

Introduction and Organizational Updates. In accordance with ACYF-CB-PI-26-03 and its definition of “critical updates”, the State of New Jersey incorporates by reference the information and data contained in its prior year Annual Program and Service Report (APSR) as if fully set forth herein. Accordingly, this submission provides only critical updates since the prior year APSR, consistent with the reporting requirements of 45 C.F.R. §1357.16. This report provides critical updates that took place between July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026, related to the state’s Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), plan for child welfare services, Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) State Plan, and other grants historically coordinated through the APSR.

The New Jersey Department of Children and Families (DCF), the lead agency for Title IV-E and IV-B programs, is the state’s Cabinet-level agency devoted exclusively to serving and supporting children and families. DCF is committed to assisting and empowering residents to be safe, healthy, and connected. DCF’s vision of a broader family strengthening system is a collaborative, all-of-state effort, including efforts made by DCF, its sister agencies, families and youth, the courts and legal partners, provider agencies, educational partners, law enforcement, healthcare partners, and many more. Year 2 critical updates related to DCF’s organization include:

- **New state administration.** On January 20, 2026, Governor Mikie Sherrill was sworn in as the state’s 57th governor. In May 2026, Governor Sherrill named Joseph Ribsam to serve as DCF’s next Commissioner. Commissioner Ribsam began his term on June 5, 2026.
- **Organizational changes.** DCF updates its organizational structure in support of the Department’s strategic priorities. In April 2026, DCF brought its Office of Quality and Office of Monitoring together into a new office, the Office of Service Performance and Improvement, under the leadership of Laura Jamet. Clinton Page stepped into Ms. Jamet’s former role as interim Assistant Commissioner for the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P.) In this role, Mr. Page also replaces Ms. Jamet as the CAPTA Coordinator/State Liaison Officer; his contact information is PO Box 717, Trenton, New Jersey, 08625-0717, (609)888-7000, Clinton.page@dcf.nj.gov. In May 2026, DCF’s Office of Strategic Development evolved into the Office of Strategy Innovation and Implementation (OSII), under the leadership of Nancy Gagliano. OSII will aim to coordinate community, programmatic and organizational priorities by developing the frameworks, plans, and execution structures to drive meaningful change. OSII consists of the Offices of Innovation, Development and Implementation, and Project and Program Management.
- **Publicly available data and information.** DCF values data transparency and believes any interested individual should be able to easily access and review agency policy and performance and outcomes data to assess how the child welfare system is functioning. DCF maintains its policies; monthly performance data; various briefs, reports, plans, and concept papers; and public customizable data reports on its public website and through the New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub. In Year 2, DCF modernized its public website, publicly available data dashboards, and internal intranet site. In addition, in December 2025, DCF launched the Healing and Resilient NJ Technical Assistance Center, which promotes trainings, resources, and other technical assistance to organizations shifting to trauma-informed approaches.

Updates on DCF’s CFSP Goals and Objectives. Table 1 summarize material changes, progress and accomplishments related to the goals and objectives of DCF’s 2025-2029 CFSP. Table 2 includes the metrics and annual targets for measuring progress towards achievement of the goals.

Updates to the Department's Service Array. DCF provides and oversees an array of public services for children, youth, families and adults. Major changes to the Department's service array during the reporting period include:

