

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.

January 2025-March 2025 Report

As of 3/31/2025	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
We are transitioning our data collection method and data for this quarter is not yet finalized.						

News and Updates

County Work and Community Connections:

- January's Learning Community Session was Tax Preparation for Contract Social Workers.
- IPR Program Manager completed Mecklenburg county visit on 2/7/2025.
- IPR Program Manager and Parent Defender met with staff from Colorado's Office of Respondent Counsel and a Durham parent with lived experience to discuss Colorado's peer partnership program on 2/19/2025.
- IPR Program and Deputy Parent Defender met with representatives from the Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights to discuss programing and collaboration on 2/20/2025.
- OPD office attended Intensive Parent Defender Training at the UNC School of Government on 3/6 and 3/7, 2025.
- IPR Program Manager served as guest panelist for Fayetteville State University's School of Social Work on 3/26/2025.

Meet the Team



Carrie Crow. Mrs. Carrie Crow earned her BSW degree from East Carolina University. Her professional career experience includes positions as a Family In-Home Services and After Hours/ On Call Social Work Supervisor, and Investigative Social Worker at Cleveland County Department of Social Services. She has been working as an Interdisciplinary Parent Representation Program Social Worker in Cleveland County since October 2022.

What do you find most rewarding about being a Social Worker for the IPR Program? What I have really come to love about my role in this program is that it gives me the opportunity to truly understand the meaning of being a part of a village of support for a parent, even if they are separated from their children. It has been so rewarding to be able to be a villager for so many of my clients. The flexibility and privileges regarding confidentiality that comes with this role make a huge difference when it comes

to my working relationships with clients. I know it means the world to many of my clients to have someone who has their back but will also encourage accountability.

Success Stories

I was assigned to this case involving substance use with a heavy dose of poverty and lack of good support. The two children were removed from mom's custody in 2024. When I began working with my client and her boyfriend, they had already been heavily engaged in services and were almost finished. Losing custody of her children was a huge hit to her and she expressed many stories about the mental trauma she went through, especially between the first half of 2024. The children were placed separately 45-70 minutes away in different counties and she battled with the parenting style of the therapeutic foster parent who would withhold phone calls from the boy as punishment.

Although things seemed difficult for my client, one thing that really changed the outcome was the support from her boyfriend. Prior to working with the IPRP, my client and her boyfriend were homeless but were actively looking for stable housing. They were able to find a place to stay with a friend who offered room and board in exchange for basic caretaking. This led to my client getting hired with a company to take on more clients as a caretaker/home health aide. After a few months she was able to begin looking for housing for herself, boyfriend, and children.

We drove all around since transportation was a barrier, looking for homes and sharing their story in hopes of a landlord giving sympathy to the situation and overlooking their lack of rental history. We were able to find a property with the only company they could get approved for. It was several miles outside the city limits, so the transportation barrier increased a little, but we made it work!

They were able to borrow a vehicle from a trusted friend for a couple months, which was crucial as they had been granted unsupervised visitation with the boys. They were more than happy to drive the hour to go pick the kids up and bring them back to visit! Things really began to turn around quickly from there. They were able to buy a trustworthy vehicle, and my client got her license back! Her children were placed in a trial home placement a few months after that, and intensive home therapy was put in place for the boys.

My client was able to have custody returned to her in DSS court, within a timeframe of 336 days. With her hard work and persistence, she got them back in under a year! She went from legitimately homeless and sleeping in a tent a year ago, to where she is now! She has so many new goals for herself, with the first being completing her GED to expand her job options. We are all so incredibly proud of her progress and I hope that one day soon, I will be able to share more about this family, as mom has decided to begin writing a book about her experience!

OPD CONTACT INFORMATION 919-354-7230

Wendy Sotolongo, State Parent Defender
Wendy.C.Sotolongo@nccourts.org

Sharice Zachary, IPR Program Manager
Sharice.J.Zachary@nccourts.org