



# Child and Adolescent Needs & Strengths Tool Fidelity Report January 2025

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# THE CHILD AND ADOLESCENT NEEDS AND STRENGTHS (CANS) TOOL

## Overview of The CANS Tool


The CANS is designed as a structured assessment strategy for identifying youth and family actionable needs and useful strengths. It provides a framework for developing and communicating about a shared vision and uses youth and family information to inform planning, support decisions, and monitor outcomes. It provides a common language for multidisciplinary settings for consensus building.

## Guiding Principles of CANS Ratings

1. Items are included because they are relevant for planning and decision making.
2. Item ratings translate into action levels.
3. Focus is on the youth's needs, not interventions or services that could mask a need.
4. Consider culture and development before establishing action levels.
5. It's about the 'what,' not the 'why.' Don't explain away needs with what you think might be an underlying cause.
6. Specific ratings window (30-days) can be overridden based on action levels.

## Before Rating Items on The CANS, Users Are Asked to Consider the Following Questions:

- Is there any evidence of a need or strength?
- Are you understanding the youth's behavior within normal development given her/his age?
- Have you considered the youth and family's culture? Does your approach to assessment and engagement communicate respect for the youth and family's culture?
- Is the need impacting the youth's functioning?
- How urgently is action required on a need? How useful is the youth/family strength in achieving targeted outcomes?
- Are you focused on describing the need or strength, and not the underlying cause?
- What services are already in place for the youth and/or family?



The majority of the CANS items are rated in the context of what is normative for the youth's age and developmental stage.

Item Rating: Action Levels

Rating Needs Domains	
0	No evidence of need; no need for action.
1	History of or possible need; watchful waiting/ prevention/additional assessment.
2	Need is interfering with functioning; action or intervention required.
3	Need is dangerous or disabling; immediate or intensive action required.

Rating Strengths Domains	
0	Centerpiece strength; central to planning.
1	Strength present; useful in planning.
2	Identified strength; consider strength building or development activities.
3	No strength identified; strength creation or identification may be indicated.

## **CANS Use in West Virginia**

The CANS Tool is a Transformational Collaborative Outcomes Management (TCOM) Tool. West Virginia (WV) has been using the CANS for over 10 years. The Wraparound Facilitators were previously trained and continue to be required by West Virginia (WV) to use the CANS in the identification of needs and strengths and to use the CANS ratings to track outcomes.

The CANS Fidelity Review and Wraparound Fidelity Review were completed concurrently since the same population of service providers were being reviewed.

## **Forward**

Although, the National Wraparound Implementation Center (NWIC) model should consider using the CANS as an assessment tool only and do not recommend using the CANS within the Wraparound Plan of Care (POC), a joint statement from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, The National Wraparound Initiative (NWI), NWIC, and The John Praed Foundation developed a joint statement in the “Effectively Integrating the CANS into the Wraparound Process” document that demonstrates how the use of the CANS tool can be done.

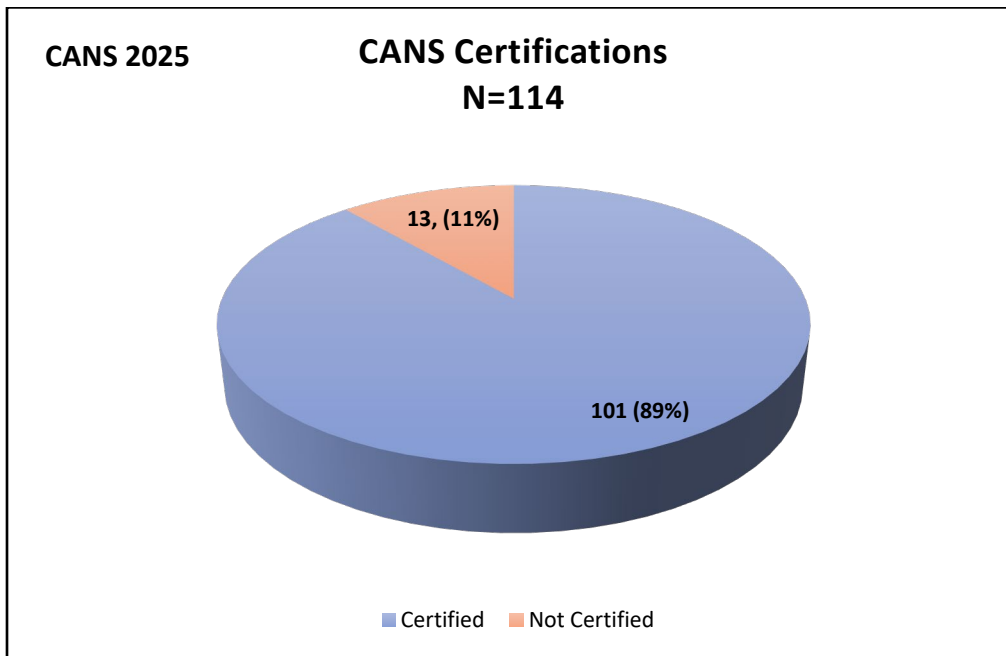
This document states that, “Although the CANS and Wraparound may be based on somewhat different underlying philosophies, the two underlying worldviews are actually more convergent than divergent. Because the CANS is typically used across youth with all levels of complexity, youth and families identified as having the most complex needs require an approach such as Wraparound for convening helpers and organizing provision of care. Meanwhile, Wraparound ideally does not rely solely on idiographic measures — systems of care that use Wraparound for youth with the most complex needs require standardized measurement that provides a common language for evaluating levels of need, eligibility for services, and degree of impact.” (Estep, K., Lyons, J.S., Bruns, E.J., & Zabel, M.D. (2019). Effectively Integrating the CANS into the Wraparound Process. Baltimore, MD: National Technical Assistance Network for Children’s Behavioral Health). The full joint statement is included as an addendum.

