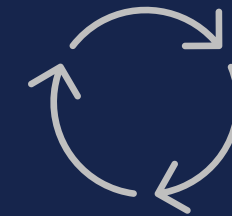




# Collaborative Quality Improvement

Division of Child Protection & Permanency



## 2024 BRIEF #4: CASE PRACTICE STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES

### Overview

The Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P) is New Jersey's child protection agency within New Jersey's Department of Children and Families (DCF). Its mission is to assist all New Jersey residents to be safe, healthy, and connected. CP&P is responsible for investigating allegations of child abuse and neglect and, if necessary, arranging for the child's safety and connecting families to appropriate services and supports.

DCF uses a Collaborative Quality Improvement (CoQI) process to assess performance in critical areas, identify strengths and focus areas, develop plans to systematically improve performance, as well as promote positive outcomes for the children, youth, and families DCF serves. For more information about CoQI please see: [CoQI Description](#).

This brief describes findings from the 2024 CP&P case record reviews and highlights key themes that emerged from in-depth interviews with families. Please note, the numeric scores reported in this brief only reflect the results of the CP&P case record review, and while the case practice areas displayed here are similar to those reported in the 2023 brief, scores cannot be compared across years as the methodology was changed [see: [Methods](#)].

### KEY FINDINGS

- Key themes that emerged from young adult and caregiver interviews were integrated into the CoQI process in 2024, and these findings from family voice interviews provided new insights in some areas and supported several findings from the CP&P case record review.<sup>1</sup>
  - Families appreciate the concrete supports CP&P provides.
  - Families have mixed experiences with caseworker consistency and communication.
  - Fathers reported difficulty accessing services and feel overlooked in the child welfare system.
  - Families with children in out-of-home placement desire longer, more frequent, and more flexible visits.
  - Families reported stable, affordable housing as a barrier to permanency and case closure.
- The areas of practice that received the highest quality scores were implementing **safety interventions** and ensuring **home and school stability** for children and youth in out-of-home placement.
- Areas needing improvement include **engagement and assessment of families** and **planning with families**. Additionally, while supervisors and caseworkers meet regularly to discuss work with families, the **quality of supervision** was found to be an area of focus.

<sup>1</sup> The qualitative family voice themes in this report are based on findings developed by the YaFIT team. For more information, [see Methods](#).



OFFICE OF  
QUALITY

# Collaborative Quality Improvement

As part of the CoQI Strengths and Challenges Analysis, the team integrates CP&P case record review scores, key performance indicators, and themes from youth and family voice interviews to identify areas of strength and areas needing improvement for each CP&P local office. This analysis sets the foundation for developing and implementing initiatives to improve service delivery.

The results from 35 CP&P local offices’ record reviews and themes from family voice interviews are described below. *Please note: the numeric scores reported in this brief only reflect the results of the case record review.*

## HOW TO INTERPRET QUALITY SCORES

Quality scores range from 0% to 100%, where 100% represents performance that is completely aligned with best practice and policy. For example, a quality score of 80% means that, on average, observed practice was 80% aligned with policy and best practice. For more information, [see Methods](#).

## Areas of Strength: Safety Interventions, Stability, & Supporting Families’ Concrete Needs

### SAFETY INTERVENTIONS:

As a child welfare agency, CP&P is first and foremost committed to ensuring that children are protected from abuse and neglect. The review examined whether caseworkers took immediate action to address any additional safety concerns that emerged during the family’s involvement with the agency and whether the caseworker gained agreement from all relevant parties in developing and implementing a safety intervention. This review also considered whether caseworkers had a comprehensive discussion with families about the specific safety concerns. This review found that CP&P’s work to implement timely and effective safety interventions was a strength among families served in their own homes (80% quality score) and in families with children in out-of-home placement (86%).<sup>2</sup>

### STABILITY:

One of the goals of the child welfare system is to provide stability and continuity for children who enter out-of-home placement. CP&P aims to minimize changes to placement settings and educational settings to provide a stable, supportive environment as well as continuity in education. At times, however, changes to the child’s placement or school setting are necessary to meet the unique needs of the child. DCF also aims to preserve family connections when possible, so special consideration is given to placement moves that unite children with kinship caregivers. The review examined whether there were unplanned changes in the child’s placement setting and school and whether steps were taken to prevent future moves. The review found that both stability of home (89% quality score)<sup>3</sup> and stability of school (94%)<sup>4</sup> were strengths among families with children served in out-of-home placement.