- **New parent support continuum.** DCF's new continuum of prevention services provides a range of evidence-based services of varying intensities to support parenting, family dynamics, and mental health, including: Positive Parenting Program (Triple P), Intercept, and Brief Strategic Family Therapy (BSFT). Triple P is a parenting intervention for families with concerns about their child's moderate to severe behavioral problem. Through one-on-one and/or group sessions, parents learn skills related to child development, behavior management, positive parenting and implementing planned activities and routines. Intercept provides intensive in-home mental health services to children and youth from birth to 18 years of age who are in out-of-home place or at risk for entry or re-entry into out-of-home placement. Family Intervention Specialists offer children and their families individualized services to address needs, support in school or legal meetings, and 24-hour on-call crisis support. BSFT uses a structured family systems approach to foster more effective and adaptive family interactions with a goal of reducing risk factors and strengthening protective factors to address adolescent drug abuse and other behavioral problems. In 2024 and 2025, DCF contracted with model developers to support DCF's implementation of the new programming and provider networks. In Spring 2025, DCF issued RFPs and awarded contracts to providers. The models became available in September and October 2025.
- **Universal home visiting (UHV) expansion.** Launched in 2024, Family Connects NJ is an evidence-based UHV program that assists families, including biological, adoptive, resource or kinship caregivers and people recovering from a stillbirth or neonatal loss, with a specially trained nurse for personalized follow-up visit at home within the first two weeks after their child's birth. During Year 2, Family Connects NJ became available in six additional counties, making the program available to approximately 87% of the state's birthing population. The program is expected to go statewide in Year 3.
- **Peer mentoring expansion.** In Year 2, DCF expanded EnlightenMENT, its peer mentoring program, from a 10-county service area to statewide coverage. This program provides young people, ages 14 through 21 and in the care of CP&P, with peer support through trained professional staff and credible messengers with lived experience in the state's child welfare system. The EnlightenMENT program delivers supportive services, including advice, guidance, and empowerment strategies, that assist young people to navigate and thrive while involved in New Jersey's foster care system.
- **Abuse intervention program (AIP) expansion.** DCF expanded its domestic violence AIP to two additional counties. AIP shifts services from a time driven, one-size-fits-all model to individualized evaluation, assessment, and treatment to participants by employing Risk, Needs, Responsivity (RNR) principles. Adherence to RNR principles has been shown to be effective in reducing general offender recidivism and has been adapted for the domestic violence offender population in many states and jurisdictions.
- **New adolescent substance use recovery initiatives.** DCF established Adolescent Substance Use Recovery Initiatives in all 21 counties. These providers provide outpatient and intensive outpatient services to youth with co-occurring substance use disorders and mental health needs.

Adolescents are eligible to receive these services if they engage in risky behavior relevant to their substance use or meet diagnostic criteria for substance use disorder.

- **LifeSet milestone and expansion.** In October 2025, Lifeset hit the milestone of having been available and serving youth in New Jersey for five years. During those five years, four providers have assisted more than 950 youth meet their identified goals related to skill development, employment, housing, and making and maintaining connections. In December 2025, Lifeset expanded to serve youth who have the Foster Youth to Independence vouchers in two jurisdictions.
- **Education and training vouchers (ETV).** In New Jersey, eligible students are able to access ETV funding for up to five years until the age of 26 with the need for consecutive enrollment. During the 2025-2026 school year, New Jersey awarded 202 ETVs; of the total ETVs, 43% were new ETVs.

Updates to Practice and Policy. Year 2 critical updates on DCF's practice or policy include:

- **Round 4 Child and Family Services Review (CFSR).** During Year 2, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) administered CFSR Round Four in New Jersey. DCF and child welfare stakeholders submitted a Statewide Assessment and participated in a Children's Bureau-led onsite review. In February 2026, ACF made available DCF's February 2026 Data Profile. In March 2026, ACF transmitted its Final Report to DCF. In April 2026, DCF elected to participate in the pilot *A Home for Every Child* performance improvement opportunity. In May 2026, DCF submitted and ACF approved the state's pilot PIP.
- **Discontinuation of Solution-Based Casework (SBC).** In 2020, DCF began to integrate the evidence-informed SBC model into its existing case practice model. In March 2026, after hearing directly from the workforce and experiencing minimal positive movement in CP&P outcomes for families, DCF determined to discontinue use of SBC. Since then, leadership has guided CP&P staff on de-implementation protocols and expectations moving forward.
- **Revised family care plan regulations.** In Year 2, DCF proposed revisions to N.J.A.C. 3A:26 et al., Substance-Affected Infants, which were enacted in January 2026. Revisions include replacement of the term "plan of safe care" with the term "family care plan" and establishment of a procedure for health care providers to initiate deidentified notifications to DCF when there are no concerns of abuse or neglect. In FFY 2025, 435 substance-exposed newborns were reported to CP&P; of these, CP&P supported development of a Family Care Plan for 325 (75%) of the infants and made referrals for services for 276 (63%) of the infants or caregivers.
- **New flexibilities for visits with young adults.** Through co-design with lived experts, DCF is incrementally increasing flexibilities for visits between caseworkers and young adults and ensuring youth have access to technology to participate. It is now permissible, with the consent of the young adult, for monthly visits between caseworkers and youth ages 18 and older in foster care to take place virtually. DCF is piloting the changes with young adults attending college. DCF updated policy to permit virtual visits and to include the requirement of informed consent.
- **Citizen review panels.** The state's three citizen review panels, the Child Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board (CFNFRB), the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect (NJTFCAN), and the Staffing and Oversight Review Subcommittee (SORS) remained intact,

submitting annual reports in January 2026, December 2025, and May 2026, respectively. Responses to each annual report are complete and pending distribution.

