

FAMILY DRUG AND ALCOHOL COURTS

Annual Report
2024

FOREWORD

SIR ANDREW MCFARLANE, PRESIDENT OF THE FAMILY DIVISION



I am pleased to introduce this FDAC Annual Report 2024. On 18 October 2023 I spoke at an event to mark 15 years of Family Drug and Alcohol Courts. At that event I underlined my longstanding support for FDACs as being an evidence-based, cost effective and all-round better way of hearing a range of care proceedings and called for the continued implementation of FDACs across the country.

As previous annual reports have shown, the appetite for new FDACs continues to grow, despite the difficult financial environment. This year, we have seen the expansion of FDAC from three local authorities to five local authorities in Greater Manchester, and the Gloucestershire FDAC has expanded to ensure there are now specific FDAC social workers based within each of their local areas. The team at the Centre for Justice Innovation continue to work with a number of areas which are hoping to start new FDACs in 2025, with a Northamptonshire FDAC and a Liverpool FDAC due to launch in spring.

When I spoke at the event in October, I highlighted my fear that, without reliable funding, the 14 FDAC teams across the country face acute and ongoing financial risk, leaving them in a position where they have to cobble together local funding on an annual basis in order to keep going.

I am sorry to say that my fears have come to pass. We have seen the first Welsh FDAC in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan close, despite a positive local evaluation. We have also seen a number of existing sites pause on taking referrals as they seek the basic funding they need to continue.

Frustratingly, this is despite the positive findings from multiple outcome evaluations, including from the What Works Centre for children social care, which showed that families who participate in FDAC are significantly more likely to be reunified, and parents are more likely to stop using substances. A new cost benefit analysis published this year demonstrates that FDACs produce a significant cost saving per case.

For my part, I am grateful to Lord Justice Peter Jackson who has taken on the lead role for championing FDAC within the judiciary. Peter Jackson LJ has brought his unique blend of energy, insight and determination to the task. We have seen, across the country, judges publishing judgments underlining the value and importance of FDAC, including the valuable outcomes it has achieved in cases involving domestic abuse. I continue to be enthused by the commitment and drive amongst the judges and professionals involved in FDAC, and this was evident amongst those who were trained in FDAC processes and procedures at the Royal Courts of Justice in September.

Looking to the future, we hope to see new sites set up under their own steam and the publication of the early findings of research looking at the impact FDAC has on offending. FDAC is part of a wider landscape of initiatives in our court system, such as the Pathfinder Pilot in the private children law system, and the intensive supervision courts in the criminal justice system. I, and many of the supporters of FDAC and of these 'problem-solving approaches' from across the judiciary, social work practice and elsewhere are keen to demonstrate their value. It is my fervent hope that this accumulated evidence, energy and commitment will be taken forward in recognition of the benefits of spreading FDAC across the country.

**The Rt Hon Sir Andrew McFarlane,
President of the Family Division**

FAMILY DRUG AND ALCOHOL COURTS: THE YEAR IN DATA 2024

Our families

Families

176
families
entered FDAC
in 2024

248
parents

322
children



Children

Average age:

6 years

20% of children were
less than a year old

77% were not in the
care of their parents at
the start of FDAC



Parents



Female



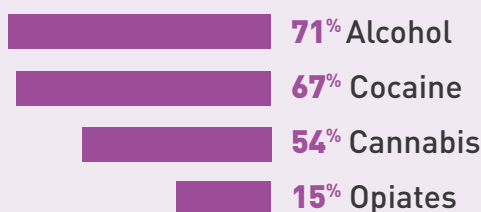
Male

19% of parents had been in
care while they were children

29% of parents had had previous
children removed from their care

Challenges facing families

Substances most commonly used by
parents were:



88% of parents
showed signs of
mental illness

69% of parents
reported having
experienced domestic
abuse at some point
in their lives.



*Based on families entering FDAC between 1 Jan 2024 and 31 Dec 2024 (excluding Pan-London FDAC)

Our outcomes

Overview

199
cases
concluded

275
parents

376
children



Outcomes for children

39% of children were reunited with one or both parents at the end of proceedings.