### SUPPORTING FAMILIES’ CONCRETE NEEDS:



### Family Voice Themes

Material and household items make a big difference for families. Many families indicated that receiving **basic material and household items** like furniture, diapers, and clothing was an important element of achieving permanency. Families demonstrated gratitude for CP&P’s help in providing resources to meet material needs.



*“It was like a godsend ... they gave us a dresser and they gave us a crib. And definitely needed the dresser because the girl’s room was just overflowing with clothes. And the crib, obviously, my daughter needed somewhere to sleep, so it was definitely really helpful.”*  
-- In-Home Case

*“Actually, [caseworker] arranged for us to get new furniture, bunk beds for the kids, different stuff like that. So, I mean, yeah, I would say it was more of a conversational kind of thing with him. We would talk about different things. I say this, he’d say, ‘Okay, I’ll see what I can do.’ Actually, I think they even paid for a medical bill, if I’m not mistaken. I didn’t even know that was a real thing. He even got me literally a check from CP&P to pay medical bills. So yeah, I think that he did.”* -- In-Home Case

<sup>2</sup> Safety Interventions: in-home practice is 80% aligned with best practice and policy; out-of-home practice is 86% aligned with best practice and policy.

<sup>3</sup> Stability of Home practice is 89% aligned with best practice and policy.

<sup>4</sup> Stability of Education practice is 94% aligned with best practice and policy.

## Areas for Improvement: Engagement & Assessment of Family

Communicating with families regularly is an essential part of a caseworker's role. High-quality engagement is critical for meaningful assessments and case planning to occur. This review examined whether caseworkers made efforts to meet the family's needs. It also considered whether caseworkers discussed the family's values and engaged parents to identify their natural supports. Overall, engagement of the family was identified as an area needing improvement (**55% quality score**) among families served in their own homes and in families with children in out-of-home placement (**51%**)<sup>5</sup>.

Assessment is the process of gathering and analyzing information to gain understanding of the factors that are impacting families. This involves using formal and informal assessments to identify appropriate and effective interventions that resolve the issues so families can function safely and independent from the agency's involvement.<sup>1</sup> This review identified CP&P's ongoing assessment of families as an area needing improvement (**56% quality score**) for families with children served in their own homes and for families with children in out-of-home placement (**67%**)<sup>6</sup>.

Another essential element of case practice is the ongoing assessment of safety and risk. This involves maintaining regular contact with family members, assessing and discussing safety and risk concerns, interviewing children alone at each contact, and conducting safety and risk assessments accurately. This review identified CP&P's ongoing assessment of safety and risk was an area needing improvement (**59% quality score**) for families with children served in their own homes and for families with children in out-of-home placement (**67%**)<sup>7</sup>.



### Family Voice Themes

Families who felt the relationship with their caseworker slowed their progress toward achieving their goals identified **inconsistent communication** and **caseworker turnover** as reasons for delayed progress.

Families felt that **rescheduling meetings** delayed case closure, even when case progress was otherwise positive.

Families who described their caseworkers as partners in developing and achieving their goals identified the **prioritization of family voice** in assessment and planning as the most important element for successful case closure. Participants emphasized the value of effective, timely **communication**, expressing appreciation for frequent check-ins and updates delivered in a way that works for them.

*"But the switching, when they were switching caseworkers, it was like, when you get the new one, I think the last one, it took a while for her to get in touch with me, because of the miscommunication of my information, like she didn't have the right phone number or something." -- In-Home Case*

*"And they keep switching my caseworker and it's like, then I have to keep starting over and they don't know what's going on from the other case. My one caseworker would say they did something, then I get a new caseworker, and then they'd be like, oh, well, I don't know what happened to that. I'm not in control of that. So it's like, it's tiring." -- Adolescent Case*

*"Meetings were always rescheduled. That was something normal. They show up late a lot, even now. If they tell me that I'm going to meet with them because I have to do the twice a month meeting, I'll tell them, 'Hey, I'm available at this time.' My one was this morning at 9:30, she didn't show up until 10:00. So it was like that. Yeah. But in all fairness, they've always done what they said they were going to do. It's just never on time". -- Out-of-Home Case*

