

FAMILY DRUG AND ALCOHOL COURTS

Annual Report 2025

Foreword

From Sir Andrew McFarlane, former President of the Family Division July 2018 to April 2026

Those who work within the family justice system are acutely aware that the cases which come before the court often involve some of the most vulnerable children and families in our society. The combination of substance use, domestic abuse, poor mental health, and entrenched disadvantage presents profound challenges. While the court must always act decisively to protect children from harm, the consequences of care proceedings can be far-reaching, and outcomes for children who are removed from their families are, too often, less favourable than we would wish.

It is for these reasons that I have long supported Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDAC). As a problem-solving court model, FDAC represents a distinctive approach to public law proceedings. By combining judicial continuity with the intensive support of a multi-disciplinary team, it seeks not only to determine outcomes, but to address the underlying causes that have brought families before the court. In doing so, it offers parents a genuine opportunity to make the changes necessary to care safely for their children, whilst ensuring that the child's welfare remains paramount.

This year's report illustrates both the continued progress of FDAC and the challenges that remain. It is encouraging to note the establishment of two new FDACs in Liverpool and Northamptonshire, extending the reach of the model. At the same time, a number of established services have marked important milestones. Leeds FDAC and Coventry and Warwickshire FDAC have each celebrated their tenth anniversaries, and a showcase event for the London FDAC highlighted the scale and maturity of the model across the twelve boroughs it serves. These occasions provide an opportunity to recognise the sustained commitment of the judges, practitioners and partner agencies who make this work possible.

The national FDAC community has also continued to develop. The annual conference for FDAC judges remains an important forum for shared learning and reflection. This year, contributions from Kate Green, Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester, and Dame Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales, underlined the relevance of FDAC within the wider landscape of public service reform. Alongside this, the establishment of a parent advisory group, made up of individuals who have themselves been through FDAC proceedings, represents a significant and welcome step, ensuring that lived experience informs future development.

FDAC has also continued to attract attention beyond the immediate family justice sphere. It has featured in parliamentary scrutiny and wider public discussion, where I have had the opportunity to reiterate my support for the model and to express the hope that its development will continue.

It is also right to recognise the individuals who have played a central role in supporting and developing FDAC nationally. I am grateful to Lord Justice Peter Jackson for his leadership as the senior judicial lead for FDAC. I also note with particular pleasure that HHJ Patrick Peruško has been awarded a CBE in the King's Honours, in recognition of his tireless work in supporting and championing FDAC over many years.

Set against this progress, however, are the ongoing challenges associated with securing sustainable funding. The closure of the Black Country FDAC, which has been operating for the last six years, is a matter of real concern. It serves as a reminder that, despite the strength of the evidence base and the clear benefits that FDAC can deliver, the model remains vulnerable to local financial pressures. The loss of any FDAC represents not only a reduction in provision, but also a missed opportunity to support families in a way that has been shown to be both effective and, in the longer term, cost-efficient.

Looking more broadly, FDAC sits within a wider movement towards problem-solving approaches across the justice system. The national rollout of the Pathfinder pilot - now known as the Child-Focused Courts - demonstrates a growing recognition of the value of approaches which seek to address underlying issues and improve engagement with families. There is a clear opportunity to build on this progress within public family law, drawing on the well-established and evidence-based model that FDAC provides.

As I end my tenure as President of the Family Division, I remain firmly of the view that the principles underpinning FDAC - judicial continuity, problem-solving, and a focus on supporting meaningful change - have an important place within the future of the family justice system. It is to be hoped that the progress made to date can be sustained and extended, so that more families are able to access this approach where it is appropriate to do so.

The continued development of FDAC will depend upon the collective efforts of judges, practitioners, policymakers and, importantly, those with lived experience of the system. This report demonstrates the strength of that collective endeavour, and what can be achieved when the justice system works in a way that is both rigorous and responsive to the needs of the families it serves.

