

# NEW: Benchmark Hearings

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# Benchmark Hearings

## What are they?

**Benchmark hearings are youth-centered events for the judge and the youth to discuss the present and the future.**

- Judge has a direct conversation with the youth, going beyond the formality of a court hearing.
- Judge listens to & learns the youth's needs.
- Identify & develop strategies so the youth's needs are addressed in a timely manner.
- Goal is a free-flowing, substantive conversation.

# Benchmark Hearings

## Which Youth?

**Benchmark hearings should be held for older youth, particularly those in placement for several years or those with an independent living plan. Hearing intervals:**

- Ages 11 to 14, at the discretion of the court, if in out of home placement for one or more years.
- At age 15
- At age 16
- At age 17
- At age 18-20 ← **Focus on housing, post-secondary education, and employment**

**For certain youth, the court will determine if a benchmark hearing will be held:**

- Youth in residential treatment program
- If Division already has guardianship of the youth
- If holding hearing would be detrimental to the youth

# Benchmark Hearings

## Who Attends?

**The youth, with Law Guardian's help, will identify issues to address and individuals to attend.**

- Youth and Law Guardian must attend.
- Youth encouraged to identify support people to invite (coach, mentor, teacher, kin, or parents)
- DCP&P caseworker, birth parents, resource parents, or other family members may attend at the discretion of the youth.
- CASA may be invited at the discretion of the youth.
- Persons who could upset/inhibit the youth should be excluded at the discretion of the judge.

# Benchmark Hearings

## Advanced Preparation

**Law Guardian provides the court with names & contact info for individuals who the youth wants included – three weeks prior to the hearing.**

- Based on conversations between the Law Guardian and the youth.

**Benchmark hearing checklist must be completed two weeks prior to the hearing.**

- Background information about the youth.
- Meant to help the judge prepare for the conversation with the youth.
- DCP&P caseworker responsible for completing the checklist, but other professionals can assist.
  - Placement facility staff
  - Therapists, psychiatrists should be contacted for updated information.
  - CASA can assist the caseworker with completing the checklist.
- DCP&P submits the checklist to court.

**“In preparation for the benchmark hearing, the court may also consider any court reports submitted by a CASA.”**

# Benchmark Hearings

## At the Hearing...

### **Conducted in the courtroom or in the judge's chambers.**

- Judge encouraged to come down from the bench.
- Hearing is confidential and will be recorded.
- Guidance not yet clear on whether Benchmark hearings can be held virtually.

### **The discussion:**

- Youth encouraged to identify topics for discussion, along with the judge.
- Others present can suggest topics too.
- Judges are the substitute parental decision makers, and conversation should be similar to one they might have with their own child.
- Explore ideas/strategies to reward positive behavior (good grades, achieving short term goals, etc.)

**Any agreement made as a result of the benchmark hearing need not be put in writing. Any new information resulting from the hearing, such as a goal change, should be provided to DCP&P as necessary.**

# Benchmark Hearings

## What can I do as CASA?

### How can I support my CASA youth?

- Monitor your CASA youth's age and advocate for a benchmark hearing at the appropriate time.
- Help the youth brainstorm the list of participants they might want to have attend.
- Help the youth think about topics/issues that they would like to discuss with the judge – make a list!
- Have a discussion with the Law Guardian prior to the benchmark hearing.
- Attend the benchmark hearing if the youth invites you; be understanding and supportive if the youth does not invite you.
- Offer the caseworker your assistance in completing the benchmark hearing checklist.
- Request a copy of the final checklist that is submitted to the court.
- Discuss with your Advocacy Supervisor whether you should submit a court report for the benchmark hearing.

# NEW: Wellbeing Assessments

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# Wellbeing Assessments

## What are they?

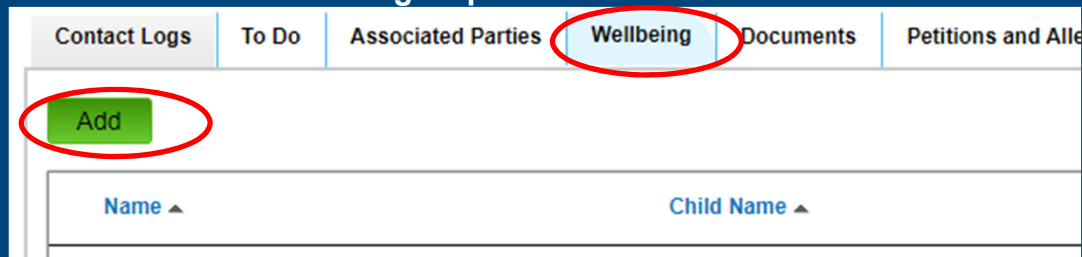
**Wellbeing Assessments monitor a child's wellbeing in the following domains:**

- Early Development (ages 0-4)
- Education (ages 5-17)
- Health (ages 0-17)
- Placement & Permanency (ages 0-17)
- Transition to Adulthood (ages 14-18+).

