

CFCR's Mission Moments Newsletter



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The holidays are approaching fast—can you believe Thanksgiving is next week? This time of year can bring its own expectations, joys, and challenges. For children with parents that are in conflict, this season can be especially difficult. Council's Custody Advocacy Program (CAP) works with children, their families, and the courts to find solutions to custody issues that will lead to the best outcomes for the children involved.

Beyond our work for children, Council is also here to make your holiday easier! Scroll to the bottom of this email for some special ways that you can change lives this holiday season while knocking some gifts off your list!

Fatherhood Restored: Faith & Isaac's Story

Council was appointed to represent two young, bright, and wonderful siblings—Faith (4) and Isaac (2)—in their parent's high conflict custody dispute, after the father had filed for custody. The children lived full-time with their Mother and she was only allowing their Father to have supervised visitation once a week at her residence despite his multiple requests to see the children more often. Prior to our appointment, the Father's visitation was completely ceased after the Mother alleged that the Father had inappropriately touched Faith, an allegation he adamantly denied.

After a thorough investigation into the allegations by the Department of Social Services and [Pat's Place Child Advocacy Center](#), both the Pat's Place interviewer and DSS were unable to substantiate the allegations of abuse, and both raised concerns that Faith had been coached by her Mother. As Council began to conduct our investigation, it became clear that there were going to be roadblocks placed by the Mother. She refused to sign release authorizations for the children's medical, school, and therapy records, refused to respond to Council emails and phone calls, and refused access to the children. She stopped responding to the Father and wouldn't share any information about the children.

Despite these roadblocks, Council continued to fervently advocate for the children. The team was able to speak with Faith's previous counselor, who indicated that she felt it was imperative to preserve the relationship between Faith and her father. With that goal in mind, the team completed phone calls with her Father's collateral witness, reviewed his background check and counseling records, and conducted a home visit. The team was able to establish that their Father was a fit, safe, and suitable parent to care for the children.

Due to mom's lack of cooperation, the team did not have any access to Isaac, and was only able to meet Faith by showing up at her school. **The school visit was the most insightful part of the team's investigation, and drastically altered the course of the case.** When the team arrived at the school, their Mother was present. The team learned that the Mother picked up Faith from school every day two hours early because she did not want her to participate in the reading curriculum or in recess. When the team spoke to Faith's teachers, they learned that Faith informed her classmates that "her Father was dead." The team also learned that Faith was on a very strict diet and could not participate in any school parties or activities with other students. Following this school visit, the team felt strongly that her Mother had alienated the children from their Father and felt that the case needed to be set for trial immediately.

When the case came to trial, Faith and Isaac's Father had not seen or spoken to his children in over 2 years. At trial, the team zealously advocated for Faith and Isaac and recommended that their Father be given primary custody with their Mother having supervised visitations. **The team presented evidence that established their Father's ability to love and care for his children, his support system in Charlotte, and his capability of taking primary care of the children.** The team also presented evidence to show the alienation caused by Mother, and the harmful effect it has had on the children. After hearing the evidence presented by Council and the arguments made by the Staff Attorney, the Judge found that this was one of the worst cases of parental alienation she has ever seen, and she ordered the Father to have permanent custody of Faith and Isaac with the Mother having supervised visitations.

Since the Court's ruling, Faith and Isaac's Father has been able to celebrate Father's day, birthdays, and take the kids on vacation. He has involved the children in counseling, taken them to the doctor, and enrolled them in school. Without our involvement in this case, Faith and Isaac would never have been given the chance to develop a relationship with their father. **Council's passionate work and dedication to these children provided them an opportunity to grow up with their father in their lives.** Council successfully accomplished our goal of advocating for the best interest of Faith and Isaac.

In the past year, Council's CAP team served 202 children in 124 of Mecklenburg county's toughest custody cases. No other group is able to offer these services to families, and no family or child will ever have to pay for Council's efforts. These cases can often take years to finish and are some of the most difficult cases to advise on. Our work for these children is supported primarily through generous individual donors like yourself. This holiday season, please consider a gift to Council to help change children's lives for the better.

Donate Today

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

How Does CAP Work?

The Council for Children's Rights Custody Advocacy Program accepts court appointments in the highest-conflict Mecklenburg County child custody cases to represent the best interests of the child or children caught in the middle of those cases.