## **WV and the Wraparound Evaluation and Research Team**

Marshall University has worked closely with the University of Washington’s Wraparound Evaluation and Research Team (WERT), the accountability and evaluation wing of NWI, to train staff (TCOM Advanced Trainers and Fidelity Reviewers extensively trained in assessing high fidelity Wraparound standards) on fidelity assessment and scoring procedures, to establish guidelines for stratified random selection of Wraparound-enrolled youth for document reviews, and to develop fidelity reports. Marshall University and WERT continue to meet monthly to address the fidelity plan, data analysis, and barriers.



## Certification of Wraparound Facilitators



Annual certification in the CANS is a requirement of the Praed Foundation for anyone using the TCOM tools. Annual certification is also a Department of Human Services (DoHS) requirement for all Wraparound staff. The DoHS and Marshall University also recognize the importance of interrater reliability while rating the CANS. Both institutions believe in the use of the CANS as an important way of identifying the strengths and needs of the family during Wraparound. Identification of actionable needs is an important piece to indirectly advance fidelity to the Wraparound model.

Of the 184 CANS reviewed, there were twelve Wraparound Facilitators that had more than one CANS reviewed. One Wraparound Facilitator had 3 CANS reviewed. Eleven Wraparound Facilitators had two CANS reviewed. A total of 114 Wraparound Facilitators had CANS reviewed.

Of the 114 Wraparound Facilitators, 101 (89%) of Wraparound Facilitators were certified in the CANS. Of the 114 Wraparound Facilitators, 13 (11%) had expired or no CANS certification.

Anyone using the TCOM tools (including the CANS) must be certified. For this reason, we did not separate out the reasons for not having their certifications current.

Key	
Yes	They are CANS Certified as of 12/1/2024.
No	They are registered on the Praed Site and have not completed CANS certification. Their CANS certification expired as of 12/01/2024 or their account was deactivated.

## Recommendations

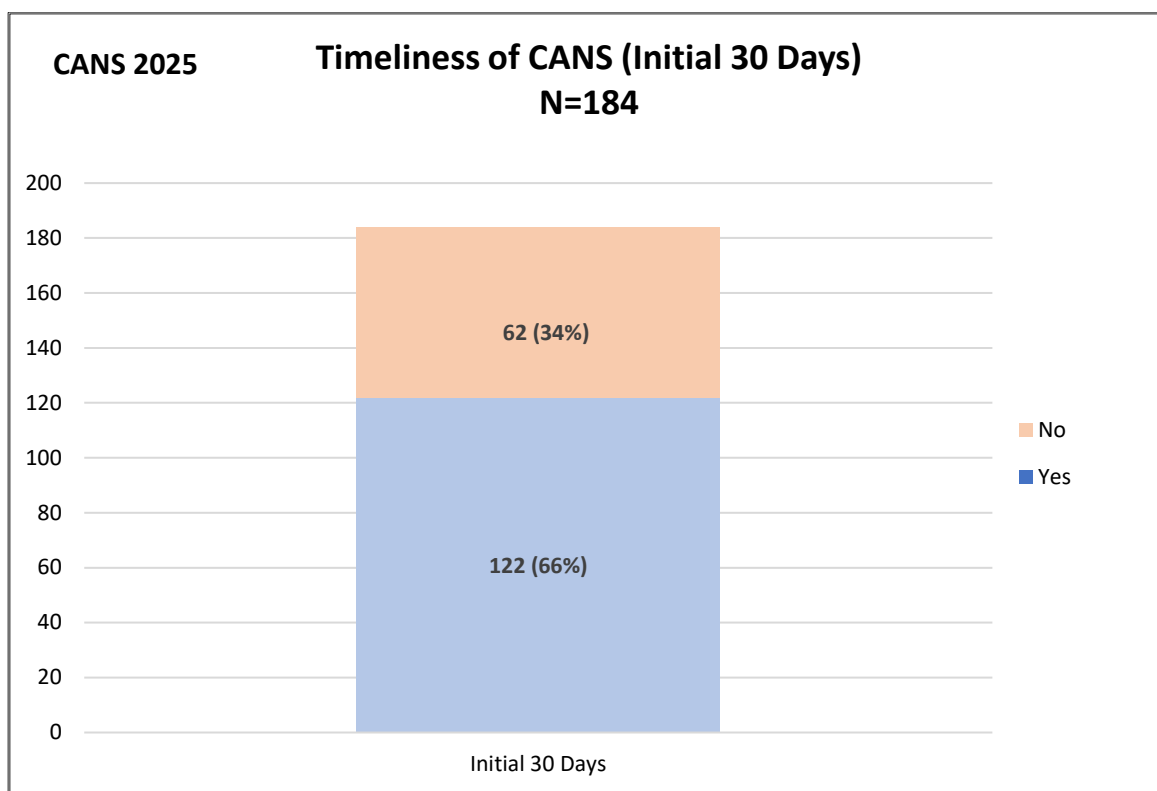
The TCOM Director will monitor CANS certifications and send out certification statuses monthly to providers. All CANS users are also alerted by the Praed Foundation when certification is about to expire.