The Rt Hon Sir Andrew McFarlane
Former President of the Family Division



MY FDAC Story

"I have an addiction to alcohol

My addiction crept up on me, well so I thought. Really it had been going on for years but I never saw it. Everyone else did but I didn't. My best friend, my Dad, died very suddenly and I was totally lost. I drank to cope, drank to forget, I just drank because I was alone and didn't think I was good enough. This continued over the years. In and out of relationships, losing jobs, and continuing to drink.

Then I met someone, he was a drinker too. We were on and off for years then along came our little one. I drank all through my pregnancy thinking nobody knew, going to appointments and knowing what I should say. But of course they knew and along came social services. I lied and went along with things. I kept getting into trouble when I drank. Along came the arrests and eventually the final time I ended up at the police station I came home to a house with no child anymore. I was devastated. But, I just said I told you that would happen. After my first visit with my baby, my amazing social worker handed me an envelope with all of the information about a new thing called FDAC.

Well, what can I say about FDAC...It was the hardest thing I've ever done. FDAC saved my life. It gave me a life to live. I started FDAC whilst I was still doing my 12 week programme with recovery services. I turned up shaking and in a real mess and drinking way over 200 units a week. I had an initial meeting with someone who has given me continuous support. They are totally amazing!

FDAC is an experience few get to have. The opportunity to work with great professionals that work with people to get clean and sober and to keep your family together or to get them back. I never thought that would happen. But it really does. I had the best professionals supporting me. One that really will stick with me is someone I had to see every 2 weeks for over a year, the Judge, they totally terrified me. But I always say in a good way as I not only wanted to get well for myself and my child, but for my Judge too. From the start she made me feel like it was possible and that she had faith in me which I had never really felt before.

"FDAC will forever be an important part of my life, they were there for me throughout the worst times of my life. But also they have been there for me getting me better, my child coming home and me moving forward. As I write this, I am 1,701 days or 4 and a half years sober."

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From an FDAC Parent

Family Drug and Alcohol Courts: The Year in Data 2025

OUR FAMILIES

FAMILIES

215
families
entered
FDAC in 2025

298
parents

320
children



CHILDREN

Average age:

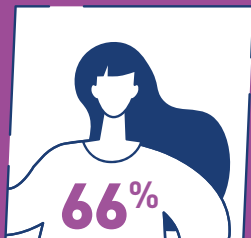
6 years

20% of children were
less than a year old

80% were not in the
care of their parents at
the start of proceedings



PARENTS



Female



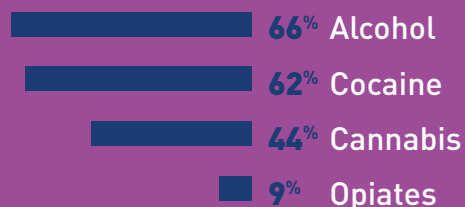
Male

18% of parents were in care
themselves as children

28% of parents have had previous
children removed from their care

CHALLENGES FACING FAMILIES

Substances most commonly used:



91% of parents
reported a history of
domestic abuse

76% of parents
showed signs of
mental illness



OUR OUTCOMES

CASES

219
cases
concluded

307
parents

368
children



Court outputs

The average FDAC case took **42 weeks**, compared to **38 weeks** weeks in standard proceedings

Only **11%** of FDAC cases ended in a contested hearing



OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

34% of children were returned to live with the parents who were caring for them before proceedings

30% of children were placed with a family member or friend



Outcomes for parents

59% of parents completed their FDAC intervention programme

37% of parents had become abstinent from all substances by the end of proceedings



*Based on all cases concluding in FDAC between 1 Jan 2025 and 31 Dec 2025

FDACs in England and Wales

In 2025, there were a total of 14 FDAC teams working with families from 37 local authorities and in 19 family courts.

The North East FDAC closed at the end of March 2025.

In 2025, the Greater Manchester FDAC expanded to include an additional local authority, Tameside. Two new FDACs were established in Liverpool and Northamptonshire in spring 2025, and the West Yorkshire Problem Solving Court Team joined the community of practice in September 2025.

