



Department  
for Education

# **Family Drug and Alcohol Court National Unit: independent evaluation**

**Research report**

**January 2017**

**Authors: Ellie Roberts, Tanya Crowther,  
Ashley Brown and Jane Kerr - NatCen  
Social Research**

# Contents

List of Figures	4
Executive Summary	5
Background	5
Overview of evaluation	5
Key findings	6
Good practice and lessons learned	10
Overview of project	11
The Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) model	11
Brief history of FDAC in the UK	11
The National Unit	12
Overview of the evaluation	14
Research aims and objectives	14
Research approach	14
Key findings	18
Views and experiences of working with the National Unit	18
Understanding the FDAC model	18
Understanding the role of the National Unit	20
Views and experiences of working with the National Unit	20
Sustainability	24
Data collection	25
Cross-cutting issues	26
The National Unit's perceived contribution to achieving outcomes	28
The National Unit's programme theory	29
Methodological strengths and limitations	29
Defining 'success'	30
Progress towards achieving long-term goals	35
Facilitators and barriers to achieving success	37
Limitations of the evaluation and future evaluation	39
Rationale for evaluation design and limitations	39
Further evaluation	40
Recommendations for policy and practice	41

References	43
Appendix A: Qualitative methodology	44
Appendix B: National Unit theory of change	48

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Outcome pathway for long-term outcome 'Increase in the successful set-up of FDACs' .....	30
Figure 2: Outcome pathway for long-term outcome 'More FDACs are sustainable' .....	33
Figure 3: Outcome pathway for long-term outcome 'Improvements in the definition, collection, dissemination and application of evidence' .....	34

# Executive Summary

## Background

The Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDAC) aim 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 believe recovery and change are possible, alongside a realistic understanding of the challenges they face.

Research published by Brunel University in 2014 indicated 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. Additionally, proportionately fewer children in FDAC families experienced new neglect or abuse in the first year following reunification (Harwin et al., 2014).

Following the publication of the initial research by Brunel University, careful consideration was given to how best to scale-up FDAC in order to improve outcomes for more children and families. This resulted in a successful funding application to the Department of Education's (DfE) Children's Social Care Innovation Programme (hereafter the Innovation Programme) to create the FDAC 'National Unit'.

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 due to the inclusion of 5 West Yorkshire local authorities, and Southampton joining the community of practice<sup>1</sup>.

Recent research, conducted by Brunel University London, Lancaster University and RyanTunnardBrown with methodological guidance from NatCen, has found evidence of the sustained benefits of FDAC. For example, the 'After FDAC: outcomes 5 years later' study, funded by the Innovation Programme, estimated that a higher proportion of FDAC than comparison reunification mothers abstained from drugs or alcohol over the 5 year follow-up<sup>2</sup> (Harwin et al., 2016).

## Overview of evaluation

In 2015 NatCen Social Research was commissioned by DfE to evaluate the FDAC National Unit. The evaluation aimed to gather an in-depth understanding of the work and

---

<sup>1</sup> Sites that the National Unit are working with to launch an FDAC are referred to as the 'community of practice'. [See here for more information.](#)

<sup>2</sup> The full study, 'After FDAC: outcomes 5 years later' (Harwin et al., 2016) can be [accessed here.](#)

contribution of the National Unit from the perspective of key stakeholders. The evaluation 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.

NatCen was also commissioned to provide independent methodological advice and guidance on 2 further studies on FDAC:

- NatCen acted as a critical friend on the methodology of the 2016 evaluation of FDAC, 'After FDAC: outcomes 5 years later', funded by the Innovation Programme and conducted by Brunel University London, Lancaster University and RyanTunnardBrown (Harwin et al., 2016)<sup>3</sup>
- NatCen provided methodological guidance to the Centre for Justice Innovation on their research assessing the value for money of FDAC, 'Better Courts: the financial impact of the London Family Drug and Alcohol Court' (Reeder et al., 2016)<sup>4</sup>

## Key findings

This section provides an overview of research findings. It explores the perceived contribution of the National Unit to 3 key outcomes 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. It highlights key elements of the National Unit's work which appear to have underpinned or limited success and describes participant views on the potential contribution of the National Unit in future years. It concludes by identifying good practice and lessons from the research.