*"Either she sends us [an] email or we created a WhatsApp group between the three of us, or she comes and tells us look, this is happening, this has to be signed here, or she communicates with us through the group, or she calls us directly from the office, or she calls us [on] his cellphone. But communication is always 90% good." -- In-Home Case*

*"My current caseworker is phenomenal. She's fairly new to the division and she's very effective. She's very proactive and she's very supportive. I'm grateful to have her. [Current Caseworker] has been a game changer for me, and I feel like if I had not been appointed her as a caseworker, I don't know where my case would be right now. Like I said, she's very proactive. She has escorted me to all my visits, even when my child was out of state two and a half hours, she had no problems with doing that. She had no problems with orchestrating medical appointments, keeping me abreast on different issues that's going on with my child. I'm very grateful for her." -- Out-of-Home Case*

<sup>5</sup> **Engagement of Family:** in-home practice is 55% aligned with best practice and policy; out-of-home practice is 51% aligned with best practice and policy.

<sup>6</sup> **Assessment of Family:** in-home practice is 56% aligned with best practice and policy; out-of-home practice is 67% aligned with best practice and policy.

<sup>7</sup> **Ongoing Assessment of Safety & Risk:** in-home practice is 59% aligned with best practice and policy; out-of-home practice is 67% aligned with best practice and policy.



## Areas for Improvement: Engagement & Assessment of Fathers



### Family Voice Themes

Many fathers reported feeling as though the child welfare system was **not designed with them in mind** and described difficulties connecting to services specifically designed for or open to fathers and their children. Some non-resident fathers described being first notified their child had an open case with DCP&P via a letter from court and expressed regret they weren't notified sooner. Some resident/custodial fathers reported **feeling overlooked** in regular communications and formal assessments and wanted their viewpoint to be considered in case planning.



*"I would say that if you're a woman, take advantage of what they can offer you. And if you're a man, try to get that situation finished as soon as possible, basically, because I do feel like it is quite biased."*

-- In-Home Case

*"But a lot of the programs is meant for mother with kids, it's not daddy and kids...I try to find shelter in the beginning for daddy and kids, there's shelters for me, but not for the kids, there's shelter for the mommy and kids. So, it is a big difference."*

-- In-Home Case



## Areas for Improvement: Supervision

Supervision of frontline staff is a critical component in CP&P's work with families. Worker-supervisor conferences take place on a consistent basis so that supervisors can maintain familiarity with the families under their supervision and formulate guidance for their staff throughout a family's involvement with the agency. The supervisor is accountable for developing their staff's skills in their work with each family to successfully engage, assess, and plan and team with families to assist them in achieving their goals.<sup>11</sup> This case record review found that supervision was an area needing improvement in CP&P's work with families served in their own homes (**61% quality score**) and with families with children in out-of-home placement (**65%**).<sup>8</sup> While **94%** of supervisors meet with their caseworkers to discuss each family on their caseload at least monthly, the CP&P record review results suggest a need to improve the quality of these meetings and the need for thorough documentation of the discussions taking place.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> **Supervision:** in-home practice is 61% aligned with best practice and policy; out-of-home practice is 65% aligned with best practice and policy.



OFFICE OF  
QUALITY



## Areas for Improvement: Ongoing & Long-Term Planning Process

CP&P works with families to establish goals and create action plans that detail the process for achieving goals. The implementation of the plans includes connecting families to appropriate services, monitoring family progress towards goal achievement, adjusting the plan to reflect new pertinent information, and preparing families for sustained independence from CP&P involvement once their goals are met. This review found that the quality of the ongoing planning process was an area needing improvement (**70% quality score**) in CP&P's work with families served in their own homes and with families with children in out-of-home placement (**70%**).<sup>9</sup>

CP&P aims to implement strategies based on a common long-term view with families to assist them in gaining and sustaining independence from CP&P involvement. This area of practice considers whether CP&P's intervention sufficiently addressed the issues that led to the family's involvement. It also assesses whether there is a clear understanding of what needs to occur for CP&P's involvement to end. This review found that the quality of the long-term view was an area needing improvement (**66% quality score**) in CP&P's work with families served in their own homes and with families with children in out-of-home placement (**67%**).<sup>10</sup>



### Family Voice Themes

Many participants identified **stable and affordable housing** as a significant barrier to permanency, case closure, and overall family well-being.

