



Family Drug and Alcohol Court National (FDAC) Unit Evaluation Summary

Background

The Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) aims to improve outcomes for children and families by providing an alternative way of working with parents involved in care proceedings who are experiencing substance misuse. FDAC encourages parents to engage in activities that support recovery and change, alongside a realistic understanding of the challenges they face. Research published in 2014 by Brunel University suggested that the FDAC model was promising; showing that a higher proportion of parents whose case was heard in FDAC had ceased misusing substances by the end of proceedings and more FDAC than comparison families were reunited with their children. Following the research careful consideration was given to how best to scale-up FDAC in order to improve outcomes for more families. A follow-up study funded by the Innovation Programme, estimated that a higher proportion of FDAC than comparison reunification mothers abstained from drugs or alcohol over the five-year follow-up¹ (Harwin et al., 2016). The Department of Education's (DfE) Children's Social Care Innovation Programme funded the creation of the FDAC 'National Unit'.

Aims and objectives

The National Unit has 3 key areas of work which relate to increasing the successful set-up of FDACs; increasing the number of FDACs that are sustainable; and improving data collection and evidence on the FDAC model. The National Unit was originally commissioned to support 4 new sites to set-up FDACs. However over the course of the first month the number of sites increased to 9.

Evaluation

The NatCen evaluation aimed to gather an in-depth understanding of the work and contribution of the National Unit from the perspective of key stakeholders. The research was underpinned by a theory of change and involved 32 in-depth qualitative interviews with individuals from new FDAC sites and 13 interviews with other stakeholders including members of the National Unit; individuals from sites who launched their FDAC before the National Unit was established; and key government stakeholders.

Findings

The evaluation found that the National Unit has played a critical role in the successful set-up of new FDACs and is expected to have a significant ongoing role in supporting the sustainability of FDACs and to strengthening the evidence-base on the efficacy of the model. Key achievements of the National Unit included:

- Nine new FDACs were created in the first year of the National Unit. The expertise, commitment and hard work of the National Unit helped to ensure that new FDACs were more successful, less resource intensive and quicker to set-up and deliver than previously.

¹ The full study, 'After FDAC: outcomes 5 years later' (Harwin et al., 2016) can be [accessed here](#).

- The National Unit's key achievements in relation to supporting the creation of new FDACs included increasing awareness and understanding of the key benefits of FDAC and the steps involved in setting up a new court; fostering commitment to FDAC among local stakeholders who were essential to service success; and bolstering the skills required to efficiently and successfully roll-out FDAC at the local level.
- The National Unit also played a significant role in communicating and convincing new sites of the benefits of closely delivering key elements of the FDAC service that has fidelity to the FDAC model.
- The National Unit played an important ongoing role in relation to the sustainability of FDACs through strengthening the evidence base on the relative costs and benefits of FDAC; working with sites to formulate a compelling business case; and maintaining commitment to FDAC among stakeholders and potential funders.
- At the time of the fieldwork, sites were at an early stage in the process of carrying out monitoring and evaluation of their FDAC. They reported that the continued involvement of the National Unit was critical to any future evaluation of the FDAC model.

Success factors and barriers

- The flexible and collaborative working style of the National Unit was highly valued. In particular, participants appreciated that the National Unit was responsive to requests for support, listened to ideas and helped sites to work through issues taking account of factors such as the FDAC model and local context.
- Overall participants were very positive about the quality of support provided by the National Unit. For example, networking and training opportunities were valued and it was appreciated that the guidance provided by the National Unit was underpinned by an intricate understanding of the FDAC model.
- External factors influenced the way in which the National Unit had been able to work with FDACs sites. For example, implementation timescales meant that sites began the process of setting up a new FDAC very shortly after the National Unit had been established, resulting in some delays in sites receiving materials.
- Despite these challenges, the National Unit was felt to have been responsive to requests for support and feedback on how elements of its work could be enhanced or extended. Since data for this evaluation were collected the National Unit has continued to review and extend how it works with FDAC sites.
- Participants were positive about the potential for the National Unit to contribute to achieving longer-term change in future years. Consequently, participants felt it was important that the National Unit received sufficient funding to be able to continue to deliver a high quality programme of work.

Good practice and lessons learned

The evaluation has identified a number of areas of good practice based on the key achievements of the National Unit. This includes:

- Having a National Unit with a staff team who are knowledgeable, committed and enthusiastic has been crucial to fostering local commitment and in motivating sites to move forward with FDAC.
- Developing a compelling, evidence-based business case is important to securing local investment, particularly in the current financial climate.
- A flexible and forward-looking approach is beneficial where it is important to be responsive to local context and to adapt to ever changing political or funding environments.
- The commitment, time and resources required to roll out a new initiative should not be underestimated. Wherever possible, commissioners should ensure that those supporting the roll-out of a new initiative have adequate time to prepare before they are required to start working closely with potential new sites.

Data collection for this evaluation was carried out between December 2015 and March 2016 by the National Centre for Social Research.

The DFE's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme funded this project and its independent evaluation. Co-ordination of the evaluation was undertaken by the Rees Centre from the University of Oxford (www.reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk.) A full copy of this report can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications