

FDAC Quarterly report July to September, 2024

This report presents compiled data shared by the 13 FDACs in England for the period 1 July to 30 September 2024, 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 some 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 July 2024 there were 250 open cases in FDAC, an increase of 1% on the same point last year but an increase of 113% since 1 January 2021 when we started collecting this data.

Over the quarter, 26 new cases were admitted to FDAC and 19 cases concluded.

The 26 families entering FDAC included 23 mothers or female parents, 15 fathers or male parents and 48 children. The average age of parents was 35 and the average age of children was 5.

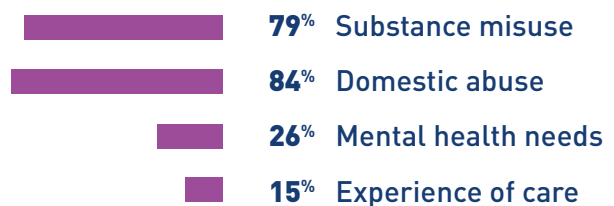


250 Open cases in FDAC

▲ an increase of 1% on the same point last year

19 Cases were concluded

Challenges facing FDAC parents



Substance use

Substance use is very common among FDAC parents with 79% of parents having ongoing substance use issues. 13% of parents were using only alcohol, 3% only drugs, and 68% using both. The most commonly used drugs by FDAC this quarter were cocaine (68%), cannabis, (61%) and opiates (18%).

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is widespread amongst FDAC parents. 84% of parents report experiencing domestic abuse, either as victim or perpetrators as 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 26% had a formal diagnosis, screening suggests that 60% of parents screened show evidence of depression, 75% anxiety and 83% 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 2.4 children removed.

FDAC Outcomes

Child reunification

Of the 39 children for who outcomes data was available this quarter, 56% were returned to their parents. A further 23% went to live with another parent and 3% were assigned to live with family or friends. Notably only 8% of children went into foster care and only no children were placed in residential care.

56% of children were returned to live with their parents

3% of children were placed with a friend or family members



Substance use cessation

FDAC has a significant impact on parental substance use. This quarter, 41% of parents completely stopped using substances while a further 5% reduced their alcohol use and 10% reduced their drug use. Women were slightly more likely to stop using substances than men (41% vs 40%).

41% 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 11% of FDAC cases 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 26% of cases required an external expert assessment.

FDAC News – FDAC Judicial Conference 2024: Building on Success

This year's Family Drug and Alcohol Court Annual Judicial Conference took place in November. The day was opened by the President of the Family Division, Sir Andrew McFarlane, who stressed that after 16 years FDAC has "proved it is the right and good thing to do". This message was echoed in speeches from Lady Chief Justice Baroness Carr and Ministers Janet Daby MP, Minister for Children and Families, and Lord Ponsonby, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the Ministry of Justice. Lord Justice Peter Jackson, the lead judge for FDAC, offered his continued support for FDAC as it "offers us the best way of achieving real culture change in our efforts to protect children from harmful parenting and equally to protect them from unnecessary separation from their families."

FDAC sites continue to ensure the voice of the family remain front and central to the model and this year's conference was no different. Alongside recognition of FDAC sites who have spent time over this last year expanding their FDAC parent peer mentor support offer, a former FDAC parent attended the conference and gave a powerful testimony on the positive impact working with FDAC had for her and son.