## Timeliness of CANS

The areas of the initial CANS reviewed were as follows:

- Were the CANS completed within 30 days from the wrap facilitator assignment/acceptance?
- Were the CANS updated every 90 days?
- Are there justifications for 2 and 3 ratings on the CANS?
- Are justifications unique and understandable?

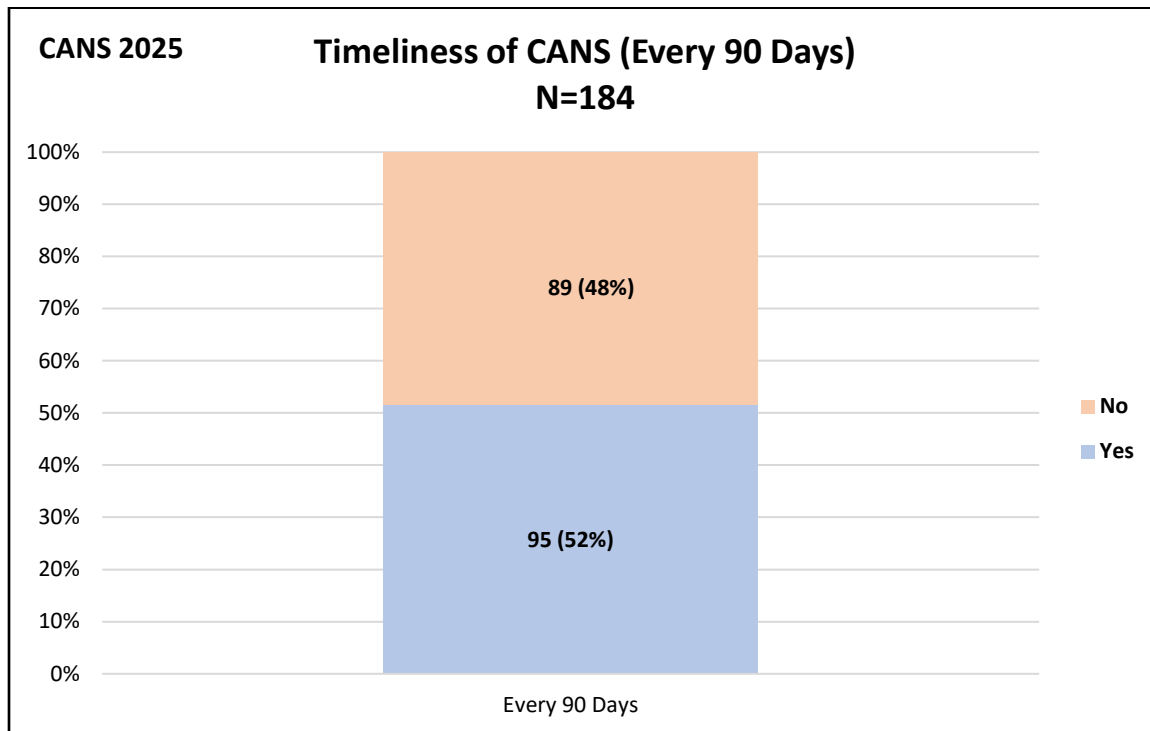
### CANS are Completed within 30 Days



The Wraparound Facilitators are required to complete the CANS within 30 days of the case assignment. Of the 184 CANS reviewed, Wraparound Facilitators completed 122 (66%) CANS within 30 days, while 62 (34%) did not meet this requirement.

