

An unpublished opinion of the North Carolina Court of Appeals does not constitute controlling legal authority. Citation is disfavored, but may be permitted in accordance with the provisions of Rule 30(e)(3) of the North Carolina Rules of Appellate Procedure.

IN THE COURT OF APPEALS OF NORTH CAROLINA

No. COA23-973

Filed 2 April 2024

Mecklenburg County, Nos. 19 JT 313-14

IN THE MATTER OF: A.J.C.R., C.A.S.

Appeal by Respondent-Mother from an order entered 25 July 2023 by Judge Aretha V. Blake in Mecklenburg County District Court. Heard in the Court of Appeals 5 March 2024.

Mecklenburg County Senior Associate Attorney Kristina A. Graham, for Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services, Youth & Family Services, Petitioner-Appellee.

McGuire Woods LLP, by Ami P. Patel, for Guardian ad Litem.

Anné C. Wright, for Respondent-Appellant Mother.

WOOD, Judge.

Respondent-Mother (“Mother”) appeals from the trial court’s order entered 25 July 2023 terminating her parental rights to two of her children. For the reasons

stated herein, we affirm.

I. Factual and Procedural History

Mother has three children,¹ two of whom are the subject of this appeal, Caleb, born 7 March 2007, and Amy, born 25 April 2012.² In 2019, Mother was diagnosed with schizophrenia and was hospitalized for three months. The children resided with their maternal aunt and uncle during this time. While hospitalized, Mother reported that she caught her father, the children’s maternal grandfather, “watching pornography with [Amy].” The grandparents denied this, and the children did not report any abuse; therefore, this report was unsubstantiated. On 12 August 2019, the Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services, Youth, and Family Services (“DSS”) received a child protective services report which included an allegation that Mother had left Amy alone with the maternal grandfather who had sexually abused Mother when she herself was a minor and that the maternal grandmother “aided and abetted the sexual abuse.”³ At some point, the maternal aunt and uncle filed an action seeking custody of the children, and mediation was scheduled for 15 August 2019. However, mediation was “rescheduled several times due to [Mother’s] failure to provide” a letter from her treating psychiatrist stating she is able to care for her

¹ Mother’s third child was born in September 2022. This child is not a subject of this appeal.

² Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the juveniles pursuant to N.C. R. App. P. 42(b).

³ The juvenile petition alleges that Mother admits her father sexually abused her and that during an investigation in 2016 her father admitted the same. However, the juvenile petition noted DSS was “unable to secure any documentation regarding the [paternal grandfather’s] admission.”

children. Mother did eventually obtain “a letter . . . from her psychiatrist that indicates she is compliant with his recommendations and understands what . . . is required of her to maintain her stability.” Shortly thereafter, the maternal aunt and uncle notified DSS “that they were no longer able to keep the children as they cannot adequately protect their own children while [Amy] and [Caleb] are in the home.” They entered into a safety plan to keep the children until 16 August 2019.

On 16 August 2019, DSS filed a juvenile petition alleging the children were dependent and neglected juveniles within the meaning of N.C. Gen. Stat. § 7B-101(9) and (15). On 9 September 2019, Mother entered into a mediated Family Services Agreement (“FSA”) with DSS in which she agreed to, among other things: (1) “continue to cooperate with all mental health treatment and recommendations” and “take any prescribed medication as directed”; (2) complete parenting classes and “demonstrate the skills learned”; (3) maintain stable income,⁴ and obtain and maintain safe and appropriate housing “independent from the grandparents”; and (4) form relationships only with people who would be appropriate to be around the children and involved in their lives.

On 30 October 2019, the trial court entered its written order adjudicating the children neglected and dependent as alleged in the juvenile petition. The trial court

⁴ The FSA noted the following: “[Mother] receives SSI disability and will have child support when the children are returned to her home. She can work up to 20 hours per week per her disability limitations and has been interviewing for jobs.”

