



One minute guide

Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC)

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What is the Family Drug and Alcohol Court?

The Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) helps families where there are concerns about the welfare of children as a result of parental substance misuse, or parental substance misuse and domestic abuse. It brings together care proceedings for children with additional resources and support, through a court-based family intervention that aims to improve children's outcomes by addressing the entrenched difficulties of their parents.

Why are we doing this in Leeds?

The FDAC approach has been used successfully in London; and in Leeds, the Local Authority, the West Yorkshire Family Court and Barca Leeds have worked together in partnership to establish similar arrangements in the city. FDAC is child-focused, relationship-based and seeks to work with parents, and so is consistent with our values in Leeds.

An independent [evaluation](#) of the London programme noted that participation in FDAC resulted in greater reductions in drug misuse for both mothers and fathers compared to families going through standard care proceedings, and that more children were able to remain with their parents at the end of the proceedings than for the comparison group. In addition, where it was not possible for children to return to their families, children in FDAC cases were placed more quickly with alternative carers.

How does the court work?

FDAC is a specialist court within care proceedings. In contrast to standard care proceedings, the FDAC approach offers the following distinct features:

Continuity - the same judge deals with a case throughout, providing consistency for families and allowing them to develop trusting relationships;

Problem-solving - Cases are reviewed on a fortnightly basis, providing opportunities for regular monitoring of parents' progress and for judges to engage and motivate parents, speaking directly to them and their social workers to help resolve problems;

Support from a specialist multi-disciplinary team who: assess and carry out direct work with parents; develop an intervention plan; enable and assist parents to engage with specialist substance misuse and other services to address identified needs; report to the court on parents' progress.

Cases are selected by the Local Authority, applying the usual threshold for care proceedings. Those families selected must have experienced a history of parental drug or alcohol misuse, or substance misuse and domestic abuse, that is impacting on or likely to impact on the children's health and development. FDAC is most likely to help families that are already demonstrating some willingness to change; participation in the FDAC programme is voluntary, and families who decline to participate will go through the standard care proceedings. There are only a limited number of places available in FDAC, however the team will always be happy to discuss any potential referrals.

What support is offered to families?

Each family on the FDAC programme receives support from the specialist multi-disciplinary FDAC team, who coordinate the intervention plan. The team includes a social worker, substance misuse specialist and a child psychiatrist / psychologist. Future development of the model will also involve support from parent mentors; volunteers with a history of recovering from addiction and who, in many cases, have experience of care proceedings.

Each parent participates in a number of **assessments** as part of the process, to ensure that their needs are fully understood and the support offered is appropriate. The initial assessment is completed early in the proceedings and identifies the timescales for the children, the parents' goals, and the support that will be provided. This is the plan that is reviewed by the court. When parents have been abstinent for some months and have made progress in addressing their problems, their relationship with their children and capacity to meet their children's needs will be assessed.

The plan of work includes a range of interventions, including:

Abstinence: Parents will be given support and advice on abstaining from street drugs and alcohol, and abstaining from domestic abuse and criminal activity (for example through community drug and alcohol programmes);

Understanding and repair: Parents will be given support, advice and treatment to understand the problems underlying any substance misuse, domestic abuse and mental health problems, and children supported to make sense of their parents' difficulties; for example, parents may be encouraged to attend community based intensive treatment programmes;

Strengthening relationships: parents will be supported to be more responsive with their children, with each other and the wider family; and

Child-centred lifestyle: Families will be supported to develop a lifestyle that prioritises children's needs, which could include education and training.

How can practitioners support families going through the FDAC process?

It is important that all practitioners recognise the importance of the FDAC process, and do what they can to support parents who have committed to make these changes for their children.

For social workers, child protection responsibilities in relation to FDAC families remain unchanged. In addition they are expected to attend fortnightly progress review court hearings, intervention planning meetings or reviews and, a meeting to consider the needs of the child.

Referrals, key contacts and for more information

If you wish to discuss the possibility of referring a family to FDAC please contact the FDAC Team Manager, Sophie Carter at Sophie.Carter@barca-leeds.org or tel: 0113 2559582.

For further information about the FDAC evidence base, please see the independent [evaluation report](#) by Brunel University.