## Progress towards the National Unit's key outcomes

### Increase in the successful set-up of FDACs

Nine new FDACs were created in the first year of the National Unit<sup>5</sup>. The research indicates that the National Unit was perceived to have played a critical role in the set-up of new FDACs. Irrespective of whether participants felt that the National Unit had been a necessary condition for creating their FDAC, 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

---

<sup>3</sup> The full study, 'After FDAC: outcomes 5 years later' (Harwin et al., 2016) can be [accessed here](#).

<sup>4</sup> The full report 'Better Courts: the financial impact of the London Family Drug and Alcohol Court' (Reeder et al., 2016) can be [accessed here](#).

<sup>5</sup> Figure provided by the National Unit in May 2016.

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 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. This included supporting sites to appropriately adapt the model to local context, or, in other cases, limiting local adaptations where the changes veered too far from the evaluated FDAC model. Participants felt it had been wise for the National Unit to encourage sites to adhere closely to the FDAC model and review the approach at a later stage if required.

### **More FDACs are sustainable**

The sustainability of FDACs beyond the first year of funding was an important issue for sites, given the financial climate local authorities were working within and the difficulties this created in securing funding. It is important to note, however, that sites were not expected to achieve longer-term sustainability within the first year.

The National Unit was seen as having an important ongoing role in relation to sustainability through strengthening the evidence base on the relative costs and benefits of FDAC; working with sites to formulate a compelling business case; and continuing to keep problem-solving courts on the political agenda as well as maintaining commitment to FDAC among stakeholders and potential funders. Since data were collected for this evaluation the National Unit has carried out this work.

### **Improving data collection and evidence on the FDAC model**

At the time of fieldwork, sites were at an early stage in the process of carrying out monitoring and evaluation of their FDAC. Despite some initial challenges, sites recognised that data collection was critical to sustainability and wanted to support the National Unit in its efforts to continue to assess the effectiveness of the FDAC model as long as data collection processes were perceived to be proportionate.

Participants believed the continued involvement of the National Unit was critical to any future evaluation of the FDAC model, as the Unit helped to ensure a systematic approach to data collection through producing resources, such as data collection tools, information, support and guidance. Some sites said they may have struggled to collect robust data in the absence of the National Unit due to gaps in local knowledge and/or capacity, for example.

## **Factors enabling or reducing success**

Participants described a number of factors which appear to have supported or reduced progress towards the National Unit's 3 long-term outcomes.

### **Working style**

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. Furthermore, the personal qualities of members of the National Unit, such as their knowledge of FDAC, professionalism and passion, were identified as crucial in fostering local commitment to FDAC, and in motivating sites to move forward with the initiative.

### **Nature, level and timeliness of support**

Overall participants were very positive about the different forms of support provided by the National Unit and described how helpful the Unit had been in supporting the set-up of new FDACs, summarised below:

- participants trusted the guidance provided by the National Unit because it was based on a detailed and intricate understanding of the FDAC model
- the resources, such as the 'Getting Going manual', developed by the National Unit were highly valued as it meant that new FDACs did not have to develop materials from scratch and could work more efficiently. Furthermore, input from the National Unit was considered critical to the successful set-up of new FDACs where participants believed they lacked the necessary skills to develop particular materials
- participants valued the networking opportunities created by the National Unit as they provided newer sites with a real-life example of how FDAC might work in practice, helped sites to share learning with one another and develop links with key staff in existing sites who might be able to offer support in the future
- participants valued the training provided by the National Unit as it helped sites to adhere to the FDAC model while allowing for flexibility to tailor delivery to local needs where necessary. It also helped to ensure that staff managing and delivering FDACs locally had the requisite skills to carry out their roles by providing clear and comprehensive information and guidance.

External factors, such as funding, project timescales and an increase in the number of participating local authorities, influenced the way in which the National Unit had been able to work with FDACs sites in its first year. Despite these challenges, participants felt the National Unit was responsive to requests for support and to feedback on how elements of its work could be enhanced or extended. This included revising existing resources, as well as developing or extending elements of support which were

particularly valued by FDAC sites. Since data for this evaluation were collected the National Unit has continued to review and extend how it works with FDAC sites<sup>6</sup>.

Where issues related to support were raised by participants, they centred on:

- 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 relevant materials
- participants did not always feel that FDAC judges had been given sufficient notice of training dates or that training had always been well timed with respect to the FDAC start date
- participants who valued networking could sometimes find it challenging to take up opportunities due to logistical reasons or costs linked to the location of events
- issues raised about data collection related to an early delay in developing and disseminating appropriate tools. Additionally, some sites anticipated that they may face practical challenges gathering local data due to limited staff capacity, for example. Participants, however, appreciated that evaluation challenges were common when delivering a new set of activities and reported that issues were being addressed.