### Subsequent CANS Completed Every 90 Days

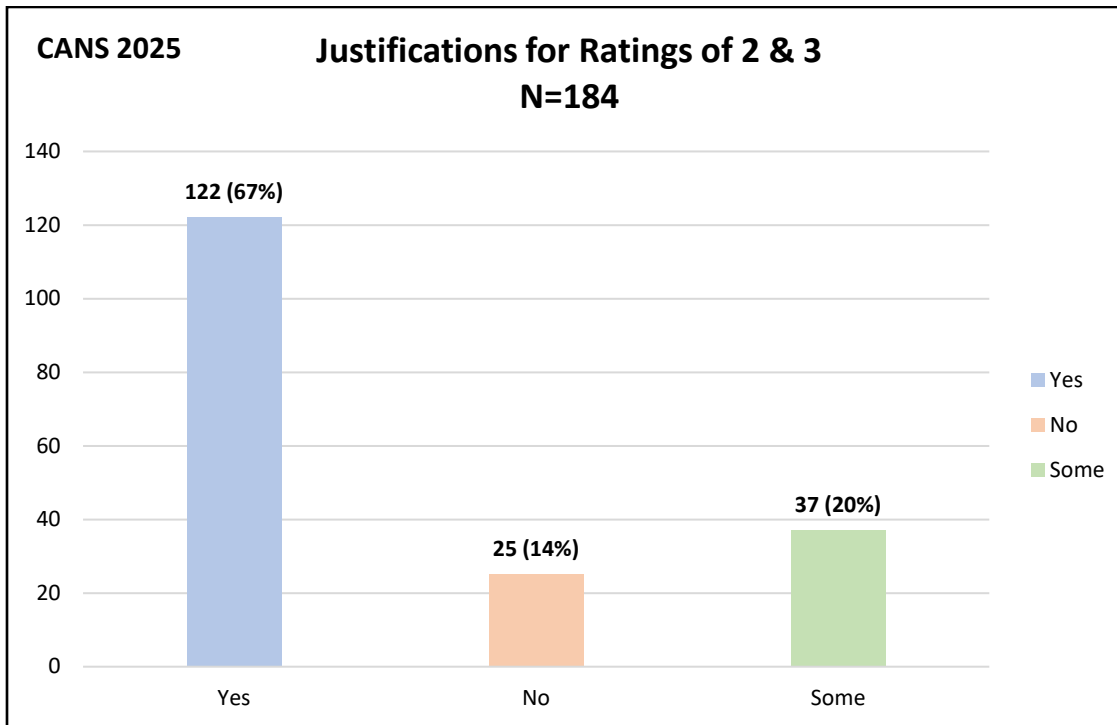
The Wraparound Facilitators are to update the CANS every 90 days. Of the 184 CANS reviewed, 95 (52%) updated the CANS every 90 days, while 89 (48%) did not.



Wraparound Facilitators need to improve on Timeliness of completing CANS at 30 days and 90 days. Barriers and recommendations for improvement are in the Review and Recommendations section of this report. Some of the timeliness could be due to Wraparound services being put on hold (child in a hospital, residential care), the family not cooperating, the family having other obligations or needs, or there was a change in the Wraparound Facilitator within the agency or a change in Wraparound providers. While these situations may not be avoidable, they do affect positive outcomes for the youth and families in the program.

## CANS Items and Justifications

### Justifications for Ratings of 2 and 3



Justifications are important for CANS ratings of 2 and 3 because these items are considered for planning purposes. The ratings tell “what” is going on with the child, while the justifications tell “why” the need was identified in a concise and meaningful way.