The significant economic barrier to securing housing left some families feeling their chances were low to achieve this goal, especially if they wanted to remain in the same community. Families who identified housing as the primary reason their CP&P case was opened described frustration when they were working on non-housing related case plan goals.

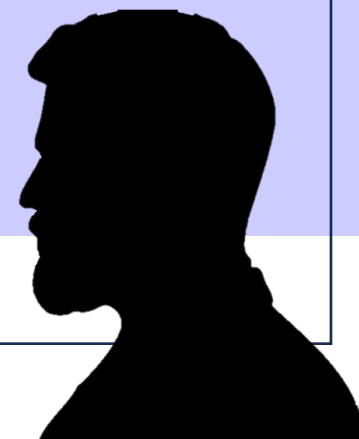
Families' understanding of CP&P's role in securing safe and affordable housing is very limited, and most families assume CP&P has the ability and mandate to connect them to housing—especially if it is included in their case plan. Several participants reported asking CP&P for help with housing and were generally dissatisfied with the process.



*"Well, the rental assistance, but that level fell through, as you know. And then since then, really nothing. I mean, there's been multiple times where we've tried to get their help with housing assistance because we're homeless. But they didn't really do anything."*  
-- Out-of-Home Case

*"Some kind of housing assistance, some kind of employment assistance. I mean, they offered a security deposit and first month's rent, and this is almost four years ago, I'm still in a one-bedroom apartment with four other people, and it's just extremely hard."*  
-- In-Home Case

*"There was zero planning because I'm, like I said, in the same situation as to why my case stayed open this duration of the time, it was because of my housing."*  
-- In-Home Case



<sup>9</sup>Ongoing Planning Process: in-home practice is 70% aligned with best practice and policy; out-of-home practice is 70% aligned with best practice and policy.

<sup>10</sup>Long-Term View: in-home practice is 66% aligned with best practice and policy; out-of-home practice is 67% aligned with best practice and policy.





## Family Voice Themes

Frequent and accessible visitation is important to family well-being and permanency. Overall, families shared a desire for **longer, more frequent, and more flexible visits**. Families with supervised visitation often described dissatisfaction with the supervision arrangement and the amount of time they got to spend with their children. Other families noted the challenges of visiting children who are placed far away, particularly when **transportation** issues make it difficult to maintain regular contact.



*"We're now going on two years, and I'm still on supervised visits once a week. I've asked for more visits. They don't want to give me more visits."*  
-- Out-of-Home Case

*"They've [CP&P] been provided cellphones, tablets, stuff like that, so they are able to keep in contact with each other. That's one thing I could say. They tried to keep the lines of communication open between me and the kids. They've never given me a restriction on, 'oh, you can't contact them,' or, 'oh, they can't contact you.' The day they took my [kids] from me and put them in that car, the next day they came to me with a \$1,000 voucher for Walmart and told me to go get my kids electronics and stuff that they need to be able to keep in contact with me."*  
-- Out-of-Home Case

<sup>11</sup> Family Connections practice is 75% aligned with best practice and policy.

<sup>12</sup> Sibling Connections practice is 76% aligned with best practice and policy.

<sup>13</sup> **Child Engagement** in-home practice is 60% aligned with best practice and policy; out-of-home practice is 66% aligned with best practice and policy.

<sup>14</sup> **Assessment and Treatment of Child's Emotional Health** in-home practice is 66% aligned with best practice and policy; out-of-home practice is 75% aligned with best practice and policy.

## What Else Did We Learn?

Additional findings from the CoQI case record review and themes from family voice interviews are highlighted below. The scores in these areas of practice demonstrate the need for some improvement to be considered strengths.

### FAMILY & COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS:

When children are temporarily living away from their immediate family members, it is essential that CP&P staff support continued family connections through regular visitation and communication, except in circumstances where it is unsafe to do so. This review examined the extent to which CP&P caseworkers sought to place children with kin caregivers and with their siblings. The review assessed the extent to which staff engaged parents in developing the visitation plan and also whether the child's connections to the greater community were maintained. Additionally, the review considered whether caseworkers actively supported and assessed visitation activities. This review found that CP&P's work to maintain family connections achieved a **75% quality score**<sup>11</sup> among families with children in out-of-home placement. For families with siblings, the review found that CP&P achieved a **76% quality score**<sup>12</sup> in maintaining sibling connections.