Opinion of the Court

concluded there was “a substantial risk of physical, emotional, and/or mental impairment of the children while in [Mother’s] care.” The court further concluded that it was “contrary to the children’s best interests to be returned to [Mother’s] care.” The trial court ordered that the children remain in DSS’s legal custody, with placement in DSS’s discretion. On 3 December 2019, the trial court entered a disposition order adopting the FSA as being in the children’s best interests but, notably, the trial court did not order Mother to participate in any services in order to reunify with her children. However, the court did find it was imperative for Mother to “maintain her mental health” and ordered that Mother “is encouraged to ask for help when needed.” The trial court was particularly concerned about the mental health of the children and ordered that DSS follow the psychological assessment recommendations for Caleb and ensure both children began therapy. The trial court also continued to grant DSS legal custody of the children and ordered DSS to arrange therapy for the children.

At the review hearing on 29 January 2020, the trial court ordered Mother to undergo a parenting capacity evaluation (“PCE”). On 5 March 2020, the trial court entered a review order in which it ordered Mother to cooperate with the PCE and follow the recommendations of the evaluation. The trial court noted: “[Mother] remains actively involved with BHC [behavioral healthcare]; and has attended group and individual therapy sessions. She is attending parenting classes. The mother is currently employed part-time at Taco Bell. Her ACT [Assertive Community

Opinion of the Court

Treatment] Team coordinator indicated she could have housing in the near future.” The trial court established a primary plan of reunification and a secondary plan of custody with a court approved caretaker and noted that Mother was informed that failure or refusal to cooperate could result in an order ceasing reunification efforts.

The DSS court report filed 17 July 2020 noted Mother “is actively involved with BHC. She has been compliant with her medications. Her group sessions were cancelled due to COVID-19; however, she does have individual therapy sessions.” The report noted Mother completed a parenting class program and that she was “demonstrating learned information from parenting class during visits.” It further noted Mother lost her employment due to COVID-19 but that she maintained income through Social Security. As for visitation, the report stated Mother had attended every visit since the children entered DSS custody, but Caleb still refused to visit with Mother. Finally, the report stated with regard to potential reunification:

While [Mother] appears to be on track for reunification based on her compliance with the objectives of her family services agreement, the department remains concerned about her ability to parent on her own as she has never been the sole caregiver for her children. Due to the department’s concerns, the agency is relying heavily on the results of the PCE to determine what, if any, service need[s] to be implemented for reunification to be successful.

By the time the trial court entered its 19 August 2020 permanency planning review order, Mother still had not completed a PCE. The trial court concluded, “[i]t is unlikely that reunification can occur with [Mother] within six (6) months given an

outstanding PCE which will guide decisions regarding reunification.” Caleb continued to reside with his maternal aunt and uncle, and Amy remained in a foster home. The plan of care for Caleb was changed to a primary plan of guardianship and a secondary plan of custody with a court approved caretaker. The plan of care for Amy remained a primary plan of reunification and a secondary plan of custody with a court approved caretaker.

On 23 November 2020, the trial court entered a permanency planning review hearing order wherein it found that Mother’s PCE was still pending and was necessary in order to determine “what services, if any, needed to be implemented in order for reunification to be successful.” The trial court continued to be concerned also about Caleb’s mental health, because his “defiance and aggression” in his maternal aunt and uncle’s home led to their decision that they could not continue to provide care for him. The trial court found that Mother was not making adequate progress on her plan and that she was not actively participating in or cooperating with the plan and was inconsistent in participating in the recommended services. The trial court ordered Mother to cooperate with the PCE and follow any recommendations.

Doctor Russell Hancock (“Dr. Hancock”) conducted the PCE with Mother from 10 June to 4 December 2020. In the PCE, he noted Mother had a missed appointment and/or “last minute cancellation” due to a medical appointment for an ear infection on 14 September 2020, and Mother did not communicate with Dr. Hancock from 14-

Opinion of the Court

28 September 2020. Dr. Hancock noted the following concerns regarding Mother: according to psychological testing, an adaptive functioning assessment, and information obtained during the interview process, Mother is “psychologically and cognitively” stunted and “[m]uch of her psychological functioning is influenced by her mental health diagnoses and the management of her mental health disorders; “[t]hroughout this PCE, there was minimal evidence that in present day [Mother] had the ability to meet all the needs required for her children to prosper in her care”; and Mother “has not lived independently with her children at any point in their lives”.

