

What does the FDAC National Unit do?

The FDAC National Unit (FDAC NU) is part of the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust and was established in 2015 with a grant from the DfE Children's Social Care Innovation Programme. Funding in 2016/17 and 2017/18 was from the DfE and the MoJ. Limited funding has been provided by the DfE for the 6 months to September 2018.

The role of the FDAC NU is to:

1. **help implement and sustain** the evaluated FDAC model in different settings,
2. **evaluate and improve** the model further, and
3. **influence** the direction of family justice reform.

The FDAC NU brings together a unique combination of expertise, about:

- problem-solving courts,
- trauma-informed practice,
- child and adolescent psychiatry,
- research and evidence-based interventions, and
- implementation science.

1. Implementing and sustaining the FDAC model

Guidance for local sites

The FDAC NU has developed a substantial library of guidance for local FDACs which it updates and expands regularly. The material is available free of charge to recognised FDAC sites via private pages of the NU website (<http://fdac.org.uk>). The sites have daily phone and email access to the NU and receive speedy information and advice from the small NU team.

Set-up advice

The NU responds to enquiries about the FDAC model and how to create a local FDAC team and court service. Queries come from judges, local authority and public health managers, commissioners and others. We arrange visits to FDAC courts so that the approach can be observed in action and discussed with those actively involved. NU staff attend meetings to gauge and stimulate interest, contribute to local planning groups, and provide timely and practical support for the complex work involved in establishing a new FDAC.

Induction training

The NU runs a 4-day induction training programme for each new specialist team and its designated judges. It covers the concept and practice of problem-solving courts, the FDAC assessment and reporting process, the timeline for hearing cases, and the value and practice of the non-lawyer court review hearings and motivational interviewing of parents that are distinctive elements of the FDAC model. Teaching is based on the FDAC manual developed by the NU, using a mix of short presentations, group discussion, and role play of simulated cases. Trainers include a child & adolescent psychiatrist, service manager and experienced FDAC judge.

Additional skills' development

The NU provides new sites with a further three training sessions in their first year, and twice a year for established sites. These are one-day courses delivered on site by members of the NU. The content is adapted to help resolve problems sites are experiencing but is usually a mix of issues about clinical practice, the use of data, and developing relationships with commissioners and stakeholders.

Peer learning is a regular and valued element of NU activity. Each year the NU facilitates for local sites:

- a national network event, for practitioners and judges from all DAC sites,
- a forum for judges,
- 3 forums for substance misuse and social work practitioners, and
- 3 forums for local team managers and clinical leads.

Auditing progress

In consultation with local sites, the NU has developed FDAC Service Standards and Good Practice Indicators. These set out the key elements of fidelity identified in independent research studies about the FDAC model. The NU works with local sites to conduct an audit after the first year of operation and then at 2-year intervals. The audit findings are used to inform and support ongoing learning and service development.

Data collection and analysis

The NU has developed an FDAC Outcomes Dataset, to capture local and national performance and trends. The NU trains and supports sites to use the dataset and fosters discussion to understand similarities and differences between sites and new trends as they begin to emerge.

Sustaining local FDACs

Financial sustainability is a perennial challenge. The FDAC NU supports sites to analyse their costs, explore additional funding streams, and ensure good value for money.

Supporting operational and strategic management

Strong working relationships between local partner agencies are essential for successfully establishing and sustaining a local FDAC. Crucial to this success is the work of their Strategic Management Group and Operational Management Group, both of which are formed in each site well in advance of a new FDAC opening. The FDAC NU provides draft terms of reference for the groups, advises on membership, and attends meetings for the first few years, as needed.

2. Evaluating and improving the model

In addition to developing the dataset and encouraging local sites to evaluate their outcomes regularly, the NU works with national partner agencies to find and take opportunities for new research and service development. It provides advice to sites seeking funding to expand the model beyond care proceedings prompted by parental substance misuse (domestic abuse and parental mental health problems also feature prominently in these cases). The NU is in discussion with researchers from Kings College and Lancaster University about seeking funding for a randomised controlled trial of the FDAC model.

3. Influencing the direction of family justice reform

By maintaining key relationships

The FDAC NU maintains strong relationships with the Centre for Justice Innovation, Coram, Lancaster University and RyanTunnardBrown, through ongoing collaborations and their membership of the FDAC NU Strategic Advisory Group. The NU has regular meetings with the Department for Education and the Ministry of Justice, and with the President of the Family Division. NU team members participate in working groups established by government departments and other agencies to discuss innovations in family justice and social care services for children and adults. Staff have regular contact with a wide range of practitioners, researchers and policy makers in family justice, public health, mental health and evidence-based practice.

By communicating to a wide audience

The FDAC NU website holds short films, updates on FDAC developments, comments from parents who have used FDAC, information and links to FDAC research findings, and regular news items to keep FDAC in the public eye. The NU manages a Twitter account, to promote the learning from this alternative and successful problem-solving approach to care proceedings. It publishes articles in peer-reviewed and other journals, including a monthly blog for *Family Law*.

By running training and other events

The FDAC NU hosts national events, to coincide with the publication of new FDAC research and capitalise on other national developments. In collaboration with the London FDAC, it offers training, such as courses on Trauma Aware Care for Family Nurse Partnership supervisors and the Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust, and 20 one-day trainings sessions about Mental Health Expertise in the Family Court, for Cafcass Guardians and Family Court Advisors.

What do people say about FDAC and the work of the National Unit?

The Nat Cen Social Research Unit's independent evaluation of the FDAC NU reported:

There was agreement that the expertise, commitment and hard work of the National Unit had helped to ensure that new FDACs were more successful, less resource intensive and quicker to set up and deliver than they otherwise would have been. Additionally, there were participants who believed that the local authority would have been unlikely to have considered FDAC without the National Unit due to the challenges involved in setting up a new and innovative service.

The President of the Family Division commented:

The FDAC National Unit plays a vital role as midwife and health visitor to new FDACs as they prepare and then implement their plans. Without the FDAC National Unit the continuing roll-out of new FDACS is likely to falter.

Judges from sites established in 2015 wrote recently:

[The threat to the NU] struck home yesterday when one of my last FDACs successfully ended with an Interim Supervision Order. The child's mother was clean of drugs, not on the street, and with no violent boyfriends ... a real transformation. She said in her final statement how grateful she was of the help from the FDAC team and she thanked me personally for believing in her because as a result she believed in herself.

Without the National Unit's support we wouldn't have succeeded in setting up an FDAC in [area] and I'm sure that's also true of the other local FDACs that have been established in the past few years. The National Unit is doing a great job in supporting and promoting FDAC local units and its closure is likely to bring an end to more local FDACs being set up, as well as jeopardising existing ones which will be starved of the support, resources and oversight that the National Unit provides.

For more information?

Check our website, at <http://fdac.org.uk>.

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