33% of children were placed with a family member or friend



Outcomes for parents

57% of parents completed the FDAC intervention programme

45% of parents had become abstinent from all substances by the end of proceedings



The FDAC process

The average FDAC case length was 45 weeks, compared to 48 weeks for the average length of non-FDAC care cases over the same period.

Only 9% of FDAC cases ended in a final contested hearing

*Based on all cases concluding in FDAC between 1 Jan 2024 and 31 Dec 2024 (excluding Pan-London FDAC)

FDACS IN ENGLAND AND WALES

At the start of 2023/24, there were a total of 14 FDAC services working with families from 36 local authorities and in 20 family courts. Sadly, due to financial constraints, the Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan FDAC closed at the end of 2023. There has been an expansion of the Greater Manchester FDAC to include an additional local authority. At the end of 2024 there are 13 FDAC services working in 19 courts and serving 35 local authorities.

FDAC SITES AND LOCAL AUTHORITY AREAS COVERED

- 1. Birmingham and Solihull FDAC**
Birmingham City Council and Solihull MBC
- 2. Coventry and Warwickshire FDAC**
Coventry City Council and Warwickshire County Council
- 3. East Sussex FDAC**
East Sussex County Council
- 4. Turn Around for Children Service Gloucestershire:**
Gloucestershire County Council
- 5. Leeds FDAC**
(Service commissioned to Barca Leeds) Leeds City Council.
- 6. Pan-London FDAC**
(Service commissioned to the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust)
Croydon, Lambeth, Southwark, Wandsworth, Sutton, Kingston, Richmond, Bromley, Barking & Dagenham, Camden, Waltham Forest, Redbridge
- 7. Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire FDAC**
Milton Keynes Council and Buckinghamshire County Council
- 8. North East FDAC**
Newcastle City Council, Gateshead Council, North Tyneside Council
- 9. Pan-Bedfordshire FDAC**
Bedfordshire County Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Luton Borough Council
- 10. Southampton FDAC**
Southampton City Council
- 11. Greater Manchester FDAC**
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, Wigan Council, Manchester City Council, Bolton Council.
- 12. Wiltshire FDAC**
Wiltshire County Council
- 13. Black Country FDAC (Service commissioned to Change, Grow, Live)**
Walsall Council, Sandwell MBC and Dudley MBC
- 14. Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan FDAC**
Cardiff Council and Vale of Glamorgan Council closed at the end of 2023

Note:



