

FDAC Quarterly report October to December, 2024

This report presents compiled data shared by the 13 FDACs in England for the period 1 October to 31 December 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 September 2024 there were 219 open cases in FDAC, a decrease of 8% on the same point last year but an increase of 111% since 1 January 2021 when we started collecting this data.

Over the quarter, 30 new cases were admitted to FDAC and 43 cases concluded.

The 30 families entering FDAC included 25 mothers or female parents, 14 fathers or male parents and 50 children. The average age of parents was 34 and the average age of children was 6.

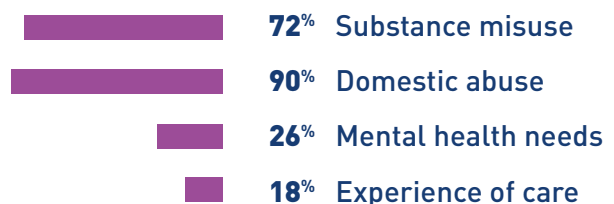


250 Open cases in FDAC

▲ 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 72% of parents having ongoing substance use issues. 5% of parents had issues with alcohol, 5% with drugs, and 67% both. This represents the first quarter in which ketamine use has exceeded opiates although we should be cautious when interpreting trends in relatively small numbers.

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is widespread amongst FDAC parents. 90% 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 26% had a formal diagnosis, screening suggests that 82% of parents screened show evidence of depression, 89% anxiety and 50% trauma.

Experiences of care

Parents in FDAC families commonly have experience of the child protection system, either during their own childhoods or as parents. 18% of FDAC parents were in care themselves at some point in their childhoods. 31% of the parents entering FDAC had had previous children removed with those parents having had an average of 1.8 children removed.

FDAC Outcomes

Child reunification

Of the 76 children for whom outcomes data was available this quarter, 34% were returned to their parents. A further 4% went to live with another parent and 29% were assigned to live with family or friends. Notably only 11% of children went into foster care and 4% of children were placed in residential care.

34% of children were returned to live with their parents

29% of children were placed with a friend or family members



Substance use cessation

FDAC has a significant impact on parental substance use. This quarter, 35% of parents completely stopped using substances while a further 15% reduced their alcohol use and 29% reduced their drug use.

35% 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 9% 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 16% of cases required an external expert assessment.

FDAC News – 'Freedom to speak up!' Words of encouragement from an FDAC Peer Mentor

Maeve*, a peer mentor parent for Pan London [has written](#) about her journey within FDAC and how that has enabled her the freedom to speak up after many years of covering her struggles and not being able to open up and speak the truth. Her journey has led her to becoming a peer mentor with hopes and dreams to see FDAC in Tower Hamlets where she lives, as she believes that the start of helping parents to care for their children and give love and recovery is the key to a better tomorrow.

*Name has been changed to protect the identity of the parent.

"The FDAC approach is to take parents desires for something better and say, 'You are not alone now, you can do it, and we will help you'. FDAC gives parents the best possible chance to overcome their problems."