Other CAPTA Data. During this reporting period, there was one child in placement under the legal authority of CP&P that was transferred from CP&P to the Juvenile Justice Commission. In 2025, DCF made Indian Child Welfare Act referrals for 65 children, representing 47 families. DCF sent 202 letters to individual Native American tribes or nations and contacted the Bureau of Indian Affairs on seven cases where the tribe or nation was unidentified. In 2025, the Department did not facilitate any intercountry adoptions. Table 3 includes data on the demographics and education levels of CP&P child welfare staff as of September 30, 2025.

Targeted Plan Updates. Year 2 critical updates related to the DCF's targeted plans include:

- **Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan.** DCF remains committed to recruiting and retaining a pool of potential resource and adoptive families that meet the needs of the infants, children, youth, and young adults served by DCF. In November 2025, DCF expanded its recruitment targets to include children ages 0-12, informed by county-specific placement needs. Throughout Year 2, DCF partnered with the National Center for Diligent Recruitment to evaluate strengths and needs and prioritize recruitment strategies. DCF and NCDR are gathering data to support GIS mapping related to resource parent recruitment. Additionally, DCF prepared to launch its new resource parent training, the National Training and Development Curriculum, by hosting train-the-trainer sessions and practice training sessions. DCF integrated strategies from its Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan into its Round 4 CFSR pilot PIP.
- **Health Care Oversight and Coordination (HCOC) Plan.** DCF updates its HCOC Plan to include the following: DCF's HCOC Plan was informed by meaningful consultation with mental health providers, including the Rutgers University François-Xavier Bagnoud School of Nursing, contracted psychiatrists regarding psychotropic medication policy and utilization, and Montclair State University Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative. DCF supports continuity of care for children in foster care through multiple integrated approaches, e.g., the Child Health Unit and Child and Family Nurse programs, the collaborative care model with hospitals and now pediatric primary care providers, and Mobile Response and Stabilization Services at placement. DCF has established protocols for the appropriate use and oversight of psychotropic medications, e.g., ensuring medications are prescribed by pediatric psychiatrists and psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners with specialized training in pediatric mental health, reduced polypharmacy and strengthened use of non-pharmaceutical interventions, provision of adequate information to the child, parent, caregiver and guardian for informed consent, and a comprehensive Children's System of Care (CSOC) follow-up process.
- **Training Plan.** The Office of Training and Professional Development leads the Department's efforts to facilitate learning experiences for the DCF workforce to carry out DCF's vision and strategic goals. During Year 2, DCF revised its training curriculum. DCF intends to submit a revised plan in the near future.