13

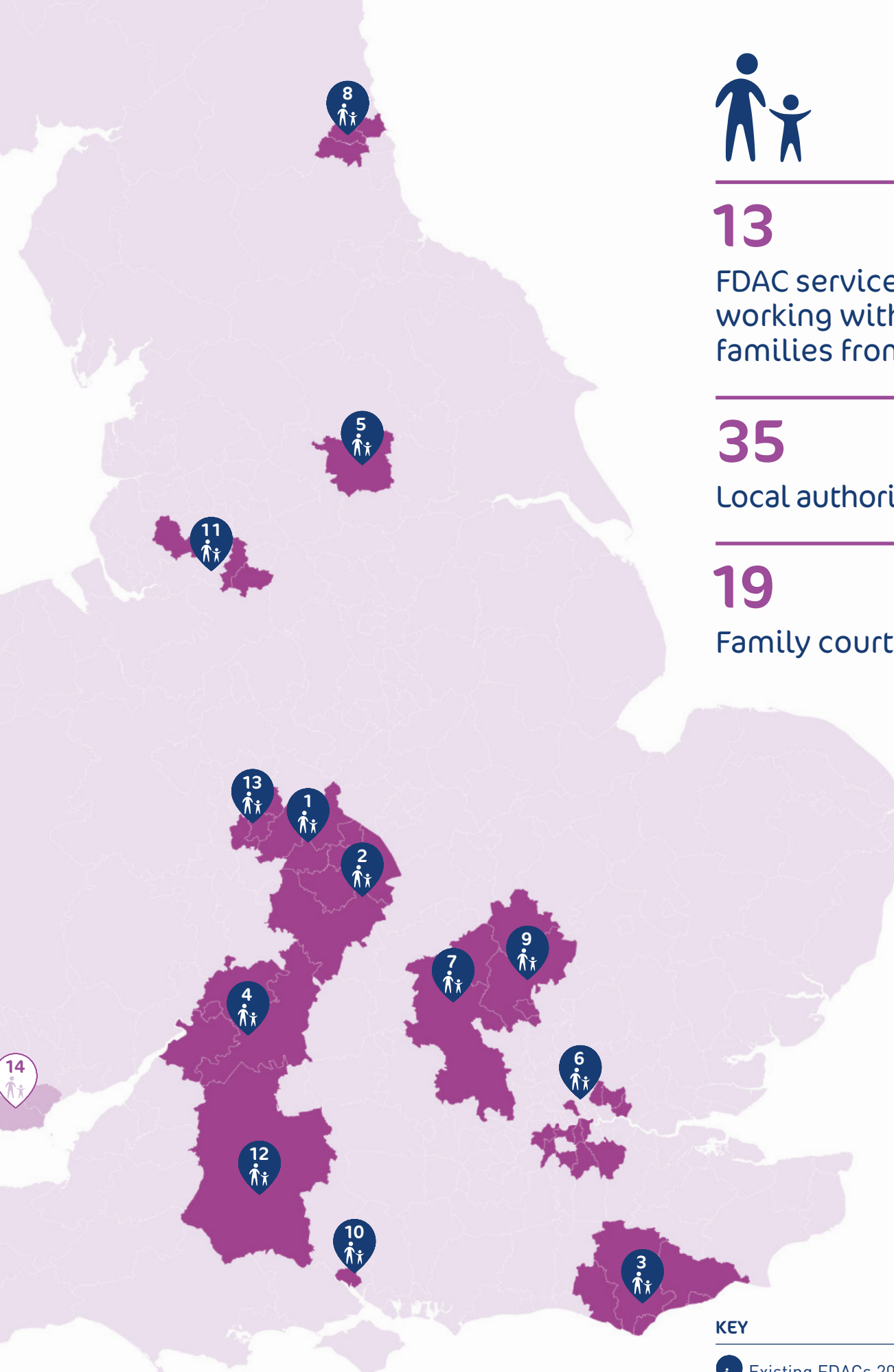
FDAC services working with families from...

35

Local authorities in...