(Emphasis in original). Regarding Mother living independently, Dr. Hancock added:

[Mother’s] ability to meet the children’s needs are compromised by her susceptibility and lack of self-confidence. She does not possess the wherewithal to make decisions for the betterment of her children because if she distanced herself from the boyfriend and her parents, she would be destitute of any connection with and from others.

(Emphasis in original).

In order to reunify with her children, Dr. Hancock concluded Mother needed to make the following changes:

[M]aking the children a priority, committing to family treatment, being able to properly differentiate between good/bad choices or better versus best decisions. If she cannot do this on a consistent basis, the reunification with her children would be temporary and potentially cause additional complications in their lives.

...

Opinion of the Court

For her to change, several fundamental transitions would need to occur. Mainly, resolution with her parents about her abuse, distinguishing boundaries with her social network, adherence to identified guidelines by the Courts and DSS, and a thorough/more balanced decision-making processes.

As for Mother's adherence with mental health recommendations, Dr. Hancock determined:

[Mother's] ability to follow-through with medication management reduces the likelihood that her mental health problems will cause harm to her and the lives of her children. But historically, she is inconsistent and irresponsible with the management of her medications and psychiatric treatment. . . . Her psychosis occurs when she does not follow-through with her medication or shots. . . . Although she was active with the ACT team and compliant with her medications, there does not seem to be a wealth of documentation which denotes her participation in therapy or counseling.

Dr. Hancock recommended Mother participate in the following:

- Individual Psychotherapy or Counseling
- Family Therapy-This is predicated on the long-lasting goal for the family (i.e., reunification, adoption, etc.)
- Formal Assessment for Substance Abuse/possible substance abuse treatment
- Completion of Formal Education
- Domestic Violence Treatment
- Independent Living Assessment

On 12 April 2021, the trial court entered a permanency planning review hearing order. The trial court found that Mother had completed parenting education, had participated in domestic violence therapy sessions, and was taking her prescribed medications. The trial court noted that although Mother had a home, she spends

Opinion of the Court

time in her parents' home and needed to "prove to the court and her children that she can live independently while at the same time partaking in behaviors to indicate she wants the children." The trial court further found that Mother "must make her children a priority, committing to family treatment, being able to differentiate between good/bad choices or better versus best decisions." The trial court noted "[M]other calls her therapist but does not engage in actual therapy. The sessions are more in the nature of a 'check in.' This does not meet her therapeutic needs." The trial court found that Mother "needs mental health support and needs support to meet her children's needs. It is clear from the [PCE] that she cannot meet her children's needs on her own." At this hearing, the trial court changed the primary plan of care for Amy to a primary plan of adoption and a secondary plan of guardianship and reunification. The plan of care for Caleb was a primary plan of guardianship and a secondary plan of custody with a court approved caretaker and reunification. The trial court ordered Mother to comply with the recommendations of her PCE including "individual psychotherapy or counseling, family therapy, formal assessment for substance abuse/possible substance abuse treatment, completion of formal education, domestic violence treatment and independent living assessment."

On 2 September 2021, the trial court entered another permanency planning review hearing order in which it adopted several sections of Mother's PCE as its findings of fact, including the influence of Mother's mental health diagnosis on her ability to understand the children's needs; her inability "to meet all the needs

Opinion of the Court

required for her children to prosper in her care”; and Mother never having “lived independently with her children at any point in their lives.” (Emphasis in original).

The trial court further found:

[Mother] is more dependent on others to care for herself. She does not have a firm grasp on her situation and is contextually hampered. She loves her children but does not have the ability to meet their well-being needs or need for a safe home. [Mother] does not understand [Caleb’s] psychological concerns.