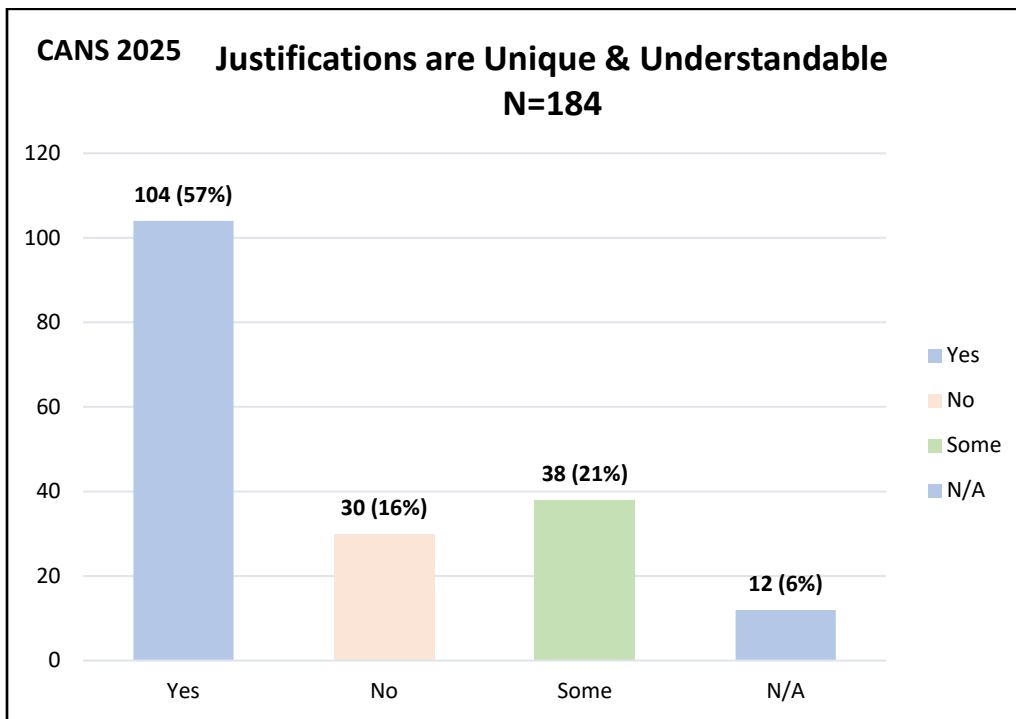
Of the 184 CANS reviewed, 37 (20%) had “Some” justifications for ratings of 2 and 3 ratings, 25 (14%) had no justifications for 2 and 3 ratings, and 122 (67%) had justifications for ratings of 2 and 3.

A CANS was rated “No” when there were no justifications for each item rated a 2 and 3 ratings even if the justifications were found in the comments at end of each domain. Justifications must be with each item.

CANS Fidelity Reviewers did not review if the CANS items should have or should not have been rated a 2 or 3, only if they were indicated. However, reviewers did find that a significant number of raters were not rating some CANS items/domains accurately. Specifically, the Trauma Experiences, Trauma Symptoms and Strengths Domains. Rating accurately has a big impact on the individual, the services recommended for the family, and the effectiveness of Wraparound at the provider and state levels. For instance, at the state level, this impacts systems such as the Decision Support Model that helps inform the level of services for which the youth qualifies.



### Justifications are Unique to the Child and Understandable for Ratings of 2 and 3



Of the 184 CANS reviewed, 104 (57%) included CANS items with ratings of 2 and 3 to be unique and understandable to the child. Of the 184, 38 (21%) had some that were unique and understandable, 30 (16%) did not have any of the justifications that were unique and understandable, and 12 (6%) did not have any justifications at all.

A rating of a 2 or 3 is imperative to have justifications as these indicate that these items should be on the Case Plan. However, all ratings are important. For instance, a rating of 0 could mean the youth has no needs or the need is unknown at the time the CANS was completed. A rating of 1 is important because this item doesn't have consensus of the team supporting the family or it is based on history but is not currently occurring. All justifications should be unique to the youth because they tell the youth and family's specific story.

### Recommendations

Barriers to improve timeliness could improve with Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) provider level along with advanced training in engagement.

The Marshall University TCOM Team has created a training video to discuss the importance of justifications and accuracy and has given examples on how to make justifications unique. Accuracy can affect outcomes and system data reviews. Marshall University also has a video, available at <https://www.marshall.edu/coefr/tcom/>, that support rating the CANS accurately and address common rating issues that occur.



## Changes in the Wraparound Plan of Care Is Reflected on the CANS

The second half of the CANS review looked at if the Wraparound Facilitator indicated changes on the CANS that were identified and addressed on their Wraparound Plan of Care or other case documentation.