Table 1. Year 2 Updates for CFSP Goals and Objectives

Goals and Objectives	Year 2 Updates
Goal 1: To prevent unnecessary involvement in the child protection system.	
Objective 1. To engage stakeholders outside of the child protection system to ensure use of the child abuse hotline is reserved only for situations in which maltreatment is suspected.	NJTFCAN: In December 2025, the NJTFCAN finalized its 2026-2029 Statewide Prevention Plan. Geospatial modeling & community planning: DCF engaged in the strategic planning process in Camden and Cumberland County. Risk analyses and service mapping were conducted in Newark and Salem City.
Objective 2. To improve awareness of access to statewide family resource directory.	With the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2026 renewals, DCF incorporated NJ 211 online directory requirements into DCF's Notice of Standard Contract Requirements.
Objective 3. To expand community programs and protective factors.	UHV: DCF maintained its UHV program with data from the first two years of the program demonstrating positive impacts. In March 2026, Governor Sherrill included funding for continued expansion of the UHV program in the State's SFY 2027 budget. New Jersey Student Support Services (NJ4S): NJ4S operated throughout Year 2. In March 2026, Governor Sherrill announced a decision to shift funding from NJ4S to a new school-based program managed by the New Jersey Department of Education. In June, DCF learned that NJ4S would continue through the next fiscal year. Planning for continuation of the program is underway.
Objective 4. To reform call screening practice to distinguish poverty more precisely from neglect.	DCF worked with an external consultant to review national best practices to conduct surveys and focus groups with State Central Registry (SCR) stakeholders. DCF developed a revised screening tool. The consultant completed a change management plan for implementation of the SCR revisions. In Year 3 and upon approval of the revised tool, the implementation team will work to upgrade the telecommunications platform and develop staff training.
Goal 2: To improve the quality of services to families involved with DCF.	
Objective 1. To ensure constituent safety in CP&P out-of-home settings and CSOC residential settings.	Collaborative Safety (C/S): In Year 2, DCF worked with the Center for Helping Professions to undertake C/S reviews with CSOC out-of-home providers, undertaking reviews and mapping sessions with five pilot agencies. In Year 3, DCF will expand to all CSOC out-of-home providers with a focus on suicide and suicide attempts. Strengthening Resource Care: In January 2026, N.J.A.C. 3A:51A was published, finalizing a more flexible licensing pathway for kinship caregivers. In Year 2, DCF operationalized the regulations by enhancing training for licensing staff, advancing quality assurance processes, and providing technical assistance to frontline staff. DCF will administer the kinship staff survey after the new practices become established. In Year 2, the Resource Parent Council transitioned to the Office of Family Voice (OFV), where a Resource Parent Engagement Advisor was hired. The Council is acting on previously identified priorities, establishing their vision and expanding membership. OFV received 90 applications by April 2026.
Objective 2. To improve the service array.	Program Plans & Project Management: In Year 2, DCF continued program develop via program plans, bringing nearly 80% of those programs into the full implementation phase. DCF further refined its service array by systematically assessing program maturity using a new maturity model and updating the program plan model for more collaborative and cohesive program development and management. DCF bolstered its project management (PM) capabilities with the establishment of a dedicated PM unit, development of a PM model and standardized workplan, and strategic hiring of PM Professional resources. Collaborative Quality Improvement (CoQI) and Monitoring: In Year 2, DCF completed development of its purchased services CoQI process, e.g., logic model, practice profile, feedback loops. DCF began CoQI for Family Preservation Services (FPS), Keeping Families Together (KFT), out-of-home residential care, Care Management Organizations, and Domestic Violence Direct Services. In Year 2, DCF monitored Wave 2 and 3 programs: Regional Diagnostic Treatment Centers, Child Protection Substance Abuse Initiatives, Family Unification Program, Expectant and Parenting Youth, and Employment Readiness Programs. DCF initiated tool development for the second round of FPS and KFT monitoring, which will take place in Fall 2026 and early 2027. In 2027, DCF will also monitor the Statewide Domestic Violence Hotline and Women's Referral Central Hotline.

Table 2. Year 2 Measurement of Progress

Measure	Baseline (2023)	Year 1	Year 2	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
		Performance	Target	Performance	Target	Target	Target
Percent of CPS reports to the child abuse hotline that are unsubstantiated (unfounded and not established)	97%	96%	94%	91%	93%	92%	90%
Number of clients who contact the NJ 211 helpline (includes duplicate contacts)	292,143	321,828	657,323	337,667	657,323	657,323	657,323
Number of children in resource family homes who are victims of child abuse and/or neglect	8	3	7	1	6	5	5
Number of children in residential out-of-home placements who are victims of child abuse and/or neglect	16	7	12	4	10	8	6

Table 3. All Child Welfare Staff, Demographics and Education Level, by Job Title, as of September 30, 2025

Job Title	Total	Female	Male	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Nat. Amer.	White	MSW	Other Masters	BSW	Other Bachelors	Law Degree	PhD
Family Service Specialist Trainee	324	270	54	8	152	10	2	152	11	31	34	221		
Family Service Specialist 2	1528	1271	257	37	751	23	28	689	81	127	196	1091		1
Family Service Specialist 1	890	756	134	30	358	14	11	477	63	87	107	629	1	1
Front Line Supervisor	637	547	90	12	198	19	7	401	70	90	67	404	2	1
Case Practice Specialist	94	83	11	2	26			66	22	17	5	50		
Case Work Supervisor	207	179	28	15	61	2		18	33	39	17	115	1	1
Local Office Manager	44	38	6	1	15	1		27	8	7	4	24		
Area Office Support Staff	29	24	5	2	8			19	6	8	1	13		
Area Office Manager	18	15	3		4			14	7	2	2	7		
	3771	3183	588	107	1,573	69	48	1,974	301	408	433	2554	4	4