### **Potential contribution of the National Unit in future years**

As the National Unit had only been in operation for 1 year at the time of writing, it is not possible to draw conclusions about long-term impacts. However, participants felt there was the potential for success because they were convinced of the rationale for FDAC; had confidence in the National Unit; and, in some cases, believed there were early indications of progress. Specific ways in which the continued existence of the National Unit was expected to contribute to longer-term change included:

- improving understanding of whether and how the principles of problem-solving courts could reap rewards beyond the original remit of FDAC. For example, the National Unit is in the process of piloting FDAC with mothers who have had children previously removed through court proceedings<sup>7</sup>
- increasing the evidence base on the positive impact of FDAC on children and families and effectively communicating the results to relevant audiences

---

<sup>6</sup> [See the FDAC National Unit website.](#)

<sup>7</sup> 'Early FDAC' offers early help to families, before the local authority has started pre-birth assessment. If proceedings are issued, the case is heard in the FDAC court and the support to parents continues for 2 years, regardless of the final decision of the court.

- contributing to sustainability by strengthening the evidence base on the value for money of FDAC in terms of savings in family justice and across children's social care.

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 in order to sustain new FDACs and achieve longer-term change.

## Good practice and lessons learned

The research has identified a number of areas of good practice based on the key achievements and contributions of the National Unit in its first year:

- having a National Unit with a staff team who are perceived to be knowledgeable, committed and enthusiastic has been crucial to fostering local commitment and in motivating sites to move forward with the initiative. The National Unit has 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
- developing a compelling, evidence-based business case is important to securing local investment, particularly in the current financial climate.
- a flexible and forward-looking working style is beneficial where it is important to be responsive to local context and need and to adapt to ever-changing political or funding environments
- being clear upfront about the nature, level and timing of support helps to manage expectations
- appropriate and well-timed guidance and support, resources, networking opportunities, and training can contribute to making new initiatives such as FDAC more successful and less resource intensive than they otherwise would have been. Key benefits include preventing sites from each having to develop separate processes and tools, as well as supporting those involved in set-up and delivery to develop the knowledge and skills required for their role
- the commitment, time and resources required to roll out a new initiative should not be underestimated. Commissioners should give additional consideration to whether the timescales for setting up new initiatives are commensurate with the scale and complexity of the task and are realistic with the available resources
- wherever possible, commissioners should ensure that those supporting the roll-out of a new initiative have adequate time to develop resources, materials, and training before they are required to start working closely with potential new sites.

## Overview of project

### The Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) model

The Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) is rooted in a problem-solving court approach to justice, where courts use their authority to help address the complex social issues that bring people before them. The model 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 believe recovery and change are possible, alongside a realistic understanding of the challenges they face.

Specialist, designated judges provide parents with regular supervision and support through fortnightly court reviews. A specialist multi-disciplinary team also works closely with the courts and parents to support families to change and overcome their substance misuse problems and other difficulties<sup>8</sup>.

### Brief history of FDAC in the UK

The first UK FDAC was set up in London in 2008 as a 3-year pilot, funded by central government. It is now commissioned by the 5 inner London local authorities it serves (Camden, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, and Southwark). The London FDAC was followed by new sites in Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire (2014) and East Sussex (2015).

Research published by Brunel University in 2014 indicated 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. Additionally, proportionately fewer children in FDAC families experienced new neglect or abuse in the first year following reunification (Harwin et al., 2014)<sup>9</sup>.

In order to improve outcomes for more children and families, careful consideration was given to how best to scale-up FDAC, which resulted in a funding application to the Department of Education's (DfE) Children's Social Care Innovation Programme (hereafter the Innovation Programme) to create the FDAC 'National Unit'.

---

<sup>8</sup> Further information on the FDAC model can be [found here](#).

<sup>9</sup> 40% [35 of 88] of FDAC mothers were no longer misusing substances, compared to 25% [24 of 95] of comparison mothers; and 25% of FDAC fathers [13 of 52] were no longer misusing substances, compared to 5% [2 of 38] of comparison fathers.