19

Family courts



KEY

Existing FDACs 2023/24

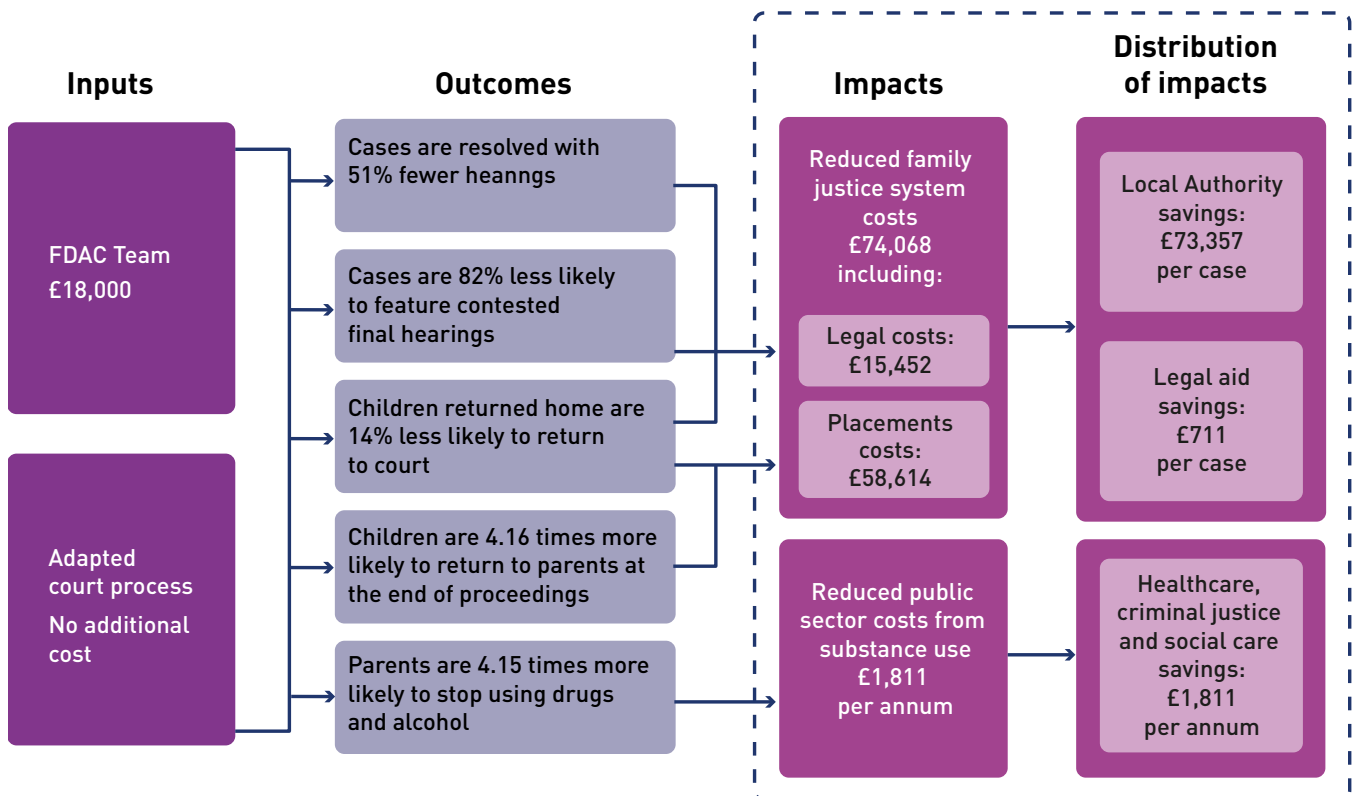
Closed in FDAC in 2023/24

FDAC: A Case for Investment

July 2024 saw the publication of FDAC: A Case For Investment, a financial and economic analysis of FDAC, prepared by the Centre for Justice Innovation and Mutual Ventures, with funding from the Department for Education. The report drew on the most recent evidence on effectiveness of FDAC from the findings of the 2023 National FDAC Evaluation.

This analysis, developed according to the Green Book guidance issued by HM Treasury, clearly demonstrates that FDAC provides value for money and generates significant savings to the family justice system in comparison to standard care proceedings. On average, FDAC costs £18,000 per case and produces a saving per case of £74,068, the vast majority of which (£73,357) goes to local authorities in predominantly cashable savings. For every £1 spent on an FDAC team, £3.20 of net savings are returned to the tax payer.

Figure 1: Costs and benefits for an average FDAC case



Savings for local authorities

- Children in FDAC care proceedings are significantly more likely to remain or be returned to the care of their parents at the end of proceedings compared to children in standard care proceedings (47% versus 27%),
- FDAC cases feature fewer hearings, fewer contested final hearings, and, those contested hearings that do occur are, on average, much shorter generating significant legal savings for local authorities
- On average, FDAC cases use significantly fewer external expert witness assessments in comparison to standard care proceedings (0.2 assessments per case versus 2.2 in standard proceedings).
- Unlike for standard care proceedings, local authorities do not contribute to the cost of parental drug testing.

Benefits for the wider system

- Parents in FDAC are much more likely to cease using drugs and alcohol than those in standard proceedings (33.6% versus 8.1%). This creates savings to health, criminal justice agencies and social care services and wider society.
- The reduced number and intensity of hearings also creates savings for the Legal Aid Agency though they are partially offset £2,837 by an increase in drug testing costs covered by legal aid.



Conclusions

Extensive evidence has shown that FDAC offers important benefits to children and families. Parents who have been through FDAC describe how, compared to adversarial standard proceedings, they find the FDAC process to be accessible, fair, supportive and respectful, which directly leads to an increased ability to be engaged with effective interventions and support, increased ability to address their recovery and wider support needs, and, as a result, more children are able to safely return to their families. This latest analysis demonstrates that as well as being good for families and children, FDAC represents a strong 'invest to save' proposition. Even once set-up costs are taken into account, an FDAC service reaches a break-even point for local authorities in its second year of operations.