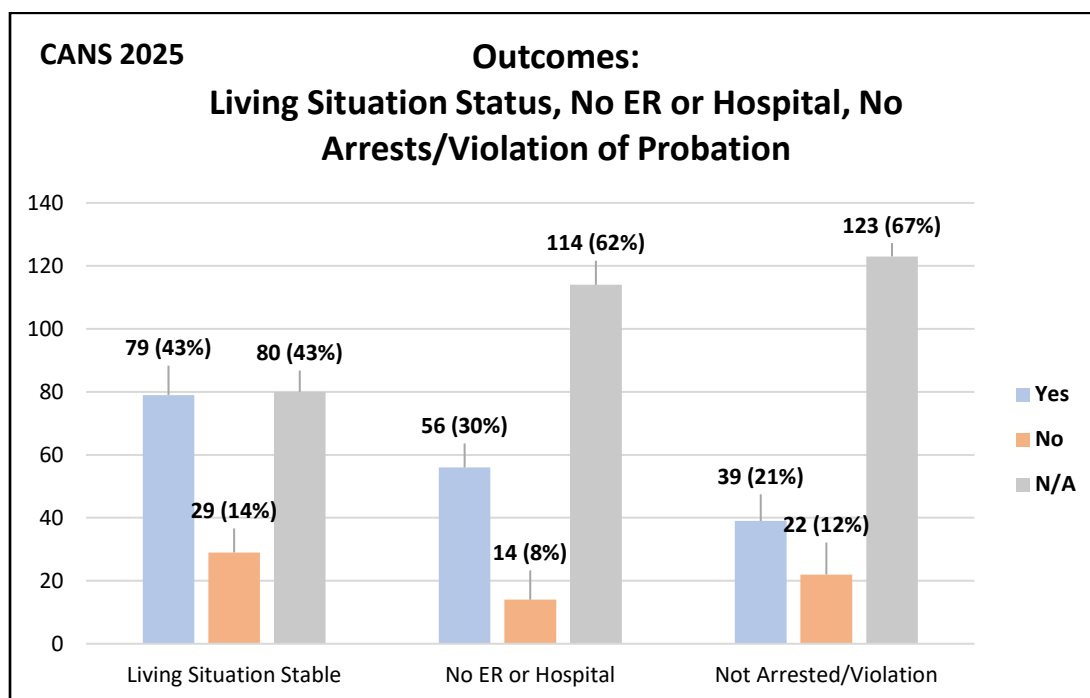
The CANS justifications and the Family Story used in Wraparound should have the same information. The family doesn't change their story based on programs used to support them. Instead, the CANS ratings and justifications and the Wraparound Family Story will only change as the family experiences changes in their own lives.

The CANS completed by the Wraparound Facilitators were considered if the family was in the Wraparound Program 6 months or longer. If the child/family exited the program before 6 months these cases are not included unless the information was provided by the Wraparound Facilitator in the Marshall Fidelity Review Form they completed. The reviewer looked at the information provided by the Wraparound Facilitator and the case record and compared these finding to the CANS items of focus. The majority of the Wraparound Facilitators used the Marshall Fidelity Review Form to provide this information. The information found on the Plan of Care or other information was used if the Marshall Fidelity Review Form was not completed or the information was not corresponding with the case information. These CANS focus items that were reviewed included: Living Situation, ER or Hospital Visits, School Attendance, Arrested/Violated Probation, Reduced Mental Health Symptoms, Interpersonal Functioning, and Improved School or Vocational Functioning.

The reviewers used a key to identify if the Family Story information was being captured on the CANS.

Key	
<b>Yes</b>	Rating did a good job of rating the CANS compared to the case documentation
<b>No</b>	Rater did not do a good job of rating the CANS compared to the case documentation; Some ratings were not given even though information given that should have been rated (such as School Functioning and School Attendance).
<b>N/A</b>	You may have an N/A when the case information/DART does not show a specific item to be of concern for that child and CANS reflects the same. You may have an N/A if there were only 1 CANS/couldn't determine change and you may have an N/A if child was discharged less than 6 months

## Stable Environment



### Living Situation (31 - Living Situation CANS Item)

- Of the 184 CANS reviewed, 79 (43%) indicated a change, 29 (14%) did not indicate a change, and 80 (43%) were N/A

### ER or Hospital Visits (31 – Living Situation CANS Item)

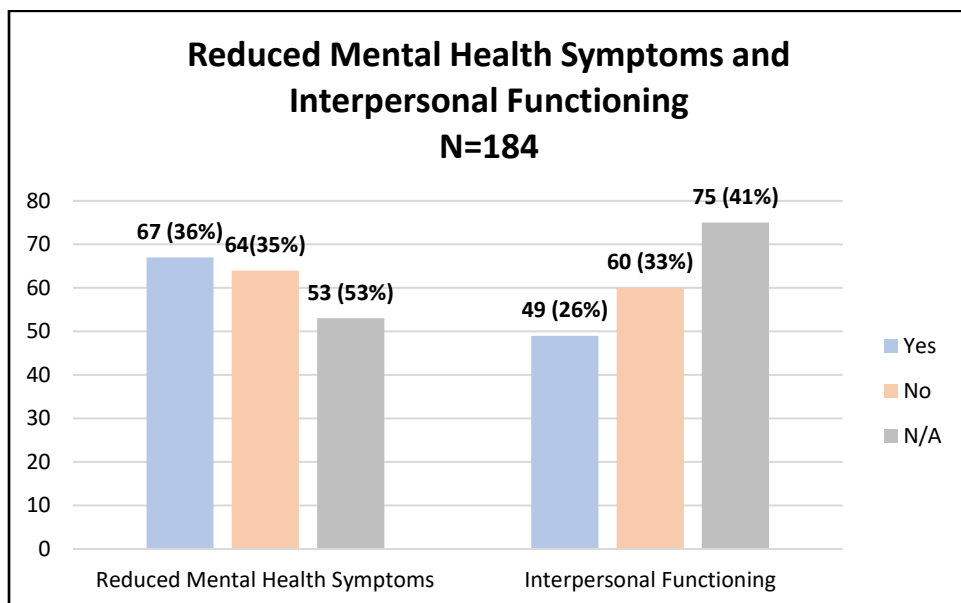
- Of the 184 CANS reviewed, 56 (30%) indicated the change, 14 (8%) did not indicated the change, and 114 (62%) were N/A

### Arrested/Violated Probation (37 – Legal CANS Item)

- Of the 184 CANS reviewed, 39 (21%) indicated the change, 22 (12%) did not indicated the change, and 123 (67%) were N/A.