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 by Leeds City Council.
- 6. Pan-London FDAC**
Bromley, Camden, Croydon, Greenwich (to end of March 2026), Hackney, Kingston, Lambeth, Redbridge, Richmond, Southwark, Sutton, Waltham Forest, Wandsworth (to end of December 2025).
- 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 and Tameside 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. Liverpool FDAC**
Liverpool City Council
- 15. Northamptonshire FDAC**
North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council.
- 16. West Yorkshire Problem Solving Court Team**
Bradford & Children's Families Trust

Note:

North East FDAC closed at the end of March 2025.



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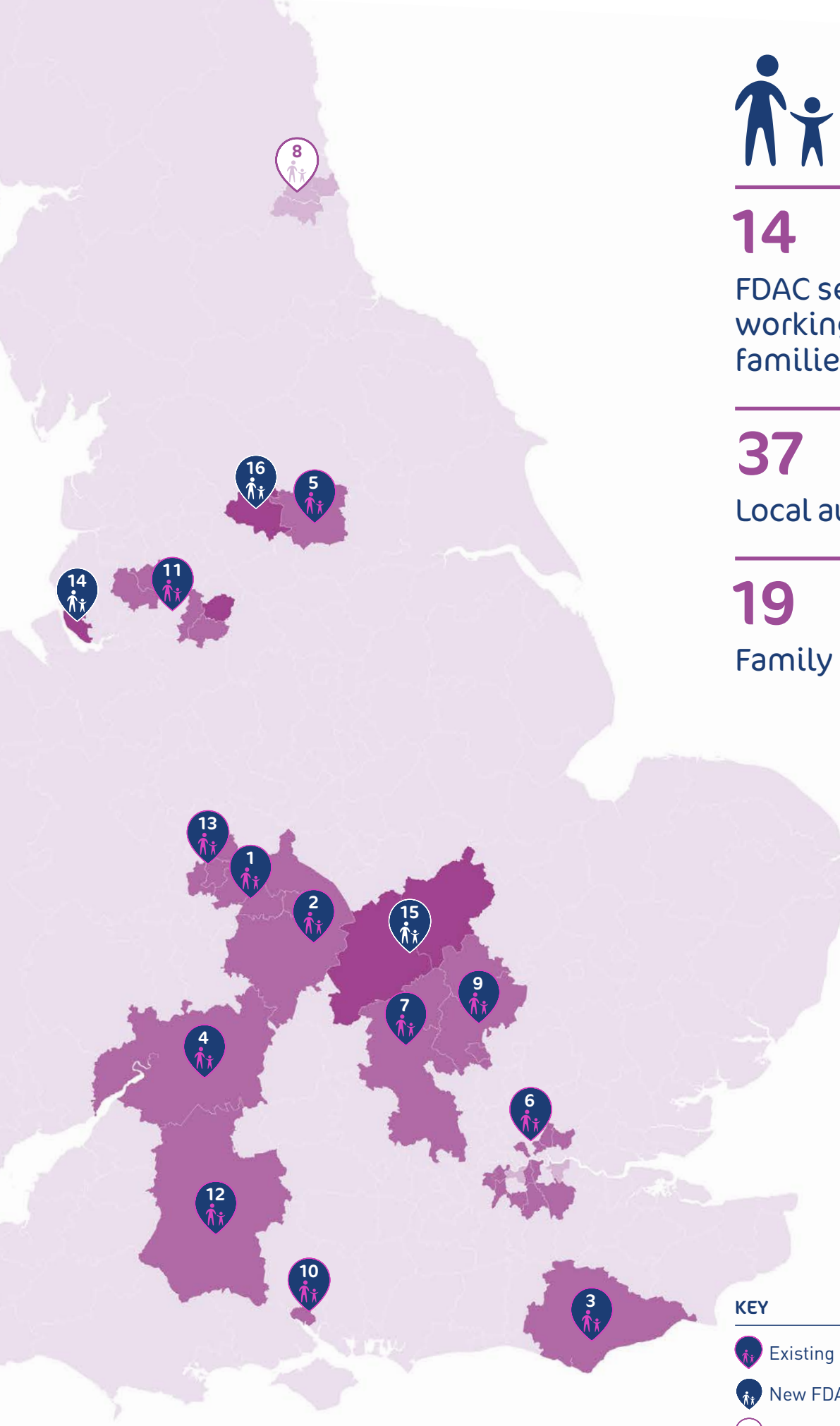
FDAC services working with families from...