...

Though [Mother is] involved in therapy, she would need to fully engage and make significant progress.

The trial court further noted Mother was currently in an abusive relationship. Accordingly, the trial court concluded Mother “is not making adequate progress within a reasonable period of time under the plan.” The trial court found that further reunification efforts would be futile and inconsistent with the children’s best interests and changed the primary plan of care for the children to adoption with secondary plans of guardianship and custody with a court approved caretaker. The trial court ordered DSS to file termination of parental rights actions within sixty days of the order.

On 8 November 2021, the trial court entered another permanency planning order in which it noted Mother was still in an abusive relationship, finding, “[M]other sees no issue with [her boyfriend], despite the domestic violence history, as he gets her to work and assists with her medications.” The trial court noted that there were

concerns during Mother's visitations with Amy requiring redirection of Mother and that Mother continued to allow persons not authorized to have contact with Amy to be present during phone calls and video calls with Amy.

As for Mother's visitations with her children, the trial court allowed Mother to have a minimum of two hours two times per week when DSS first took custody of them. In the trial court's review hearing order entered 5 March 2020, it allowed Caleb to choose whether to have telephone contact with Mother. Caleb has not wanted to visit with Mother since a therapy session in July 2022. In the PCE, Dr. Hancock had noted Mother displayed a very limited understanding regarding Caleb's psychological concerns including depression. Dr. Hancock further noted Caleb admitted he did not always feel safe when he was in Mother's custody and that he felt he had to "look after" Amy. However, Dr. Hancock noted Mother's "relationship with [Amy] has less divisiveness, thus making her daughter an easier prospect to raise." In its 19 August 2020 and 12 April 2021 permanency planning hearing orders, the trial court noted concerns regarding Mother speaking of reunification during visits with Amy, though overall, visits with Amy went well. The foster parents with whom Amy was placed at the time of the termination hearing indicated they "are open" to adopting all the children.

On 3 December 2021, DSS filed a petition to terminate Mother’s parental rights.⁵ The TPR hearings were held on 8 and 14 February 2023. On 3 March 2023, the trial court rendered its ruling on the matter in open court. Four months later, on 25 July 2023, the trial court entered its written order terminating Mother’s parental rights, as well as the parental rights of the fathers, as to both juveniles. Specifically, the trial court concluded grounds existed for termination of Mother’s parental rights on the bases of neglect, willfully leaving the juveniles in foster care or placement outside the home without making reasonable progress under the circumstances in correcting the conditions which led to the juveniles’ removal from her custody, and incapability of providing proper care and supervision for the juveniles and a reasonable probability that such incapability will continue for the foreseeable future. *See* N.G. Gen. Stat. § 7B-1111(a)(1), (2), (6).

On 7 August 2023, Mother filed written notice of appeal pursuant to N.G. Gen. Stat. § 7B-1001(a)(7). The respondent-fathers did not appeal.

II. Analysis

Mother contends it was error for the trial court to find grounds existed to terminate her parental rights and puts forth arguments on each ground—neglect, willful failure to make reasonable progress to correct the conditions underlying the children’s removal within a reasonable time, and dependency. Because we affirm the

⁵ DSS did not serve the TPR petition until 5 September 2022.

order of the trial court terminating Mother's parental rights on the basis of neglect, we do not address the other grounds. "As we have found one ground for termination, we need not address the others." *In re N.N.B.*, 271 N.C. App. 199, 203, 843 S.E.2d 474, 477 (2020).

Our Supreme Court has stated the standard of review of a termination of parental rights as follows:

If a trial court's finding of fact is supported by clear, cogent, and convincing evidence, it will be deemed conclusive even if the record contains evidence that would support a contrary finding. We review whether the findings of fact support the conclusions of law, and conclusions of law are reviewed de novo.

In re S.R., 384 N.C. 516, 520, 886 S.E.2d 166, 171 (2023) (cleaned up).