Our program utilizes a structured team approach to investigate each case. Each team consists of a staff attorney, a volunteer attorney, and a volunteer custody advocate. You can learn more about our [volunteer opportunities here](#).

- **Appointment:** We are appointed by Mecklenburg County Family Court Judges to advocate for the best interests of children in custody cases in which the conflict between their parents threatens to impede the judge's inquiry into and determination of the children's best interests.
- **Investigation:** We investigate all the circumstances and facts of the case by interviewing clients and collateral witnesses, conducting home visits, and gathering a variety of records and documents, which enables us to take a position regarding what is in the children's best interest.
- **Children First:** When we are court appointed to a case, we never represent adults or parents involved. We only represent the best interests of the child or children involved.

In cases where neither parent has representation, part of our service to the children and to the Court is in helping both parents navigate the complexities of the court system, while ensuring the judge hears all relevant evidence.

While we don't represent the parents, getting their case through the court process smoothly and efficiently is most certainly in the best interest of the children we represent. Children need resolution in their parents' cases so that they are not staying in unsafe or unsuitable environments, changing schools mid-year, or in limbo about where they're going to be living.

And anything that leads to litigation coming to an end and the parties being able to shift their focus away from fighting that battle and towards caring for their children is always best for our child-clients.

Council Changemakers

This month we'd like to highlight Linda Hurlbert, JD, one of the staff attorneys on our Custody Advocacy Team!

LINDA
HURLBERT

Staff Attorney



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

It took me a while to figure out what I wanted to be when I grew up. My career path has included becoming a partner in a large law firm, clerking for a federal judge, and practicing law in a small boutique firm. While working at my last job, I decided to volunteer on the Council's custody advocacy team and got hooked on the work they do. I found it to be extremely interesting and challenging, and fulfilling in a way that I had not previously experienced. I realized that I wanted to be a lawyer who helps children.

Tell us about your role here

I am an attorney on the CAP team. We help children impacted by divorce by representing their best interests in high conflict custody cases. We start by conducting a detailed investigation of their families in order to uncover issues that are adversely affecting the children such as domestic violence, substance abuse, neglect, and parental alienation. We then work with the families to get the resources they need to in order to heal by matching them up with resources in the community. Our ultimate job is to either help the parents resolve their custody dispute by consent or, if that isn't possible, to make a custody recommendation to the Court at trial.

What inspires you about Council?

My colleagues. The work we do is rewarding but it can also be demanding, frustrating and at times exhausting. However, my co-workers show up day after day and gladly embrace the opportunity to improve the lives of children. My team. They support each other unconditionally and offer pearls of wisdom when needed. Our volunteers. They sacrifice time from their real jobs and even time with their families in order to assist us with our work. The Board. Serving on a board of directors can often be a thankless job but we couldn't do the work we do without their commitment to the health of our organization.

What do you wish people knew about Council?

One of the most common misconceptions is that we are government funded or that we are funded by the court system. In reality, the Council relies on grants and private donations to fund our work. Another misconception is that we all do the same thing but in actuality the Council is comprised of three different teams that are engaged in different types of work. We are also engaged in changing public policy.

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

I love hanging out with my children and will do whatever it takes to spend time with them including watching shows on Netflix in which I have very little or no interest. I also watch a lot of football with my husband. My favorite outdoor activities include riding my bike on the greenway and taking my yellow lab to the dog park.

Where are you from and where did you grow up?

I was born and raised in Charlotte and am a proud product of the public school system. By the time that I graduated college and returned to Charlotte twenty years later, the city had undergone massive expansion and economic development. While some like to believe that "a rising tide lifts all boats," this is not always the case. Children in our community are especially vulnerable and far too many of them are affected by rising rates of poverty, crime, family breakdown, educational challenges, and mental health struggles. I am proud of the work the Council does to address these issues.

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 three 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!

Donate a gift of stock

Are you looking for a smarter way to support Council this year? Donating stock is one simple way you can give a powerful gift, while avoiding the capital gains tax. It can make a huge difference for Council and is also advantageous for you! Email advancement@cfcrights.org for more information or find the instructions at www.cfcrights.org/donate.

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 early!

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. Make it a stress free holiday season— reply to this email and Council staff will address and mail the cards to ensure your gift arrives on time!

Email our team at advancement@cfcrights.org for more information and to book your celebration today!



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