37

Local authorities in...

19

Family courts



KEY

- Existing FDACs
- New FDAC in 2025
- FDAC Closed in 2025

Development of Current FDACs and Wider Influence

Over the last year, 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.

Showcasing FDAC

Over the last year there have been several opportunities to celebrate FDAC, the impact of FDAC teams, and the expertise held in the community of practice. Not only did 2025 welcome the new Liverpool and Northamptonshire FDACs, along with the West Yorkshire Problem Solving Court in Bradford, four excellent showcase events took place. These events celebrated the London, Black Country, Leeds and Coventry and Warwickshire FDACs. All these events exhibited the expertise of the teams, the partnerships they have developed and the positive impact that they have had for families across their region. Lord Justice Peter Jackson spoke at these events underlining the impact of the FDAC model and the degree to which it is valued at a national level. However, the highlight of each occasion were the contributions from FDAC parents.

National FDAC Parent Advisory Group

In October 2025, CJI Associate and former FDAC parent Nickii Webster, chaired the first meeting of the National FDAC Parent Advisory Group (PAG). This group has been formed to elevate the voices of parents in national discussions around policy, practice, and the future of the FDAC model. Members of the PAG are extremely generous with their time and contributions and have quickly identified areas of work to focus on. This includes supporting an upcoming project to create an FDAC guide for parents, written by parents.

FDAC Community of Practice

This last year has seen the FDAC Community of Practice continue to grow with FDAC colleagues attending sessions during the year which are intended to continue to develop the knowledge and skills held by FDAC practitioners. The high points for these were the sessions on the Domestic homicide timeline, vicarious trauma, anti-poverty in practice, and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorders (FASD). Specialist Practitioner forums continue to be well-attended. These forums provide an important opportunity for reflection and practice sharing.

1001 days

FDACs continue to ensure their practice is supporting this critical phase in a child's development. The Gloucestershire FDAC has developed its Antenatal Journey Program in partnership with their Health Visitor, recognising the multiple barriers mothers struggling with substance use, domestic abuse and poor mental health experience when trying to access effective support. The Leeds FDAC Team are working with their infant mental health, maternity and health visitor teams to pilot being the first non-Leeds Community Health Care Service to use the early attachment infant observation tool. This will be reviewed over the next year. The Birmingham FDAC Team have partnered with the Giving Hope Project to offer Hope Boxes to FDAC mothers who have been separated from their baby at birth, a therapeutic offer designed to give hope and reduce the impact of trauma and separation at such a difficult time.

Wider practice influence

Alongside supporting the implementation of Child Focused Courts in pilot areas of Birmingham and Solihull, and West Yorkshire, FDAC Teams and practice have continued to support wider family justice practice and development. This has included, but is not limited to, experiences of effective reunification planning, FDAC Judiciary being involved in the Judge's toolkit for writing to children, effective clinical supervision practice and exploring the opportunity of using Narrative Exposure Therapy as an intervention with families.

Elevating the Voices of Lived Experience

FDAC families have continued to benefit from the establishment of peer support and FDAC Graduates' Groups, using these opportunities to not only support their own recovery but as a platform to share their views and influence practice. FDAC parents speak movingly and articulately to explain how FDAC has supported them and the changes they have been able to achieve for their families.

One example of this is the Coventry and Warwickshire FDAC Graduates' Group, who not only spoke at the Coventry and Warwickshire FDAC showcase and the regional Innovate and Grow conference, but have also been involved in work to guide recommendations for the Department for Education and the upcoming Family Justice Strategy.