A district "court may terminate the parental rights" of a parent "upon a finding" that the "parent has abused or neglected the juvenile." N.C. Gen. Stat. § 7B-1111(a)(1). A "neglected juvenile" is defined as a juvenile whose parent "[d]oes not provide proper care, supervision, or discipline." N.C. Gen. Stat. § 7B-101(15)(a). The trial court originally adjudicated the children neglected in its adjudication order dated 30 October 2019.

This Court has stated with regard to DSS's required showing of neglect:

In deciding whether a child is neglected for purposes of terminating parental rights, the dispositive question is the fitness of the parent to care for the child at the time of the termination proceeding. Termination may not be based solely upon past conditions that no longer exist.

Opinion of the Court

Nevertheless, where a child has not been in the custody of the parents for a significant period of time prior to the termination hearing, requiring the petitioner to show that the child is currently neglected would make termination of parental rights impossible. In those circumstances, a trial court may find that grounds for termination exist upon a showing of a history of neglect by the parent and the probability of a repetition of neglect.

In re J.E.M., Jr., 221 N.C. App. 361, 363, 727 S.E.2d 398, 400–01 (2012) (citations and quotation marks omitted). Our Supreme Court has further stated:

The trial court must also consider any evidence of changed conditions in light of the evidence of prior neglect and the probability of a repetition of neglect. The determinative factors must be the best interests of the child and the fitness of the parent to care for the child *at the time of the termination proceeding*.

In re Ballard, 311 N.C. 708, 715, 319 S.E.2d 227, 232 (1984) (citation omitted) (emphasis in original). “A parent’s *failure to make progress in completing a case plan* is indicative of a likelihood of future neglect.” *In re M.A.*, 374 N.C. 865, 870, 844 S.E.2d 916, 921 (2020) (emphasis added).

Mother challenges the trial court’s findings of fact 18 and 25, which state:

18. [Mother] has not addressed her mental health issues consistently during this matter. Nor has she consistently engaged in medication management. Consequently, she cannot provide safe and secure placement for her children. There has not been sufficient enough progress in establishing a harm-free environment.

...

25. Overall, [Mother] has not made much progress on addressing her mental health concerns since the

Opinion of the Court

completion of the PCE. Given her lack of meaningful progress from the completion of the PCE to present with regard to her mental health, her lack of processing of her own trauma, her continuously poor decision making, and the lack of demonstration that she could meet the basic needs of the children, there exists a high likelihood of repetition of neglect.

Specifically, Mother argues she “made steady [and] meaningful progress and had worked on processing her own trauma”; her mental health had been stable for years; and her lack of “decision-making skills are not indic[a]tive of future neglect.”

Here, regarding Mother’s progress addressing her mental health, Briana Partlow (“Partlow”) started working with Mother as her therapist in September 2022. Mother was scheduled to have one meeting with Partlow per week, though she testified Mother’s attendance was sporadic during the six months preceding the termination hearing. Partlow had not had any therapy sessions with Mother as late in the case as November and December 2022. Although Partlow and Mother had “some engagement” during this time, their contact was for case management rather than actual therapy sessions. Partlow had encouraged Mother as recently as January 2023 to “re-engage in therapy and follow ACT medication treatment recommendations.” She testified Mother’s progress in processing her trauma “could be difficult to gauge.” There were “times” when Mother indicated she forgave her father, and “in the same moment she would also share that she was still chat[ting] with him and she wanted to avoid the situation [altogether].” Partlow further testified that Mother’s trauma “would affect her parenting just because she’s still

Opinion of the Court

having trouble processing her sexual abuse, so she wouldn't really be able to have the -- the full insight as to how love and affection is." Partlow wrote an entry after an 8 December 2022 meeting with Mother in which she noted Mother "does not seem to have a full insight as to how her father's actions impacted her, and why addressing her own trauma is a necessary concern." Partlow explained that Mother was "triggered" when speaking with Amy about what Amy was going through and that Mother is "not as bothered by some of the things that have happened to her." Partlow noted that at one point, Mother had given up her housing and moved back in with her parents. Mother switched prescriptions from Haldol to Abilify, but Partlow could not determine the effectiveness of the change in medication because she was not "consistent enough with the medications to give an accurate answer." Partlow testified Mother's consistency in taking her medication has "been a concern."

