

FDAC Quarterly report January to March, 2025

This report presents compiled data shared by the 13 FDACs in England for the period 1 January to 31 March 2025, to offer a live picture of the circumstances facing families in FDAC, the work that is done to support them and the outcomes that have been achieved.

Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDACs) were established to support families where parental substance use is a contributing factor for local authorities issuing care proceedings. Over time, the model has developed to also support families where other issues such as domestic abuse or mental health are the key concerns.

FDAC offers an alternative, trauma-informed route through care proceedings. Families are supported by a multi-disciplinary team which provides an intensive and tailored package of interventions that help parents overcome their presenting issues and gives them the best possible chance of reuniting with their children. The FDAC team complete a dynamic assessment of change; reviewing and evidencing whether parents are able to make the changes required to meet their children's needs within their children's timescales, and if they are able to sustain them. Families are also provided with regular in-court reviews, without the presence of lawyers, where they meet with a dedicated specially trained judge. The court process and their judge become an agent for change; discussing progress openly, motivating families, encouraging families to have a voice and be engaged with the process, and encouraging problem solving.

Caseload

On 1 January 2025 there were 193 open cases in FDAC, a decrease of 20% on the same point last year but an increase of 89% since 1 January 2021 when we started collecting this data. During this period, a number of FDACs have been awaiting confirmation of future funding, which impacts the number of families the team can work with.

Over the quarter, 29 new cases were admitted to FDAC and 45 cases concluded.

The 29 families entering FDAC included 23 mothers or female parents, 15 fathers or male parents and 56 children. The average age of parents was 34 and the average age of children was 5.

Challenges facing FDAC parents



Substance use

Substance use is very common among FDAC parents with 74% of parents having ongoing substance use issues. 5% of parents had issues with alcohol, 16% only drugs, and 63% both. The most commonly used drugs by FDAC parents were cocaine (61%), cannabis (50%) and opiates.

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is widespread amongst FDAC parents. 74% of parents report experiencing domestic abuse, either as victim or perpetrators at some point in their lives. However, as a self-reported data this is potentially an underestimate.

Mental health

Parents in FDAC commonly have undiagnosed mental health needs. Although only 34% had a formal



193 Open cases in FDAC

▼ a decrease of 20% on the same point last year

45 Cases were concluded

diagnosis, screening suggests that 50% of parents screened show evidence of depression, 50% anxiety and 26% trauma.

Experiences of care

Parents in FDAC families commonly have experience of the child protection system, either during their own childhoods or as parents. 21% of FDAC parents were in care themselves at some point in their childhoods. 26% of the parents entering FDAC had had previous children removed with those parents having had an average of 2.9 children removed.

Offending

A significant proportion of parents in FDAC families have histories of criminal justice system contact. 50% of parents entering FDAC in this quarter for whom data was available had at least one criminal conviction or caution. Criminal justice system contact was notably more common amongst male parents (64%), than female parents (43%).

FDAC Outcomes

Child reunification

Of the 39 children for whom outcomes data was available this quarter, 33% were returned to their parents. A further 37% went to live with another parent. Notably only 17% of children went into foster care and no children were placed in residential care.

33% of children were returned to live with their parents

37% of children went to live with another parent



Substance use cessation

FDAC has a significant impact on parental substance use. This quarter, 19% of parents completely stopped using substances while a further 9% reduced their alcohol use and 27% reduced their drug use. Women were more likely to stop using substances than men (25% vs 6%).

19% of parents completely stopped using substances



FDACs and legal processes

FDAC seeks to provide parents with a better court experience where they are able to share their experience in an open, supportive space and provided with a clear sense of what changes they would need to make to be able to be safely reunified with their children. This means that, whatever decisions courts take, parents tend to understand and accept the reasoning behind it, reporting the FDAC process to feel fairer and more transparent. As a result, this quarter only one FDAC case (2%) ended with a contested hearing where the parent challenged the court's decision.

FDAC teams work closely and intensively with parents, formulating and tailoring the interventions enabling them to provide an ongoing dynamic assessment of change. They provide regular reports to the court, detailing the progress of the interventions and the assessment with updates and information from the whole system around the family and the children. This consistently reduces the need for external experts to provide assessments. This quarter only 16% of cases required an external expert assessment.

FDAC News – Welcome to the Northamptonshire FDAC and the Liverpool FDAC!

This spring has seen the launch of two new FDAC Teams. The Northamptonshire FDAC will be supporting families across the North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Local Authorities, with their launch event taking place on 16th May 2025. For any further information on this service please contact the Team Manager, Rachel Saunders, at Rachael.Sanders@nctrust.co.uk.

The Liverpool FDAC launch took place on 16th April 2025 at Liverpool Town Hall. There is the opportunity to read the speeches given by Lord Justice Peter Jackson [here](#) and the Designated Family Justice, His Honour Judge Parker, [here](#). For any further information on this service please contact the Team Manager Carol Batchelor, at Carol.Batchelor@liverpool.gov.uk.

This quarter we have also had showcase events celebrating the Black Country FDAC and the Pan London FDAC Team. Judge O'Hagan shared his journey with FDAC and his speech can be read [here](#).

This report is produced as part of the Centre for Justice Innovation's work to provide national leadership to strengthen, expand and champion the FDAC approach. To discuss any aspects of our work around FDAC please contact Sophie Carter at scarter@justiceinnovation.org