A typical FDAC service, supporting 30 families a year may cost around £540,000. Given the current difficult fiscal environment for local authorities it may be challenging to make a case for the upfront investment in an FDAC service, even given the relatively short timeframe for the service to pay off. However, this analysis shows that, over the medium term, an FDAC service can make a contribution to reducing the pressure on local authorities' children's services budgets by significantly reducing expenditure on care proceedings and on care placements. Local authorities can mitigate the initial burden by sharing an FDAC service across multiple local authorities, or by working in partnership with other local stakeholders who have an interest in addressing substance misuse, domestic abuse, mental health or child well-being. Existing FDACs have supported their running costs by bringing in contributions from PCCs (Police and Crime Commissioners) or Public Health alongside children's services teams. The Centre will also continue to work with policy makers to promote the value of central government support in unlocking these benefits.

At a time when the escalating costs of care proceedings and long-term care placements are contributing to local authority's financial difficulties it may seem difficult to justify investing in new services for families at the edge of care. But in the case of FDAC, this robust new analysis suggests that this investment will pay itself back many times over.

Development of current FDACs

During 2024, the FDAC teams have continued to develop to meet the needs of the families and communities that they are working with. The teams have continued to share practice, host visits and contribute to ongoing research.

Greater Manchester FDAC

The Greater Manchester FDAC saw a further expansion of its service in 2024 to include an additional local authority: Bolton. Additional training and recruitment has been able to take place and the Greater Manchester FDAC will look to serve five local authorities with Tameside joining in 2025.

Gloucestershire FDAC

The Gloucestershire FDAC has expanded to ensure there are now specific FDAC social workers based within each of their locality areas. There has been, and continues to be, a positive response from the wider system to the FDAC practice being undertaken.

North East FDAC

The North East FDAC team have been working with local police partners to look at the data and review families accessing FDAC and their levels of offending during and post FDAC. The initial analysis indicates reduced offending rates up to 18-months post FDAC. Although this is very early analysis, it feeds in to the national research being conducted by Lancaster University and UCLan looking at the impact of FDAC on offending behavior.

Coventry and Warwickshire FDAC

The Coventry and Warwickshire FDAC team have continued to support the training and development of the wider system and partners. This has included trauma awareness, motivational interviewing skills and understanding around drug and alcohol testing analysis.

Pan-Bedfordshire FDAC

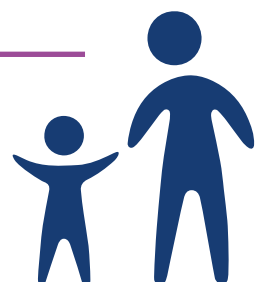
A Pan-Bedfordshire FDAC parent has been working with the FDAC team and the local Recovery College to establish specialist education and training group work sessions for FDAC parents, supporting their recovery and future education and employment opportunities.

Birmingham and Solihull FDAC

The Birmingham and Solihull FDAC team has been focused on increasing their number of parent peer mentors. Parent mentors access a specialist training program and are matched with families entering FDAC to provide guidance and support about the process. This year, a further six parent mentors have completed their training and now support FDAC parents.

“FDAC has been a true blessing to me. With their help, support, knowledge, skills and patience I have overcome a 28-year vicious cycle of addiction. Now being a peer mentor is a chance to give a little something back...to be able to pass on my knowledge and experience... supporting them through their journey and help them get the best outcome”

- FDAC Parent Peer Mentor



One family's FDAC story

Lucy* had two children under the age of 4 who were removed from her care due to ongoing difficulties with substance use and domestic abuse. Lucy had experienced extensive abuse from the children's father and had used substances as a means to cope. However, due to the children's father being in prison at the time of care proceedings being issued, Lucy's substance use was initially perceived to be the primary issue within the proceedings. Awareness around the long standing impact of the domestic abuse and trauma on Lucy was limited.