Mother's mental health records, which were entered into evidence during the hearing, further demonstrate her lack of progress regarding mental health and medication management. On 4 January 2023, her ACT clinician reported Mother "challenges her diagnosis of bipolar disorder which surprised me because we talked about this so many times." As recently as 12 January 2023, her behavioral health clinician noted:

[M]other continues to challenge her mental health diagnosis, often stating she is asymptomatic. Client presents with flight of ideas and rambling needing redirection throughout session. [Mother] also reports she has not taken any medication in several weeks, either

Opinion of the Court

because she “didn’t need it” or it makes her drowsy. . . . [Mother] is currently lacking progress towards her treatment goals as evidenced by non compliance with medications and inconsistent engagement with ACTT. [Mother] is hyper focused on housing and getting custody of her children, with little focus on addressing her mental health recently.

In its oral rendition of its order, the trial court stated:

Even as recently as December and January the medical records from the ACT team reflect [Mother] has indicated that she is not taking her medication. She has been disputing with her care providers the fact that she even has bipolar disorder. She consistently has indicated that, you know, [she] changes [her] medications but then communicated the desire not to take the medication.

Thus, the trial court’s oral findings and its written findings of fact #18 and #25 are supported by competent evidence which in turn support the trial court’s conclusion that Mother did not make adequate progress in her mental health treatment or medication management. Such lack of progress is indicative of the likelihood of future neglect because Mother’s mental health and medication management are connected to her understanding of her children’s needs and her ability to make good decisions, especially regarding who Mother allows to be around the children.

The trial court found Mother’s continued demonstration of poor decision making is indicative of the likelihood of future neglect. The trial court relied on three instances of poor decision making in particular. First, during the pendency of the case, Mother lived with a boyfriend in what she herself called “a domestic violence relationship.” The boyfriend was selling drugs out of the home. Mother was referred

Opinion of the Court

to domestic violence services. The day DSS obtained her completion letter and certificate, Veronica Edwards (“Edwards”), a social worker with DSS, found out Mother was still involved in a domestic violence relationship with the same boyfriend. Edwards encouraged Mother to obtain a domestic violence protective order, but Mother “decided she didn’t want to do it and she’d rather pay him to leave.” “Eventually,” Mother moved out of the home she shared with her boyfriend and paid him \$250 to leave it. Dr. Hancock, whose PCE report was admitted into evidence and accepted by the trial court, testified that he relied, in part, on this incident as an example of how Mother “has a history and a pattern of being in unhealthy relationships.” Dr. Hancock explained that Mother is “in many ways . . . more dependent on others to help take care of herself than she is available to take care of her children.” This incident demonstrates Mother continued to foster unhealthy relationships with others during the life of this case and supports the trial court’s finding of the likelihood of future neglect because of the influence such people could have on the children in the event of reunification. Moreover, Mother has a new boyfriend, but she was not forthcoming with her treatment team in notifying them of this new relationship.

The second incident the trial court relied on is that three months prior to the termination hearing, Mother met a Lyft driver and had only known her for two weeks when Mother allowed her to reside with her and her brother. The driver stole her daughter’s birth certificate and social security card. When Mother confronted her

Opinion of the Court

about the missing items, the driver admitted to taking them and returned them. She thanked Mother for allowing her to stay in her home because she was just released from prison in January 2023. Although the children did not reside with Mother during this time as they were in DSS custody, this incident demonstrates Mother's inability to make good decisions. This incident further demonstrates the likelihood that she would continue to form unhealthy relationships with others and potentially allow them to be negative influences in the presence of the children or to harm the children. This incident is particularly concerning because one of the reasons for the children's removal from the home is that Amy was left alone with her maternal grandfather who had abused Mother when she was a minor.