Since the National Unit was established, further research on the efficacy of FDAC has been conducted by Brunel University London, Lancaster University and RyanTunnardBrown, with methodological guidance from NatCen. The 'After FDAC: outcomes 5 years later' study, funded by the Innovation Programme, found new evidence of the sustained benefits of FDAC. For example, it was estimated that a higher proportion of FDAC than comparison reunification mothers abstained from drugs or alcohol over the five year follow-up (Harwin et al., 2016)<sup>10</sup>.

## The National Unit

The FDAC National Unit was established in April 2015 through funding from DfE's Innovation Programme. The Unit is a partnership of 6 organisations led by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust<sup>11</sup> with expertise in areas including judicial and social care practice, problem-solving courts, evaluation, and project management. It aims to improve outcomes for more children and families by increasing the number of FDACs. Specifically, the Unit was awarded funding to support the creation of 4 new FDACs, with each site receiving funding for the costs of a project manager and half the cost of their specialist FDAC team for the first year. This funding was matched by the local authority.

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 with the inclusion of 5 West Yorkshire local authorities and Southampton.

The work of the National Unit is summarised below:

- the Unit's implementation team provides guidance and support to existing, new and potential FDAC sites and promotes wider understanding and commitment to the model
- the Unit carries out research and evaluation to strengthen and improve the FDAC model and help build the case for a more sustainable model of funding for local FDACs
- the Unit also carries out work on new developments, including increasing understanding of the costs and benefits of FDAC; learning from area variations; and developing potential new services such as Early FDAC.

The National Unit expects to contribute to the following longer-term outcomes: increase in the successful set-up of FDACs; more FDACs which are sustainable; and,

---

<sup>10</sup> The full study, 'After FDAC: outcomes 5 years later' (Harwin et al., 2016) can be [accessed here](#).

<sup>11</sup> These are The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust; The Centre for Justice Innovation; CORAM; RyanTunnardBrown; Brunel University London; and Lancaster University. Further information about the partnership organisations can be [accessed here](#).

improvements in the definition, collection, dissemination and application of evidence (see evaluation theory of change in Appendix B).

In turn these longer-term outcomes are expected to support the National Unit in meeting its 3 key goals of better outcomes for children and families; better justice; and better value for money.

# Overview of the evaluation

## Research aims and objectives

NatCen was also commissioned to provide independent methodological advice and guidance on 2 further studies on FDAC:

- NatCen acted as a critical friend on the methodology of the 2016 evaluation of FDAC, 'After FDAC: outcomes 5 years later', funded by the Innovation Programme and conducted by Brunel University London, Lancaster University and RyanTunnardBrown (Harwin et al., 2016)<sup>12</sup>
- NatCen provided methodological guidance to the Centre for Justice Innovation on their research assessing the value for money of FDAC, 'Better Courts: the financial impact of the London Family Drug and Alcohol Court' (Reeder et al., 2016)<sup>13</sup>.

The rest of this report focuses on NatCen's evaluation of the National Unit, commissioned by DfE in 2015. This qualitative study aimed to increase understanding of the delivery, contribution and perceived outcomes of the National Unit. The specific research objectives were to:

- articulate the National Unit's theory of change using a series of logic model diagrams, and explore how this resonated with delivery and outcomes on the ground
- explore the National Unit's perceived contribution and added value to the implementation and delivery of new FDACs
- Describe the perceived outcomes (short, medium and longer-term) of the National Unit
- identify lessons to inform the future roll-out of the FDAC model.

## Research approach

The evaluation adopted a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the work and contribution of the National Unit from the perspectives of FDAC sites and other key stakeholders. The evaluation was conducted across 2 key strands of activity, described below:

---

<sup>12</sup> The full study, 'After FDAC: outcomes 5 years later' (Harwin et al., 2016) can be [accessed here](#).

<sup>13</sup> The full report 'Better Courts: the financial impact of the London Family Drug and Alcohol Court' (Reeder et al., 2016) can be [accessed here](#).

## Theory of change

The research team worked in partnership with the National Unit to refine the Unit's theory of change. A logic model approach was used, based on the W.K Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide (W.K Kellogg Foundation, 2004). This involved:

- a brief document review to develop the research team's understanding of the FDAC model as well as the origins, aims, activities and intended outcomes of the national unit
- four half day workshops to aid understanding of programme theory and facilitate discussion of the Unit's intended outcomes and impact. Three workshops involved key stakeholders from the Unit and a separate workshop involved FDAC project managers and strategic leads from a number of sites who were at different stages of launching and delivering their FDACs. The research team used the workshop findings to refine the Unit's theory of change, so that it resonated with delivery, outcomes and impact on the ground (see Appendix B).