In FDAC, Lucy managed to become abstinent from substances and undertook 1-1 trauma work alongside emotional wellbeing group work and structured keywork sessions. The impact of the domestic abuse was shared with key partners, including with housing, who supported her to be moved due to the risk. Extensive partnership working took place with probation in regards to protective licence conditions for when the children's father was released from prison, including securing family court protective orders. A no contact order was made by the courts due to the risks posed to Lucy, her children and her wider family.

Work was also undertaken with Lucy's wider family and support network who had previously struggled to understand Lucy's substance use and her continued relationship with the children's father. Sessions were completed with them to learn about trauma, substance use, domestic abuse and how best to support a family member. Lucy did experience a lapse with her substance use but she was able to put her learning in to practice to manage this, and work effectively with services so there was no disruption for the children.

Both children were able to return to Lucy's care and additional work took place to support a structured reunification plan. Work with FDAC continued to support the children to rebuild their trust in their relationship with Lucy. This included access to play therapy, including 'theraplay' and other therapeutic parenting techniques. The eldest child in particular had witnessed and remembered the domestic abuse within the family.

Lucy and her family were offered an additional 6 months of post-proceedings support. The children continue to thrive in her care and she has managed to maintain part-time work as a carer to support her family.



A Poem by a FDAC parent

In FDAC, parents are encouraged to express their experiences and feelings through various methods. One FDAC mum bravely shared her view of alcohol in the following poem.

Hello my name is ALCOHOL.
I am stronger than all the armies of this world.
I have destroyed more people than all the wars, battles and attacks.
I have caused millions of accidents and destroyed more homes
and families than all the storm surges and floods combined.
I am the most dangerous thief in this world, I rob millions
of people of their lives

I find my victims among both the rich and the poor, among
the young and the old, among the strong and the weak.
I am sneaky and unpredictable.

I am everywhere: at home, on the street, in the factory,
in the office, at sea and in the air.
I bring disease, poverty and death.
I give nothing and take everything.
I am your worst enemy.
I am ALCOHOL.



“I had an amazing journey working with FDAC, they taught me to believe that there is a way out of the darkness I was facing and I am looking forward to being able to share my experiences with other parents that are going through the same journey”

- FDAC Parent

Letter from one FDAC parent to another

In FDAC it is known how powerful the support from a fellow parent can be. At a time where everything can feel frightening and the feelings of shame and judgement are huge, talking to someone who has had experience of the process can be invaluable. The opportunity to have Parent Mentors is part of the FDAC model that many areas would like to develop but where this is still in progress, FDAC parents continue to be creative in showing their support by offering guidance to parents entering FDAC.

"To whoever is reading this,

Firstly, welcome to FDAC, which stands for Family Drug and Alcohol Court. If you're here and reading this, you've been given the opportunity to fight for what you want - your babies - but ultimately, it's all down to you.

A little about me and my situation: my "poison" was heroin and crack cocaine. I've been an addict for 27 years on and off with my longest clean time being 4 1/2 years. I stupidly started dabbling again which resulted in social services getting involved and having to sign my baby over on his 1st birthday. I was broken and started using more and before I knew it, I was back in the vicious cycle of addiction. I was given the chance to work with FDAC, to who I will forever be grateful, and with their help, support, knowledge, advice, understanding and patience, I've now got my baby boy back home after what seemed to be an eternity. I'm not going to tell it was easy because it's not. You will experience an absolute array of emotions (not all good) but what I can say is that it gets easier as you become stronger...mentally, emotionally and physically too. You're going to have bad days but also good days and those good days do overcome the bad. Always remember why you're doing this, for your children.

TRUST THE PROCESS. If it worked for me, it can for you too. Don't be scared about NLRs - that's your Non-Lawyer Reviews which happen every 2 weeks. I promise they're not like normal court, all the judges are lovely and you get to build a rapport up with them. You write your report by your actions and FDAC just reports whatever you are doing for the Judge and other professionals to see. There is an end to all of this, even though it may seem a long way away, time does go by so fast. You will overcome little steps along the way to reach that final goal. Be proud of each achievement you make, no matter how small it may seem as they all add up. I had an extension; I didn't take it as a negative - the opposite to be honest - I saw it as FDAC having faith and trust in me that I could do it. I'm now in my 6 months' aftercare, my son is back home with me, and we are living a happy, blessed life which is getting better day by day. I'm now clear minded and looking to the future instead of living day by day, hour by hour in the grips of addiction. I also know that if I make one bad decision, I'll be back in that obsession, that vicious circle of addiction, but I'm stronger and have the tools and support I need in place that I learnt from FDAC.