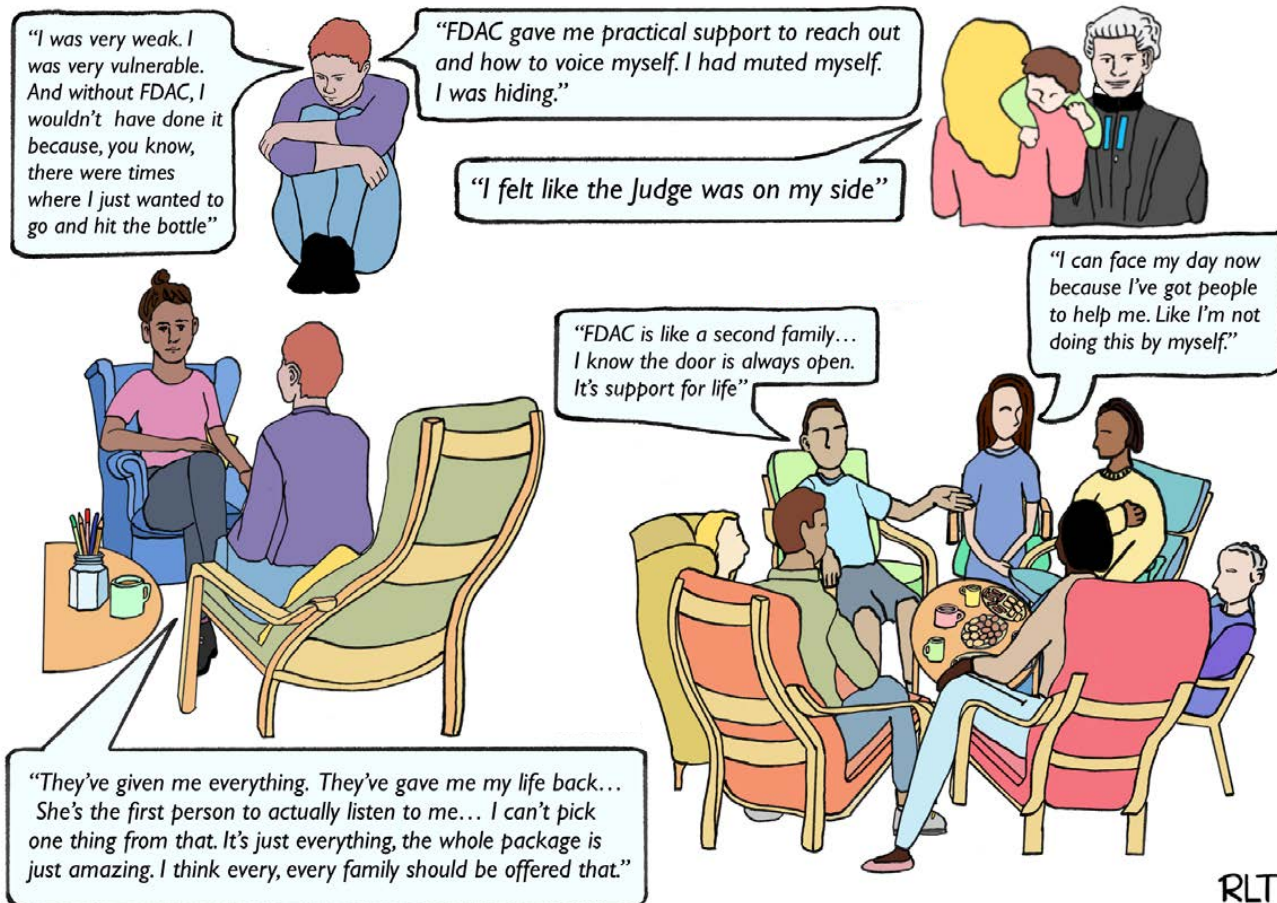
FDAC families from across the country have been involved in research, interviews, sharing testimonials and recording podcast episodes, all with the aim of using their experiences to ensure better outcomes for children and families.

