting suspended instead of treatment. When they do receive treatment, they often aren't getting an education at these centers, putting them further behind their peers. Bullying is an increasing problem where neither the victim nor perpetrator is getting the support they need to thrive.

Our children are the future of Charlotte, and they need our help. They need their community to meet them where they are, and experts that can help navigate the outdated systems that aren't set up to solve today's problems. **We've made real progress in the past year— we're serving more children, working with more partners, hosting more community trainings, and building out our team.** We look forward to serving our community's children for many years to come with your help.

Support Our Kids

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

Council in the News



Caitlin Whalan Jones, Director of Council's Education Law Program, sat down for an interview with [WCNC Charlotte](#) on how North Carolina relies on lengthy exclusionary discipline for students with disabilities more than any other state.

"We don't talk about it enough. We've started to talk about it more, because of the pandemic," she said of the problem. **"School feels like just another place where (these kids) don't belong, which is heartbreaking,** because as a society, we think of education as this way out, but if we're saying it's only education for some or only students who behave in a certain way, that's not what we as a society, we as North Carolina, have said about education and how we perceive education should be."

She knows the research shows exclusionary discipline is ineffective, plus a precursor to dropping out of school and potential criminal behavior.

"Taking a child out of school is not beneficial and so, we really want to be selective when we are using that disciplinary consequence," Whalan Jones added. "There are lots and lots of options before we remove a student from a classroom. **What we really need to be doing for these students is providing them the support and skills and tools to change the behavior.**"

[Read the story and watch her full interview here.](#)



Council Changemakers

This month we want to spotlight our Summer Intern, Leena Saif

Leena SAIF



Summer Intern

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

I have always had a strong passion for "the right thing" and realized that law might be the route for me. In Chicago, I had talked to the Deputy Mayor about this and he told me and a group of peers that getting involved in nonprofits, businesses, and politics was the key towards being well rounded not only as a lawyer, but as a civil servant. This ultimately led to me joining The Merancas Foundation as their Summer Intern and part of the program places me with two of their grantees. I had already spent June with The Relatives and worked with their administrative side. Everyone at the foundation knew how passionate I was about pursuing a legal degree and had placed me with Council to get first-hand legal experience.

Tell us about your role here

At the Council I do a wide variety of things depending on the day. On the days I work with the Defense Team, I go to court and shadow the lawyers during their detention hearings. I'm sure to ask questions because I typically have a lot. When working with the Custody Team, I take notes during parent conferences, help prepare for custody trials, and get familiar with the cases handed to Council. When I have a bit more downtime then I'm typically working on a side project with Amy, Heather, or Robert.

What do you enjoy most about working at Council?

I love how welcoming and fun everyone is here. Honestly, this is the first time I've sat with this many legal professionals and all of them love their jobs. Everyone is so understanding with my questions and making sure that I fully understand what's going on in and outside of the courtroom.

What inspires you about Council?

How dedicated everyone is to their work is what inspires me and solidifies my desire to be a lawyer. The passion and work put in to ensure the safety and happiness of as many children as possible is so heartwarming.

Where are you from or where did you grow up?

I grew up in Charlotte and spent practically my entire life in the Queen City. I currently go to school at the University of Chicago, and while I love the windy city, my heart is still with the 704.

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

Outside of work you can find me trying a new dessert recipe, reading a superhero comic, going to brunch with my friends, or watching movies with my brothers. On a more academic side, I spend a lot of time as a board member of my school's mock trial program and preparing for tournaments during the school year.

Support Summer

Thank you to everyone that generously donated to help keep summer fun for our kids! **You all helped us raise \$69,210- a full 38% over our \$50K goal!** These gifts will directly support children in need as the new school year starts.



Celebrate with Council

Council is making it easy to celebrate this holiday season.

We're asking you to join us in creating a new tradition of making change in the lives of the children we serve by planning for the holidays early! Below are four stress-free, impactful ways to plan for the upcoming holiday season— [email us today](#) to let us know how you'd like to celebrate with us!

Giving Program

Plan a Giving Program at your workplace, civic club, country club, professional association, or neighborhood/friend group. Start today and create a group that is committed to donate monthly from now until December— we'll take care of the details! On December 8, 2023, join us for breakfast to hear about the incredible change you have made. We will announce and celebrate the group that donated the highest amount.

Break the Barrier Breakfast

Organize a holiday breakfast for your close friends or coworkers and invite us to come speak about the stories of our amazing children and how you can make a difference in their lives. Break the barriers they face by bringing a bus pass, gift card for food, or a journal to the breakfast. A bus pass ensures a child can get to therapy and school, a gift card ensures they have food during school break, and a journal is a wonderful coping tool for youth struggling over the holidays. (Lunch or Dinner works too!) [Book us soon](#) before the dates are filled!

Be the Change. Be a trendsetter. BE AN INSPIRATION

Be a changemaker at your workplace by proposing that your workplace forgo the holiday lunches, galas, or dinners. Instead, ask your workplace to support our youth by donating the amount typically spent on these holiday gatherings. We can also help provide the information and tools to set a donation goal for your workplace. The amount you forgo can make real and lasting change in the life of a child.*

**Did you know that \$500 provides 10 children with trauma-informed mental health and education assessments? \$2,500 restores safety, stability, and security for a sibling group caught in a high-conflict custody battle— and \$8,216 covers the full daily cost for all services at Council.*

Have all of your holiday shopping done on December 8th!

Block your calendar now! Join us for breakfast and bring your address book! In lieu of gifts this year, make a donation in honor of your friends and family. During the holiday season, let that person know that they have inspired change in the life of a child, a legacy that will not be forgotten. This gift will be memorialized in a beautiful card delivered to your loved ones. All of your holiday shopping can be done in just one hour while you drink hot coffee, eat pastries, and hear about the impact you are making on the life of a child. Make it a stress free holiday season— bringing the addresses of your loved ones and Council staff will address and mail the cards that day on your behalf to ensure your gift arrives on time!



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