OPD OFFICE OF THE PARENT DEFENDER

Interdisciplinary Parent Representation Program

The mission of the Office of the Parent Defender's Interdisciplinary Parent Representation (IPR) Program is to defend the rights of parents navigating the abuse, neglect, and dependency system in North Carolina by providing high quality, holistic representation through zealous legal advocacy in and out of court coupled with strengths-based, compassionate, and comprehensive social work services.

December 2023-February 2024 Report

As of 2/29/2024	IPRP started 10/1/2022	IPRP started 11/1/2022	IPRP started 12/1/2022	IPRP started 2/1/2023	IPRP started 10/1/2023	IPRP started 2/5/2024
County	**Cleveland**	**Mecklenburg**	**Buncombe**	**New Hanover**	**Wake**	**Lincoln**
Assignments (from IPRP start)	48	31	106	62	15	5
Open (ACTIVE)	36	18	54	38	15	5
Open (INACTIVE)	02	0	13	13	0	0
Waitlist	0	0	0	1	7	0
Closed	10	13	39	11	0	0

News and Updates

County work:

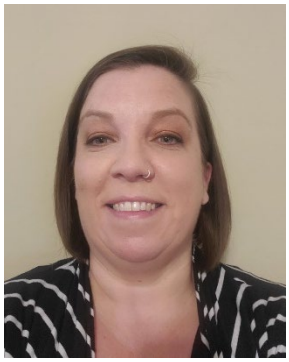
- Site visits by Program Manager to Mecklenburg County 12/8/2023 and 2/15/2024, Cleveland County 12/18/2023, and New Hanover County 2/2/2024.
- Buncombe County- START Program presentation given to the Buncombe IPRP SWs from DSS staff on 12/11/2023.
- Wake County-Two new contract social workers were hired to fill vacancies on 2/27/2024. Ms. Danielle McLean and Ms. Jeri Frumes will start 3/18/2024.
- Lincoln and Cleveland Counties: Lincoln County Kickoff Meeting was held on 1/31/2024. Attorneys completed training and met Cleveland County IPRP social workers who will be working both counties. Social Worker assignments began 2/5/2024.

Community Connections:

- IPR Program Manager and Parent Defender presented to the DSS Director's meeting on 12/13/2023.
- IPR Program Manager met with the UNC Horizons- Wake Program Manager to discuss their Recovery and Reentry Program. They service child welfare involved, incarcerated women.
- The IPR Program continues to receive inquiries from MSW students interested in the area of interdisciplinary social work and internship opportunities, as well as from various DSS agencies who are interested in bringing the program to their county.

Meet the Team

Sara Ward earned her Master of Social Work Degree from Washington University and a Bachelor of Social Work from UNC-Greensboro. Her professional career experience includes positions as Social Worker for the Council for Children's Rights on the Children's Defense Team, a Foster Care Specialist for Children's Home Society of NC, and a Juvenile Justice Behavioral Health Consultant and Trainer at UNC-Greensboro. She specializes in forensic social work and has spoken on this subject at legal conferences locally, regionally, and nationally. She believes social work and the law are a perfect match and enjoys helping people understand what social workers bring to the table and how they add value in the legal arena. She became a social worker to fight for justice and believes that forensic social work is the perfect avenue for doing so.



What do you find most rewarding about being a Social Worker for the IPR Program? The independence and creativity the Interdisciplinary Parent Representation Program allows me to apply to social work practice, and I enjoy delving into both the micro and macro issues this work entails.

Success Stories

In February, I met Ms. K., originally from a country in Africa. After her parents were killed, she fled to a neighboring country at the age of 9 where she lived for 16 years before coming to the US. She had 3 children in Africa and 2 in the US. Her baby became ill, and she took him to the doctor in Charlotte. She was told the baby was fine and was sent home, but she knew something was wrong and she took him to another doctor. This happened 4 times until it was determined the baby had a head bleed and meningitis. He underwent brain surgery and was released to a TSP after having a G-Tube placed. Some medical professionals suspected abuse and others didn't. What's clear is that Ms. K. saved her baby's life.

This mom has done everything she's been asked to do. DSS recommended Intensive In-Home. She did it. Twice. DSS said learn how to use the G-Tube. She did it. DSS said bring some other people to learn how to use the G-Tube so they can feed the baby while you're at work. She did it. DSS said get up early to visit with your child when you work overnights. She did it.

Luckily, the Judge eventually recognized Ms. K's efforts, and while she proceeded with understandable caution based on what was presented to her, the attorney and I fought hard. I am happy to report that custody was divested to Ms. K. today. The attorney and I are going to pick up the now 2-year-old baby tomorrow and take him home to his mom and his siblings. I sobbed after court, and maybe a little bit during!

I'm so overjoyed I don't even have words for it. I truly, truly believe that the IPRP made a difference in this case. Baby A is healthy and thriving AND HE'S GOING HOME!!! Sara K. Ward, MSW

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