Four things to remember if you're fighting addiction:

1. IF YOU DON'T LET THE PAST DIE, IT WON'T LET YOU LIVE.
2. ROCK BOTTOM WILL ACTUALLY TEACH YOU MORE THAN MOUNTAIN TOPS EVER WILL.
3. YOU HAVE TO BE VULNERABLE; YOU CAN'T HEAL WHAT YOU HIDE.
4. TRUST THE PROCESS.

I hope this has helped give you an insight to FDAC and how it helped me. Good luck and here's a hug for you whenever you need one. This is your journey, and you write your ending xx"

Opportunities and developments for the next year

Further research

Next year will see the publication of the early findings of research completed by Lancaster University and UCLan looking at the impact FDAC has on offending. The qualitative impact of FDAC for families and professionals continues to be collated across FDAC sites.

FDAC and Family Safeguarding

The Centre for Justice Innovation are working with the central Family Safeguarding Team to develop a briefing for implementing Family Safeguarding and FDAC within the same local authority; identifying best practice, supporting partnership working and communication routes and busting the myth that it should be 'either/or' when it comes to local authorities wanting to develop their practice.

FDAC National Parent Advisory Board

The Centre for Justice Innovation will be working with graduated FDAC parents to develop a national FDAC Parent Advisory Board, ensuring the voices of FDAC families remain central to the ongoing development of the work.

New FDAC services

As one door closes, another door opens - Sadly despite its success, due to an inability to reach a funding agreement, the NE FDAC will be closing its doors at the end of March 2025. This continues to highlight the challenges being experienced by Local Authorities and the Family Justice System. However, as the NE FDAC closes, two others will be opening their doors. Northamptonshire FDAC and Liverpool FDAC are both due to open in Spring 2025. There are also a further five sites across the UK currently exploring their ability to establish an FDAC over the next year.

Final reflections from Lord Justice Peter Jackson

This has been my first year as lead judge of FDAC, and it has been one of the most interesting of my career. When I began to read in, I could see that the research is of particularly high quality and that the messages from it are consistent. On visits to FDAC hearings, I have seen dedicated professionals helping courageous parents to achieve some extraordinary life changes. It is inspiring to see the court process being used constructively, while always keeping the child's welfare at the fore. The powerful testimony of team members and judges working in this unique court deserves to be heard as widely as possible. I am convinced that FDAC is now ready to be scaled up, and that it will be a good influence on non-FDAC proceedings as well. This can only happen if those who make decisions at a national level are persuaded by the strong arguments that the 'invest to save' model should be supported. I hope they will be, and that the next year will see FDAC grow to another level.



Rt. Hon. Lord Justice Peter Jackson,
Lead FDAC Judge

Support for FDAC

The Centre for Justice Innovation believes that every family that could benefit from a Family Drug and Alcohol Court should be able to access one. Since April 2019, part of the Centre's mission has been to provide national leadership to strengthen, expand and champion the FDAC approach.

We provide consultancy, technical advice and support to areas seeking to set up an FDAC, as well as induction training and mentoring. We convene and facilitate strategic connections between the range of different agencies and stakeholders that are essential to the successful set up and operation of FDACs.

All FDAC services and practitioners can benefit from being members of our FDAC community of practice, connecting them through networking days and judicial and practitioner forums and we provide regular practitioner bulletins, which identify, codify and share effective practice across the Family Justice system.

We also work to promote the FDAC model and other models of problem-solving justice at the local and national level, bringing us into conversations with UK Governments as well as a wide variety of local commissioners.

Our work is supported by a wide range of funders, including Addcounsel, the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, Family Law in Partnership, HallBrown Family Law, the Hadley Trust, the Jongen Trust and LCM Family.