## Qualitative in-depth interviews

### Case studies with FDAC sites

A qualitative case study design was used to obtain a comprehensive and contextualised understanding of the National Unit's work. Ten FDAC sites were purposively selected as case studies to ensure range and diversity in their approach to implementation and delivery. Consideration was also given to how far along the site was in setting up their FDAC in order to capture a range of views and experiences.<sup>14</sup>

Thirty two in-depth interviews were conducted across case study sites, with potential interviewees selected on the basis of their experience of working with the National Unit and their role within the local FDAC. Case study participants were recruited through facilitators from the National Unit and/or local sites. While the sample for the evaluation as a whole shows diversity with respect to the chosen selection criteria (outlined above), it was not always possible to capture the full range of perspectives within individual sites. Further information on the sample can be found in Table A.1 in Appendix A.

### Strategic stakeholders

To ensure the research provided rich insight into the work of the National Unit, interviews were also conducted with 13 strategic stakeholders. They included members or partners of the National Unit (internal stakeholders); FDAC project managers or leads from sites who launched their FDAC before the National Unit was established and key government

---

<sup>14</sup> At the time of fieldwork 5 of the 10 case study sites had set up courts and were starting to hear cases.

stakeholders (external stakeholders). Once again a diverse sample was achieved in relation to experiences of working with the National Unit and the FDAC model<sup>15</sup>.

## **Interview conduct and analysis**

Fieldwork took place between December 2015 and March 2016. Tailored topic guides were used in all interviews to help ensure a consistent approach across encounters and between members of the research team. The guides were used flexibly, with open and non-leading phrasing to allow researchers to respond to the nature and content of each discussion. The main headings and sub-headings for the topic guides used for interviews within the case study sites are provided in Appendix A.

Interviews were carried out face-to-face or by telephone, depending on the participant's preference. Choice was given to minimise burden and facilitate participation in the study. Interviews lasted between 35 and 85 minutes and were audio recorded on encrypted digital devices and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were managed and analysed using the Framework approach (Ritchie et al., 2013), a systematic approach to qualitative data management that was developed by NatCen (see Appendix A). Verbatim interview quotations are used throughout this report to illustrate themes and findings where appropriate. Quotations are attributed to participants using descriptive categories relevant to this research: case study participant or stakeholder.

This report shows the range and diversity of views and experiences among those interviewed. As this is qualitative research, the number of people who hold a particular view is not reported as it offers no indication of the extent to which these views are held in the wider population. Any numerical inference is likely to be misleading or inaccurate as qualitative samples are not designed for this purpose.

The report distinguishes between the views of different types of participants (case study, internal stakeholders and external stakeholders) where this helps to illuminate findings and would not breach anonymity.

## **Reading the findings**

The evaluation helps to increase understanding of the work and contribution of the National Unit from the perspectives of new FDAC sites, members of the National Unit and other key stakeholders. It is important, however, to acknowledge that, due to the timing of data collection, this report does not fully capture the range of ways in which the National Unit has responded to feedback from FDAC sites throughout the year. An

---

<sup>15</sup> We have not provided a further breakdown of participants by job role as this would compromise anonymity.

overview of the current work of the National Unit can be found on the [National Unit's website](#).

## **Changes to research design**

At the outset of the evaluation, we intended to visit 7 case study sites, including 3 sites at 2 points in time, in order to gain a detailed 'real time' understanding of whether, and how, views and experiences of working with the National Unit had changed. However, the research team, in consultation with the National Unit and DfE, made 3 main revisions to this design to take account of some delays in implementation and to reduce burden on sites who were working to launch their FDAC. These were:

- data collection happened at 1 point in time only
- the number of case studies was increased to 10, (o reduce the number of interviews within each site
- a new strand of research was introduced to conduct interviews with a wider range of strategic stakeholders, including partners of the National Unit itself. This provided valuable perspectives on the delivery and perceived contribution and outcomes of the National Unit.

## Key findings

This chapter presents the key findings of the research. It begins by exploring participant views and experiences of working with the National Unit and goes on to describe the perceived contribution and outcomes of the National Unit in relation to its 3 longer-term outcomes.