The majority of the CANS ratings did reflect the changes found in the Wraparound Plan of Care and other case information. However, improvement still needs to be made. Additional training may be needed around these specific items (Living Situation, ER or Hospital admissions, and Arrested or Violation of Probation).

## Reduced Mental Health Symptoms and Interpersonal Functioning



Reduce Mental Health Symptoms (Behavioral and Emotional Needs) Symptoms and Interpersonal Functioning (52-64 CANS Items)

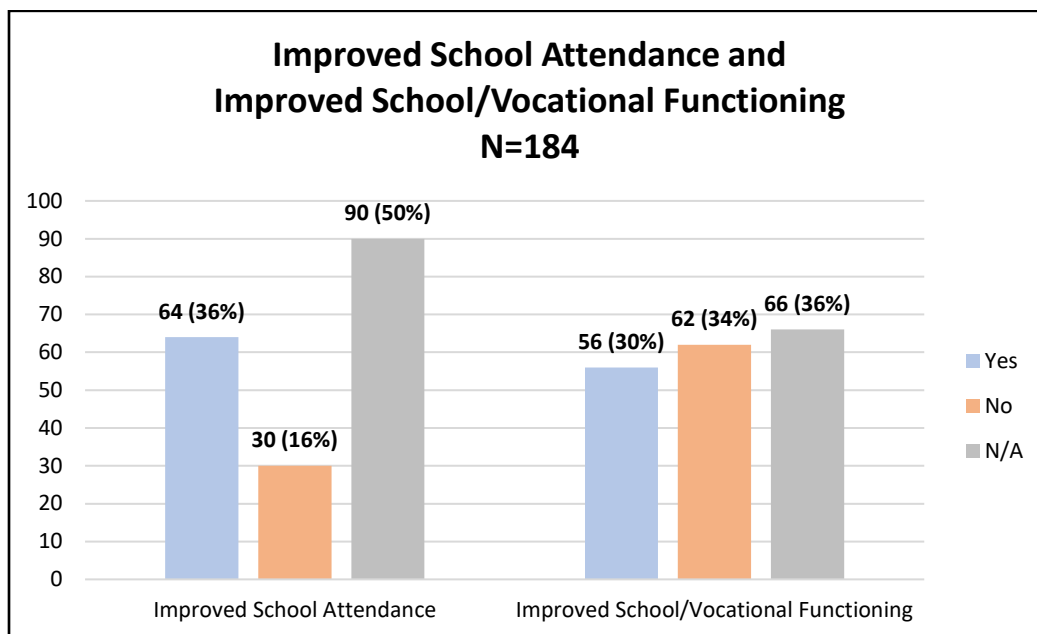
- Of the 184 CANS reviewed, 67 (36%) indicated the change, 64 (35%) did not indicate the change, and 53 (53%) were N/A.

Interpersonal Functioning (21 – Strengths/Living Situation)

- Of the 184 CANS reviewed, 49 (26%) indicated the change, 60 (33%) did not indicate the change, and 75 (41%) were N/A

The CANS ratings only identified the changes in about half found in the Wraparound Plan of Care and other case information. Additional training may be needed around these specific CANS items (Mental Health Symptoms and Interpersonal Functioning).

### School Attendance and Improved School and Vocational Functioning



#### Improved School Attendance (48 – School CANS Item)

- Of the 184 CANS reviewed, 64 (36%) indicated the change, 30 (16%) did not indicate the change and 90 (50%) were N/A

#### Improved School or Vocational Functioning (46 and 47 – School Behavior and School Attendance).

- Of the 184 CANS Reviewed, 56 (30%) indicated the change, 62 (34%) did not indicate the change, and 66 (36%) were N/A

The CANS ratings only identified the changes in about half of the cases where School Attendance was a need and less than half if Improved School or Vocational Functioning was identified as a need in the Wraparound POC and other case information. Additional training may be needed around these specific CANS items (School Attendance and Improved School or Vocational Functioning).

Reviewing the CANS Manual and item descriptions is important to understanding these items better. The CANS reviewers took into consideration that moderate change, noted by the Wraparound Facilitator, may not have been enough of a change to show up as a lower rating on the CANS. The CANS reviewers reviewed these areas carefully.