Third, Mother refused independent housing offered to her in September 2022, and as of the TPR, she still had not obtained independent housing. In September 2022, she was living with her mother and brother. DSS expressed concern about the maternal grandmother due to her failure to protect Mother from her father's abuse and Mother's brother because of his prior drug use. As recently as a few months prior to the termination hearing, Mother had visited a behavioral health care emergency room due to a confrontation with her brother. Mother testified regarding that incident, "[i]t was just stressful [and] I needed my space and he would bug me when I wanted to be left alone." She further stated, "I did all my coping skills before I went to the hospital." The trial court noted Mother's refusal to move into housing independent of her brother was particularly concerning given her "discord" with him.

Opinion of the Court

Mother's stated reason for refusing the apartment was because it had only one bedroom, and she insisted on a two-bedroom apartment to be able to house the children should she reunify with them. Although Mother's stated reason seems sound on the surface, at this time the permanency plan was adoption for Amy and another planned permanent living arrangement and guardianship for Caleb, and Mother was consistently told by the court and her ACTT team that she needed independent housing for her well-being and the safety of her children. The future availability of a two-bedroom apartment was unknown, and DSS told Mother they could put her on a waitlist for a two-bedroom apartment contingent on the results of the TPR hearing. Mother then stated she would accept a one-bedroom apartment, but declined the one that was offered to her because she did not like its location. However, on the day of the hearing, Mother told Edwards she would "move forward" with the apartment that was offered to her. As of the day of the hearing, however, Mother was still considering a different location for a one-bedroom apartment.

One of Mother's primary goals throughout the case was to obtain housing independent of her mother and father and to form healthy relationships with people who would not pose negative influences in the lives of her children in the event of reunification. Mother's refusal to move into the home originally approved for her further demonstrates her lack of sound decision making skills and consequently her lack of understanding regarding the negative impact her mother and brother potentially would have on the children. The maternal grandmother "aided and

Opinion of the Court

abetted” the maternal grandfather’s abuse of Mother when she was a minor. Although Mother’s father died during the pendency of the case, Mother still has refused to separate herself from those would pose negative influences in her children’s lives. Moreover, she has continued to engage in relationships with others, including past and present boyfriends and even strangers, who could pose negative influences and potential danger to her children.

Such competent evidence supports the trial court’s findings regarding Mother’s lack of progress with regard to her mental health treatment, medication management, decision making, and forming healthy relationships. Therefore, the evidence supports the trial court’s finding of the following:

Overall, [Mother] has not made much progress on addressing her mental health concerns since the completion of the PCE. Given her *lack of meaningful progress from the completion of the PCE to present* with regard to her mental health, her lack of processing her own trauma, her continued poor decision making, and the lack of demonstration that she could meet the basic needs of the children, *there exists a high likelihood of repetition of neglect.*

(Emphasis added). *In re M.A.*, 374 N.C. at 870, 844 S.E.2d at 921 (“A parent’s *failure to make progress in completing a case plan* is indicative of a likelihood of future neglect”) (emphasis added). Competent evidence supports this and the trial court’s other findings. Because the trial court’s findings are supported by competent evidence, they are binding on appeal even in light of some evidence to the contrary. *In re S.R.*, 384 N.C. at 520, 886 S.E.2d at 171. The trial court’s findings of fact, in

turn, support its conclusion that “there remains a high probability of the repetition of neglect.” Accordingly, we affirm the order of the trial court.

III. Conclusion

Competent evidence supported the trial court’s findings of fact regarding Mother’s failure to make progress indicating a high likelihood of future neglect. These findings, in turn, supported the trial court’s conclusion that grounds existed to terminate Mother’s parental rights on the basis of neglect. Because one ground existed to terminate Mother’s parental rights, we need not address the other grounds. *In re N.N.B.*, 271 N.C. App. at 203, 843 S.E.2d at 477. Accordingly, we affirm the order of the trial court.

AFFIRMED.

Judges ZACHARY and THOMPSON concur.

Report per Rule 30(e).