

FDAC The problem-solving court

Centre for Justice Innovation

FDAC Quarterly report

July to September, 2026

This report presents compiled data shared by the 13 FDACs in England for the period 1 July to 30 September 2026, 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 30 September 2026 there were 248 open cases in FDAC, an increase of 13% on the same point last year but an increase of 163% since 1 January 2021 when we started collecting this data.

Over the quarter, 53 new cases were admitted to FDAC and 43 cases concluded.

The 53 families entering FDAC included 47 mothers or female carers, 18 fathers or male carers and 88 children. The average age of parents was 37 and the average age of children was 6 years.



248 Open cases in FDAC

▲ an increase of 13% on the same point last year

43 Cases were concluded

Challenges facing FDAC parents



76% Substance misuse

89% Domestic abuse

28% Mental health diagnosis

6% Experience of care

Substance use

Substance use is very common among FDAC parents with 76% of parents having ongoing substance use issues. 17% of parents had onggoing or historic alcohol use issues only, 13% drugs only, and 56% both. The most commonly used drugs by FDAC parents were cocaine (45%), cannabis (32%) and opiates (15%).

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is widespread amongst FDAC parents. 89% of parents report experiencing domestic abuse at some point in their lives, either as victim or perpetrators, and 16% report ongoing abuse at the time they enter FDAC. However, as a self-reported data this is likely a significant underestimate.

Mental health

Parents in FDAC commonly have undiagnosed mental health needs. Although only 28% had a formal diagnosis, screening suggests that 71% of parents screened show evidence of depression, 74% anxiety and 67% trauma.

Experiences of care

A significant minority of parents in FDAC families had experience of the child protection system, either during their own childhoods or as parents. 6% 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 3 children removed.

Substance use cessation

FDAC has a significant impact on parental substance use. This quarter, 46% of parents completely stopped using substances while a further 9% reduced their alcohol use and 18% reduced their drug use. Women were more likely to stop using substances than men (50% vs 40%).

46% of parents completely stopped using substances



FDAC Outcomes

Child reunification

Of the 59 children for whom outcomes data was available this quarter, 41% were returned to the parents they were living with before proceedings began. A further 36% went to live with another parent or other family member. Notably only 17% of children went into foster care and no children went into residential care.

41% of children were returned to live with the parents they were living with before proceedings began

36% of children were placed with another parent or family members



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 5% 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 9% of cases required an external expert assessment.

FDAC News – Film Festivals, Awards and National Networks

This quarter The Leeds FDAC Team was invited to create a film for the West Yorkshire Trauma Informed Film Festival, showcasing collaboration and the work of FDAC. Watch it here, and hear about families' positive experiences of FDAC. We are also taking this opportunity to celebrate with the Birmingham and Solihull FDAC and the Liverpool FDAC Teams who won joint Silver in the Social Work Team of the Year 2026 awards. Congratulations to both teams! This autumn, we are also looking forward to the launch of the national FDAC Legal Champions network, with events in Manchester, London and Birmingham.

This report is produced as part of the Centre for Justice Innovation's work to provide national leadership to strengthen, expand and champion the FDAC approach. To discuss any aspects of our work around FDAC please contact Sophie Carter at scarter@justiceinnovation.org

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