

FDAC Quarterly report April to June, 2024

This report presents compiled data shared by the 13 FDACs in England for the period 1 April to 30 June 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 April 2024 there were 210 open cases in FDAC, a decrease of 7% on the same point last year but an increase of 162% since 1 January 2021 when we started collecting this data.

Over the quarter, 53 new cases were admitted to FDAC and 47 cases concluded.

The 53 families entering FDAC included 37 mothers or female parents, 15 fathers or male parents and 88 children. The average age of parents was 36 and the average age of children was 6.

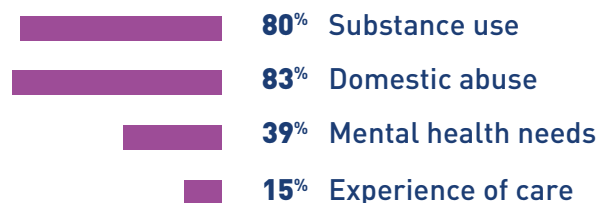


210 Open cases in FDAC

▼ a decrease of 7% on the same point last year

47 Cases were concluded

Challenges facing FDAC parents



Substance use

Substance use is very common among FDAC parents with 80% of parents having ongoing substance use issues. 9% of parents were using only alcohol, 15% drugs, and 56% using both. The most commonly used drugs by FDAC parents were cocaine (57%), cannabis, (50%) and opiates (13%).

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is widespread amongst FDAC parents. 83% of parents report experiencing domestic abuse, either as victim or perpetrators as 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 39% had a formal diagnosis, screening suggests that 48% show evidence of depression and 70% anxiety.

Experiences of care

Parents in FDAC families commonly have experience of the child protection system, either during their own childhoods or as parents. 15% of FDAC parents were in care themselves at some point in their childhoods. 30% of the parents entering FDAC had had previous children removed with those parents having had an average of 2.7 previous removals.



Substance use cessation

FDAC has a significant impact on parental substance use. This quarter, 35% of parents completely stopped using substances while a further 10% reduced their alcohol use and 15% reduced their drug use. Women were more likely to stop using substances than men (42% vs 25%).

35% of parents completely stopped using substances



FDAC Outcomes

Child reunification

Of the 92 children for whom outcomes data was available this quarter, 45% were returned to their parents. A further 9% went to live with another parent and 17% were assigned to live with family or friends. Notably only 18% of children went into foster care and only 1 child was placed in residential care.

45% of children were returned to live with their parents

17% of children were placed with a friend 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 6% 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 – A new case for investing in FDAC

The recent report [FDAC: The case for investment](#), from the [Centre for Justice Innovation](#) and [Mutual Ventures](#) highlights the savings that local authorities and other statutory agencies can make by investing in FDAC. The report, which is based on outcomes data from the 2023 [National FDAC Evaluation](#), found that an average FDAC case costs an additional £18,000 but saves the taxpayer £74,000. The majority of savings go to local authorities who save £15,000 in legal costs and £59,000 in placement costs as a result of fewer children going into care. The report also looked at options for rolling out FDAC more widely. It found that an £18m government investment in supporting FDAC could lead to 20 more sites and net savings of £68m.

As part of the development of the report, we have created [a tool](#) which local areas can use to explore the financial benefits of FDAC for their local authority. For help using the tool contact Stephen Whitehead at swhitehead@justiceinnovation.org