**Assessments can be completed all at one time (approx. 20 – 30 minutes) or one area at a time.**

- This is an opportunity to assess the strengths and needs of children/youth served by CASA

**Assessments are now accessible through Optima:**



# Wellbeing Assessments

## Who completes them?

**CASA NJ requires all CASA volunteers statewide to complete assessments on behalf of the child(ren)/youth they have worked with for at least 2 months.**

- If you work with multiple children/youth, assessments should be completed for each individual.
- You may need to consult with other people in the child/youth's life to answer some questions. (e.g., contact school to learn of discipline problems).
- You should also consult with the child/youth on certain questions as necessary (e.g., Does the youth have a supportive adult, other than their CASA or a professional, that checks in with them regularly?).
- CASA NJ asks that all assessments be completed by the advocate, not the Supervisor, because the advocate knows the child better.

# Wellbeing Assessments

## When to complete them?

Wellbeing Assessment should be completed **every January and July** throughout the duration of the case.

- Only complete assessments after you have been working with the child for at least 2 months.
- If you began working with the child in December, wait until the following July to complete the Wellbeing Assessment (not January).

**Reminders will be sent prior to each assessment period.**

- A few advocates will be asked to complete a preliminary evaluation by September 30<sup>th</sup>, as a pilot rollout of the process.
- Thank you for your assistance with this!

# Wellbeing Assessments

## How will assessments be used?

**Information from the assessments will be used to measure changes in wellbeing as a child/youth works with a CASA volunteer.**

- Helps us and CASA NJ better understand to what extent working with a CASA volunteer is helpful to children in various domains.
- You can use the information to identify areas in which you can help the child/youth.
- Follow-up surveys can be compared to the previous assessment results, to understand areas of improvement and areas where the child/youth may struggle over time.

**Over time, assessment information may help Passaic County CASA demonstrate to stakeholders and funders the value of the program.**

# A Few Reminders

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# Monthly visits with CASA children

In person visits are required every month.

You are the court's "Eyes on the child" and the Judges rely on you.

We are required to report statistics on monthly in-person visits to the Administrative Office of the Courts.

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# No one knows your case as well as you!

**PLEASE**...Check information in Optima for accuracy:

- Child's placement
- Current school & grade level
- Does the child have an IEP?
- Emails/Phone numbers for CASA teens!
- Contact info for parents, RPs, and yourself
- Attorneys and caseworkers
- Demographic information for the child (race, languages spoken, Factors)



**Please let us know if information is incorrect.**

- **Tell your Advocacy Supervisor and/or Michelle**
- Please pester us if you don't see Optima quickly updated!

# Update Contact Logs Frequently

Please update contact logs in Optima within 72 hours of each contact.

For in-person visits with CASA children:

- **A Child Contact: In-Person** must also have “**In-Person**” as the contact type
- Check boxes must be selected for each child you saw/spoke to.



# Practice Change - Always Check Child's Name

***For all contact logs, check the names of each child that contact log pertains to. For example:***

If you call a child's teacher, then

- Activity Type = Educational Advocacy/Educational Contact
- Contact Type = Phone
- Check the name of the Child that you discussed with the teacher.

If you discuss two children on your case with your Advocacy Supervisor via Zoom:

- Activity Type = Contact with CASA Supervisor/PC
- Contact Type = Facetime/Videochat
- Check the names of the two children discussed.

# Entering Time in Optima

Enter time in quarter hour increments

Time as entered in Optima	Amount of Time Spent
0.25	15 minutes or one quarter of an hour
0.5	30 minutes or half an hour
0.75	45 minutes or three quarters of an hour
1.0	60 minutes or one hour
1.25	1 hour and 15 minutes
1.5	1 hour and 30 minutes

## Please remember...

Be mindful of confidentiality, especially with family members frequently home together now.

Don't rely solely on text messages to communicate with DCP&P caseworkers, resource parents, bio parents, etc. – phone calls provide more detail.

Contact Division caseworker and birth parents at least once per month, even if you don't receive a response.