Ratings do go up and down depending on the circumstances of a child/family, that is why justifications are so important in telling the child and family's story. For instance, a rating may go up in items if a child is returned home from a short-term residential placement. This is typical in most of these situations and justification should explain that the child and family are adjusting. The POC would indicate how the family will be supported during this transition.

## Review and Recommendations

### CANS Certifications for Wraparound Facilitators Are Current

Certification in the CANS is a requirement of the Praed Foundation for anyone using the TCOM tools, such as the CANS. It is also a state requirement. West Virginia recognizes the importance of interrater reliability in administering CANS and given CANS relationship with fidelity and assessing strengths and needs. This is an important piece to indirectly advance fidelity to other programs, such as the Wraparound model.

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**Recommendation:** The Transformational Collaborative Outcome Management Director will monitor CANS certifications and send out certification statuses monthly to providers. All CANS users are also alerted by the Praed Foundation when certification is about to expire.

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### Timeliness of CANS Completed at The Initial (Within 30 Days) and Subsequently (Every 90 Days)

Wraparound Facilitators need to improve on timeliness at 30 days and 90 days.

Reasons for missing the timeframes are case transfers (some families having multiple Wraparound Facilitators) or cases being put on hold.

Some of the timeliness could be due to the service put on hold (child in a hospital or residential care), the family did not cooperate/family had other obligations or issues, or there was a change in the Wraparound facilitator within the agency or a change in the Wraparound facilitator because there was a change in the agency. While these situations may not be avoidable, the Wraparound Facilitator may misunderstand the recommended process for updating the CANS.

“The family does not need to retell their story to update the CANS. All that needs to happen is at check-in with the family and team, determine which, if any, CANS needs have been resolved, whether new CANS needs have been identified, and the status of existing strengths or any efforts to build new strengths.”

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**Recommendation:** Barriers to improve timeliness could improve with Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) at the provider level along with advanced training in engagement. The Marshall TCOM Trainers and Fidelity Team will provide training related to how the CANS should be used in the Wraparound process. Including existing videos/trainings to assist with improved ratings.

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### Justifications for CANS Ratings of 2 and 3 and Are the CANS Ratings Unique to The Child and Understandable

Justifications are important for CANS ratings of 2 and 3 because these items are considered for planning purposes. The ratings tell “what” is going on with the child, while the Justifications tell “why” or underlying condition.



Writing concise, unique to the client, and understandable statements are transferred to all areas of professional practice. Below are some considerations of the CANS Fidelity Reviewers while looking for unique and understandable justifications.

- The justifications should be clear and concise for each item.
- The justification should be clear, use simple language and avoid jargon or abbreviations.
- The justification should focus on the information as it relates only to each item (leave out irrelevant details).
- The justification should include key information (name of who was involved or stating information)
- The justifications should be based on fact or family and team members factual observations.
- The justifications should use date/time if needed to clarify duration, history, etc.

CANS Fidelity Reviewers did not review if the CANS items should have or should not have been rated a 2 or 3, only if they were indicated. However, reviewers did find that a significant number of raters were not rating some CANS items/domains accurately. Specifically, the Trauma Experiences, Trauma Symptoms and the Strength Domains. Rating accurately has a big impact on the individual, services provided, and programs and state delivery of Wraparound. For instance, at the state level, this impacts systems such as the Decision Support Model.

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**Recommendation:** The Marshall TCOM Trainers and Fidelity Team will provide training related to writing concise, unique to the child, and understandable justifications using the TCOM tools (CANS). Including existing videos/trainings to assist with improved ratings.

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### Changes In The Wraparound Plan of Care Is Reflected on The CANS

The CANS justifications and the Family Story used in Wraparound should have the same information. The family does not change their story based on programs used to support them. Instead, the CANS ratings and justifications and the Wraparound Family Story will only change as the family experiences change throughout their lives.

The majority of the CANS ratings did reflect the changes found in the Wraparound POC and other case information. However, improvements still needs to be made. Additional training may be needed around these specific items (Living Situation, ER or Hospital Visits, and Arrested or Violation of Probation).

The CANS ratings were only identifying changes in about half the needs identified in the POCs and other case information. Additional training may be needed around these specific CANS items (Mental Health and Interpersonal Functioning).

The CANS ratings were only identifying changes in about half of the POCs where School Attendance was identified. Also, less than half identified updates in the areas of Improved School or Vocational Functioning on



their POCs and other case information. Additional training may be needed around these specific CANS items (School Attendance and Improved School or Vocational Functioning).

The CANS Manual and item descriptions will provide information on what rating is needed for each situation. Focused Training may be helpful in understanding the CANS items better.

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**Recommendation:** The Marshall TCOM Trainers and Fidelity Team will provide training related to understanding how to document changes in the specific areas reviewed.

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