### DCF SUPPORTS FAMILY CONNECTIONS:

Of all children in out-of-home placement (n=3,000) **48% were living with kin**.<sup>IV</sup> When children who entered out-of-home placement were part of a sibling group of 2 or 3 (n=105), **89% of the time all siblings were placed together**. When children were part of a sibling group of four or more (n=84), 83% of the time at least two siblings were placed together.<sup>V</sup>

### ENGAGEMENT OF CHILDREN:

Communicating with children regularly and in a way that builds trust and yields meaningful information-sharing is an essential part of a caseworker's role. High-quality engagement is critical for meaningful assessments and case planning to occur. The review assessed the extent to which caseworkers utilized a variety of engagement strategies with children. Additionally, when children were in placement, the review sought to determine whether they had discussions with children about the reasons they remain in care when developmentally appropriate. Engagement of the child achieved a **60% quality score** among families with children served in their own homes and among families with children in out-of-home placement (**66%**).<sup>13</sup>

### ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL & MENTAL HEALTH:

The involvement of children and families with a child welfare agency may follow situations that are emotionally challenging or traumatic for children. In these contexts, it is critical for CP&P caseworkers to identify and address children's emotional needs. This review examined whether CP&P staff continuously and comprehensively assessed children's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Additionally, when children were receiving mental health treatment, this review considered the extent to which CP&P caseworkers communicated with mental health treatment providers and monitored the child's progress in treatment. In this review, CP&P's assessment and treatment of children's emotional health achieved a **66% quality score** in their work with families of children living in their own homes and a **75% quality score** in their work with families of children in out-of-home placement.<sup>14</sup>

# SUMMARY

The 2024 CP&P record review found that caseworkers consistently worked to ensure children in out-of-home placement were in stable and consistent home and school environments, and when safety concerns emerged among families with children served in their own homes and in out-of-home placement, caseworkers implemented timely and effective safety interventions.

The review also identified core case practice areas for improvement, including engagement and assessment of families and ongoing and long-term planning with families. While supervisors meet frequently with caseworkers, the documentation lacked evidence of consistently providing caseworkers with the guidance and coaching necessary to engage, assess and plan with families effectively.

Key themes from youth and family voice interviews supported CP&P case record review findings in many cases and provided additional insights into challenges families face like challenges with visitation when children were in out-of-home placement and barriers to stable, affordable housing.

## What is happening across DCF?

### SERVICES FOR FAMILIES

While the impact of certain programmatic changes will take time to measure, DCF has taken steps to address some of the known challenges mentioned in this brief. Large-scale, statewide interventions that are planned or in progress are described below:

- **Visitation Services:** After piloting the program in three New Jersey counties in 2015, and expanding to a fourth county in 2017, DCF grew the Supportive Visitation Services (SVS) program to all 21 counties in 2025 to maintain and strengthen familial interactions and facilitate permanency. SVS is an innovative parent-child visitation model that offers visitation services along a continuum to meet the unique needs of each family. The continuum includes a full range of visitation services from least restrictive-supportive to more intensive, therapeutic interventions. For more information see: [Supportive Visitation Services](#).
- **Housing:** DCF's Office of Housing was established in 2021 to facilitate a comprehensive housing hub that promotes access to housing and related services for the youth and families DCF serves. While DCF is not a housing agency, per se, this office's work aims to enhance service coordination across the statewide housing landscape and improve the alignment of housing supports with prevention related outcomes. For more information see: [Office of Housing](#).
- **Family Support Services Continuum:** DCF is committed to maintaining a strong network of proven programs to strengthen families as intact units and prevent child maltreatment and out-of-home placement. In addition to the community-based services in the current service array, DCF will be launching four new evidence-based and evidence supported programs in the Fall of 2025:
  - [Intercept®](#) provides intensive in-home mental health services to children and youth who are in out-of-home placement or at risk for entry or re-entry into out-of-home placement.
  - [Brief Strategic Family Therapy](#) provides treatment to families with children or adolescents experiencing or at risk of substance use, conduct problems and delinquency.
  - [The Triple P Positive Parenting Program®](#) is a treatment and prevention program that helps parents address behavioral and emotional challenges in their children and youth.
  - The [Exchange Parent Aide](#) program provides strengths based, family centered supportive and educational in-home services to families at risk of child abuse and neglect.

