

Collaboration at Its Finest

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When I think of effective collaboration, I think of Kiesha Crawford, manager of the Juvenile CIP at the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts. She knows how to do it well. I love her “let’s figure out how we can make this happen” attitude. While adhering to agency guidelines (which, with a federally funded program, are numerous), she is willing to step out of the box and strategize with partners to advance the mission of the program. Along with others at SOG, I have worked closely with Kiesha and seen her tenacity in action. CIP and SOG have been collaborating for several years to provide relevant training and resources for judges and lawyers working in the area of abuse, neglect, and dependency law.

You may be familiar with SOG, but perhaps CIP is not part of your acronym vocabulary. I will explain what CIP is and how we have been working together to improve court practices.

What is CIP?

The Court Improvement Program (CIP) is a federally funded project to improve court practice in child abuse, neglect, and dependency cases. The North Carolina Court Improvement Program (NC-CIP), based in the state Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), receives grant awards from the [Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau](#). Since the initial grant award in 1995, NC-CIP funds have been distributed to twenty-three of North Carolina’s judicial districts to provide staff who perform case management activities and training.

The NC-CIP mission is to improve the performance of North Carolina's Juvenile Courts in abuse and neglect cases so that safety, permanence, and well-being for each child are achieved in a fair and timely manner. One strategy is to support and create collaborative efforts and training opportunities for judges, attorneys, and community partners. SOG has partnered with NC-CIP to provide training and education across disciplines.

School of Government (SOG) Partnerships with NC-CIP

[Abuse, Neglect, Dependency, and Termination of Parental Rights Manual](#)

The Abuse, Neglect, Dependency, and Termination of Parental Rights Manual is designed as a reference manual and training tool for everyone who works in this challenging field. It is intended to assist district court judges, social service attorneys, parent attorneys, and guardian ad litem attorney advocates.

Production of this manual was made possible with funding provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—Administration for Children and Families, and the Court Improvement

Program of the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts. The first edition of the manual, issued in 2011, was authored by Kella W. Hatcher, now Executive Director of the North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force, Janet Mason, now retired Professor of Public Law and Government, and John Rubin, Albert Coates Professor of Public Law and Government, with the assistance of a diverse advisory committee, including a district court judge, clerk of court, several attorneys representing different parties, and AOC Court Programs staff. With support from NC-CIP, SOG has continued to update the manual and issue new editions, the latest co-authored by SOG faculty member Sara DePasquale, Assistant Professor of Public Law and Government. The manual is designed for online use; however, practitioners may download or print it. You can find the manual [here](#) on the SOG website. You can also find a link to the manual on the [Indigent Defense Manual Series](#) website under Other Manuals.

Webinar

In December 2014, NC-CIP partnered with SOG to provide a live, two-hour webinar on *Preparing Good Court Orders*. It was designed for judges and attorneys working in child welfare cases. The presenters were Sara DePasquale; Deana Fleming, formerly Associate Counsel, Guardian Ad Litem Program and now Assistant Legal Counsel, AOC; Wendy Sotolongo, Parent Representation Coordinator, Office of Indigent Defense Services; and Angie Stephenson, formerly Assistant Attorney General, North Carolina Department of Justice and now Attorney, Holcomb & Stephenson. The webinar helps practitioners learn how to draft and enter well-written orders that are legally correct. It was recorded and can be viewed free on this SOG [webinar page](#). Thanks to CIP support, participants can also pay a small fee if they want CLE credit.

Child Welfare Training

The Indigent Defense Education group at the School, with which I work, typically develops training and resources for defenders representing indigent clients in criminal and civil cases. In partnership with NC-CIP and the North Carolina Office of Indigent Defense Services (IDS), we offered hands-on training for all child welfare attorneys, breaking down the barriers of training one group at a time. We were only missing judges and, ironically, a group of new district court judges was in the training room next door.

Thirty parent attorneys, Department of Social Services attorneys and guardian ad litem attorney advocates convened at the SOG in Chapel Hill, NC for a two-day intensive trial skills program on March 9-10, 2017. Illustrating its appeal, the training was full within a few days after registration opened! Through a combination of lecture and small group work, participants worked on their litigation skills. And, I do mean worked. Over the course of the two-day program, participants heard presentations on different trial skills and immediately practiced the skills in workshops. The feedback was positive so perhaps there is more to come.

I enjoy working with Kiesha and her staff to develop training and resources for our legal

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professionals. SOG looks forward to continued collaborations with NC-CIP to improve court practice in child abuse, neglect, and dependency cases. If you want to learn more about the Court Improvement Program in North Carolina, see “[Court Improvement for Children and Families](#)” on the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts website.