"this group is a way of us trying to shape the future for other parents going through the same, we have a voice and we should use it, FDAC needs to be funded, and we need to do what we can to help"

Coventry and Warwickshire, FDAC graduate

"as a father I am often judged and its hard to go to places and be accepted, graduates group I know everyone's been in the same position as me and we have a mutual understanding of our recovery needs and challenges"

Coventry and Warwickshire FDAC graduate



Opportunities and Developments for the Next Year

FDAC Rebrand

An important development to keep an eye on next year is an FDAC rebrand. The term 'Family Drug and Alcohol Courts' does not reflect the multi-disciplinary and specialist work that FDAC teams carry out, and the interventions that address domestic abuse, mental health, and wider practical barriers that families are facing. There have been ongoing discussions exploring this opportunity with colleagues and decision makers in the sector. It will be important that any change in name still reflects the role of FDAC and the work the teams do, as well as protecting the important legacy of FDAC and all the research and evidence that underpins it.

FDAC research

FDAC Teams remain committed to ongoing research and practice development with 2026 expecting to see the publication of research looking at FDAC and crime, the implementation of Narrative Exposure Therapy in FDAC, as well local process evaluations and reviews. Both Liverpool and Leeds FDACs hope to share service evaluations and CJI are hoping to publish a piece of qualitative work exploring further families' experiences in Care Proceedings. Practice briefings looking at reunification, substance use testing and FDAC Parent Mentors are all in discussion.

“FDACs have been a story of success, showing how the system can approach child protection ahead of proceedings, and how courts should be used differently.”

Social Care Reforms and the Family Justice Strategy

FDACs feed into a series of learning that supports the government's key mission to break down barriers to opportunity and give children the best start in life. Ministers have shared their recognition that the learning from FDACs will play an important role in the children's social care and family justice systems and that it is a priority for the family justice system to learn from the approach within FDACs. The DfE and MoJ have shared their commitment to explore how central government can incorporate learning from FDACs into the current system and to include it in an upcoming family justice strategy. FDACs have been a story of success, showing how the system can approach child protection ahead of proceedings, and how courts should be used differently. Important discussions will continue exploring how FDAC will sit within the wider social work reforms.



FDAC in the news

Alongside FDAC showcase events, multiple stories highlighting the positive impact that FDAC teams are having have appeared in the news over the last year. Interviews and discussions have spotlighted the impact of the model on families, as well as the precarious nature of funding.

The FDAC website www.fdac.org.uk highlighted endeavours to share as many of these articles as possible and there are links to a number of them below:



These courts save families — we can't let them close



CHERIE BLAIR

YORKSHIRE POST

'It gave me and my children a proper life'

The life-changing impact of Leeds Family Drug and Alcohol Court as service marks ten years

LGL

The Family Drug and Alcohol Court: time to take the brakes off?



'Without the FDAC... I'd be dead': On the fringes at Labour in Liverpool

By Monidipa Fouzder



Family drug and alcohol courts are at risk of closure

LGL

Senior family judge reaffirms goal of having Family Drug and Alcohol Court in every area

Judge Patrick Peruško

Reflections on receiving his CBE for services to the administration of justice

“I feel hugely privileged and humbled to have received a CBE in the King’s New Years Honours List for services to the administration of justice. I say humbled because this award is on behalf of the whole FDAC community, not just me personally and, I hope, recognition that FDAC has made a real difference to the way we deal with family justice.

It has been the privilege of my professional life to work with, and learn from, professionals from diverse disciplines who share the same ethos and goals, namely, to help families achieve and sustain change so that children can be allowed to thrive safely with the family. FDAC has not just helped parents change, it has shown professionals, including judges, that working in different ways can help achieve far better outcomes for parents and children.

Long may FDAC continue to develop and expand. We owe it to the vulnerable people who come into the family justice system to give them the best chance of success. FDAC does that. I make no apologies for reminding anyone prepared to listen to me that in FDAC we achieve outcomes for children which are four times better than standard proceedings.”

“FDAC has not just helped parents change, it has shown professionals, including judges, that working in different ways can help achieve far better outcomes for parents and children.”



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 teams 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.

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FDAC 
The problem-solving court

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