# What is happening across DCF?

## CP&P CASE PRACTICE

All CP&P local offices have launched CoQI and are in various phases of the cycle, and the implementation of improvement plans is underway among the local offices included in this brief. While interventions included in the improvement plans are specific to each local office's needs, strategies to improve case practice with children and families include focusing on evidence-based practice models, enhancing supervisory and assessment practice, continuing to develop the workforce, and leveraging technology to create efficiencies. In addition to the local office strategies described below, CP&P leaders will continue to review, revise, and correct areas of practice that directly affect outcomes for children and families.

**Focusing on evidence-based case practice:** In 2022, DCF began its implementation of an evidence-based assessment and planning case practice model, [Solution Based Casework \(SBC\)](#), to better support families experiencing complex challenges. The model aims to help family teams organize, prioritize, and document the steps they will take to help build or rebuild safe, healthy, and connected families. SBC breaks down every situation to its most basic elements to determine the challenges and helps families develop useful and meaningful actions to resolve them. To improve the quality of assessment and strengthen the team-based approach to case discussions and planning, CP&P will leverage **Solution Based Casework (SBC) Case Consultations**. As part of their improvement plans, local offices will also reinforce the use of the **SBC Family Discussion Guide** during early interactions with families to gather higher quality information about family members and the support they can provide to better assess family dynamics.

**Enhancing supervision:** Supervisors play a key role in improving the quality of family engagement and assessment by providing feedback during conferences with workers. Regular supervisory meetings are used to communicate progress, reinforce priorities, and ensure practice is aligned with organizational goals and expectations. CP&P supervisors, as documented in local office improvement plans, will conduct **periodic case reviews** to ensure staff are adhering to best practice and protocols, and supervisors will continue to **conference with staff** to provide feedback. As part of local office improvement planning, supervisors will review documented casework for both quality and compliance and work with staff to ensure they have the support needed to engage effectively with family members, conduct thorough, high-quality assessments, and develop high-quality, collaborative plans with families.

**Enhancing assessment practice:** In April 2025, CP&P conducted a **supplemental case record** review that focused on the quality of assessments specifically. This additional review found that certain information about families was captured inaccurately at times on standardized assessments of families with multiple households and multiple caregivers. CP&P is developing a **webinar** for all CP&P investigative workers and supervisors to address common issues and areas of confusion. CP&P will use the findings from this review to develop additional tasks for all local offices that include strategies to focus on practice related to the quality of risk assessments and supervisory oversight of these assessments. Once finalized, the tasks will be included in local offices' improvement plans.

**Developing the workforce:** CP&P local offices will hold **workshops and training sessions** for staff focused on skill building in family engagement and assessment. These sessions will enhance staff competencies and promote consistent practice across teams. To strengthen caseworkers' engagement and assessment skills, some CP&P local offices have implemented a **peer mentorship model** that pairs trainees with experienced staff for ongoing support.

**Leveraging technology:** CP&P is exploring **technological advancements** to enhance the accuracy of assessments and to create efficiencies in documentation processes. DCF is continuously updating its existing data and reporting systems to better assist staff to manage their workloads and to use data to improve practice and outcomes.



OFFICE OF  
QUALITY



# METHODS

The CP&P case record review examined the quality of CP&P case practice for 817 families that were actively involved with the division between February 2023 and April 2024. By September 2024, DCF's Office of Quality completed in-depth, structured reviews from 35 (76%) CP&P local offices located throughout the state. Within the review, just under a third of families (255) had at least one child in an out-of-home placement, and the remaining 562 families had all children served in their own homes.

The review covered topics related to the health and safety of children, including but not limited to the safety of the child's environment and the extent to which children remained connected to their family members and communities, especially when residing in out-of-home placement. It also covered topics related to the quality of case practice, such as engagement and assessment of children and caregivers, and teaming and planning with families. Additionally, the review measured the quality of supervision for frontline caseworkers. It is important to note, the quality scores in this brief solely reflect the results of the record review and are limited to documentation in the electronic case record and other supplemental documents.

