

FDAC LIVERPOOL OPENING 16 APRIL 2025  
LORD JUSTICE JACKSON

I'm delighted to have been asked to speak this afternoon and am sorry not to be with you in person. I used to be the lead family judge for the North West, and in total spent a year working in Liverpool; I have the fondest memories of this great city.

Anyhow, time moved on, and I'm now the national lead judge for FDAC. I cannot say how pleased I am that FDAC has finally arrived here. I pay tribute to Liverpool City Council's children's services and public health and the elected members, and also the local judiciary and HMCTS and the Centre for Justice Innovation. Jenny Turnross, Liz Parsons, Matt Ashton, Steven Parker, Sarah Alexander, Sophie Carter: together you show what can be achieved by visionary, collaborative public sector leadership.

FDAC has been around for 18 years, and we must congratulate it on reaching adulthood. During childhood and adolescence, it took endless exams and repeatedly passed them with flying colours. You do not need me to repeat the remarkable statistics that show how profoundly the lives of so many FDAC families have been changed. I am sure that this will be the experience in Liverpool, and I hope that it will lead to other authorities wanting to coming on board in the area and across the region.

But it has become increasingly clear to me that FDAC is not just about FDACs. What you are embarking upon here contains radical possibilities for the whole family justice system. There are currently 84,000 children in care in England and Wales: they would barely fit into Goodison Park and Anfield combined. And every year some 25,000 children enter care proceedings. Judge Parker tells me that in 2024, 1030 of these children came through the Liverpool family courts. While their cases are going on, social workers, Guardians, experts, lawyers and judges are doing their very best to provide a fair process that achieves the best possible welfare outcomes. But we know we can do better.

We know that there are many thousands of children each year, and hundreds in the Liverpool area alone, whose families could be kept together by a problem-solving approach. Again and again, it has been shown that the combination of the FDAC team and the judge achieves results that were not possible pre-proceedings. FDAC dismantles the idea that the interests of children and parents have to be in conflict. Instead of professionals asking whether they can trust parents, FDAC asks parents to trust us. That is a lot to ask, but it is the key to them accepting help and turning their lives around.

Instead of just being assessed and judged, they are also supported and understood. Instead of the parents' lawyers trying to discredit the social worker and the local authority lawyer trying to expose the parents' weaknesses, everyone works together to identify and build on strengths. Social workers and experts can do the jobs they trained for, and judges can be sure that where a care order or placement order has to be made, it really is necessary.

The significance of FDAC is not just that one child in two that can return to parents (against one in eight in standard proceedings), but also that almost every case ends in agreement. It brings benefits to the children who can return home, and also to the children who can't, but whose parents feel in their hearts that the process was fair; and that is before we come to the striking savings to the public purse and the example of enlightened justice that it sets to our society. This is the sort of system we should surely be aiming for, and the opening of Liverpool FDAC is another important, visible step in that direction. I very much look forward to seeing the court in action at Vernon Street and in the meantime, I warmly congratulate you all on making this exciting day possible.

Thank you.