Beginning in 2024, for CoQI activities at the local level, the CP&P case record review scores were supplemented with themes from youth and family interviews conducted by partners at Rutgers University. The Youth and Family Interview Team (YaFIT) conducted 122 interviews with families - 70% of respondents were caregivers from families with children served in their own homes, 21% were caregivers from families with children served in out-of-home placement, 9% were young adults.

The interviews lasted about one hour, and respondents were compensated \$60. The interviews covered topics such as early involvement with CP&P, services, teaming and relationships, communication, cultural responsiveness, outcomes, and overall satisfaction. The audio from completed interviews was transcribed and loaded into a qualitative analysis software, ATLAS.ti. Researchers read through all transcripts, highlighting quotes with important information and looking for patterns or themes within and across the data. The research team reported quotes and themes at each local office's strengths and challenges analysis to add families' voices to this phase of the CoQI process.

## REFERENCES

I Service Provision: <https://dcfpolicy.nj.gov/api/policy/download/CPPIII-C-2-150.pdf>

II Permanency Supervision: <https://dcfpolicy.nj.gov/api/policy/download/CPPIII-C-5-500.pdf>

III Monthly Supervisor-Worker Conferencing in the period under review February 2023 – April 2024. Retrieved 11/14/2024 from SafeMeasures for New Jersey Department of Children and Families. [SafeMeasures is a data warehouse and analytical tool that allows tracking of critical child welfare indicators by worker, supervisor, Local Office, county and statewide. It is used by different levels of staff to track, monitor and analyze performance and trends in case practice and targeted measures and outcomes.]

IV Data as of June 30th, 2024. Retrieved from: <https://njchilddata.rutgers.edu/portal/children-in-placement>

V Data refers to the period between January 2024 and June 2024. Retrieved from: <https://njchilddata.rutgers.edu/portal/siblings-placed-together>

VI U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Children's Bureau. (2020). Child and family services reviews aggregate report: Round 3, fiscal years 2015-2018. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/report/child-and-family-services-reviews-aggregate-report-round-3-fiscal-years-2015-2018>

## Differences between 2023 and 2024 Case Record Review:

For the reasons described below, it is not valid to compare quality scores between the case record reviews reported in 2023 and those reported in 2024:

The case record review tool was enhanced after the first cycle of CoQI, in part, to improve the quality of the data. A major change included modifying certain items in the review tool to focus on a single child participant within families with multiple children served in out-of-home placement. Focusing on a single child participant in the family yields a more detailed understanding of the child's experience while in placement, and it reduces complexity observed in families where the number of factors and interactions a reviewer must consider can obscure the important aspects of service. This case study method centering items around a focus child or target child yields more accurate scoring and is also more closely aligned with federal reviews.<sup>VI</sup>

The final scores described in this brief are also weighted based on new criteria. Scored case record review items related to safety were given weights between 4 and 5. Items related to casework practice were given weights between 3 and 4. Items related to case practice activities focused on gathering information were given weights between 1 and 3. Questions that yielded binary yes/no answers, and questions that were not applicable to all cases and don't fall into the above categories were given weights of 2 to 3.

### INTERPRETING QUALITY SCORES:

Reviewers sought to determine if there was evidence in the electronic record that casework performance aligned with best practice and policy. Performance scores were assigned to each casework activity reviewed, based on whether the observed practice was completely, substantially, marginally, or not at all aligned with best practice and policy. The quality scores in this brief represent a summary of performance scores within a practice indicator. Quality scores range from 0% to 100%, where 100% represents performance that is completely aligned with best practice and policy.

To interpret scores and identify areas for improvement, several factors must be considered. Each domain can highlight strengths or areas for improvement, which may not always align with the overall domain rating. Scores are evaluated on their relevance to critical practice functions and their impact on child safety and outcomes. Contextual factors, such as seasonal caseload fluctuations and systemic issues, should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. In general, within this statewide report, scores of 80 or above are considered strengths, scores between 65 and 80 are considered areas for improvement, and scores below 65 are considered areas for significant improvement. For more information see: [Quality Scores Guide](#).