### Views and experiences of working with the National Unit

This section explores the work of the National Unit from the perspectives of case study participants and stakeholders. It begins by exploring understandings of the FDAC model and awareness of the role of the National Unit. The section then considers experiences of working with the National Unit, with a focus on 3 strands of work; set-up, implementation and delivery of FDAC; achieving sustainability; and data collection. The section concludes by summarising key factors which were reported to have supported or reduced the National Unit's work with FDAC sites.

### Understanding the FDAC model

Participants described FDAC as an alternative way of working with families with substance misuse problems who are involved in care proceedings. Core elements of the FDAC model were felt to include:

- A focus on the family unit in order to:
  - provide the best opportunity for families to stay together (where appropriate)
  - support better outcomes for children and families.
- A parent-centred approach in order to:
  - help parents overcome their problems and give children the best possible chance of being brought up safely by their own parents
  - give parents a stronger voice in court, by providing the opportunity to speak directly to the judge
  - enable families to exert some control over the process and feel they are being listened to
  - provide practical support or resources, and timely access to therapeutic interventions to parents with substance misuse issues.
- A less adversarial approach in order to:

- reduce confrontation and build relationships between parties
- work openly with parents in a structured and supported environment.
- A multi-disciplinary team in order to:
  - offer a specialist team with a range of expertise
  - co-ordinate working across multiple agencies
  - support the active involvement of the judiciary via a designated family judge.

Positive views about the FDAC model centred on the potential contribution it could make to improve the lives of children and families. Participants were overall positive about the core components of the FDAC model, such as the opportunity to provide specialist support to parents to help them to overcome addiction. Furthermore, participants were enthused by the potential for FDAC to contribute to a shift in approach to family justice.

‘FDAC is quite refreshing because it’s about solving the problems that we know are there. We don’t really need people to tell us what the issues are...What we need to do is something about them, and FDAC seems, hopefully, to be looking at it in that way.’ (Case study participant)

Reservations about elements of the FDAC model were also raised by some participants. These related to whether finance could potentially be diverted away from traditional care proceedings in order to fund what was considered in some cases to be a more resource-intensive approach and whether the child could become inadvertently lost in FDAC proceedings. There was also concern about the sustainability of FDACs beyond the pilot. Questions related to whether the nature and level of support available to families who completed proceedings would meet their ongoing needs, and whether sites, operating in the context of significant public service cuts and more limited evidence of the efficacy of FDAC, would be able to secure funding to deliver FDAC in future years:

‘...If the project doesn’t go beyond that 12 months are we then going to drop the families...it’s just making sure that there’s appropriate exit strategies for all families [if] there isn’t funding for the FDAC model beyond that time.’ (Case study participant)

The National Unit played an important role in responding to, and helping to alleviate, concerns by drawing on existing evidence of the benefits and costs of FDAC as well as discussing the National Unit’s plans to support the longer-term sustainability of FDAC.

The section above shows that participants’ understanding of the core elements of the FDAC model were closely aligned with the National Unit. This indicates that the Unit has played an important role in increasing local understanding of FDAC and convincing stakeholders of the benefits of implementing an FDAC service close to the evaluated

model (see 'The National Unit's perceived contribution to achieving outcomes' from page 30).

## **Understanding the role of the National Unit**

The National Unit was felt to have a key role in supporting the set-up and delivery of new sites. A second key aim of the National Unit, identified by participants, was to gather evidence on the effectiveness of the FDAC model in different contexts and to better understand which factors supported or prevented positive outcomes. The long-term goals of the National Unit were described by participants as related to achieving systematic change within family justice and related policy areas. This included goals to reduce the number of children in care by creating the conditions under which families could stay together, if appropriate. Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of the National Unit's role in supporting the standardised collection of data in order to allow sites to assess and demonstrate the value of the FDAC model. Participants' perceptions of the National Unit's aims, therefore, related closely to those articulated in the evaluation theory of change<sup>16</sup>. Once again, this indicates that the Unit has been successful in clearly articulating its role and contribution to FDAC sites.

## **Views and experiences of working with the National Unit**

Participants described their views and experiences of working with the National Unit across key stages of implementation and delivery.

### **Decision to set-up FDAC**

Participants reported that early suggestions to set up FDAC came either from members of the judiciary, or from the local authority. Where FDACs originated from the judiciary they were enthusiastic to develop an alternative way of working with families involved in care proceedings. Where local authorities had led discussions, they were reported to have been motivated by local factors such as high numbers of family court cases involving parental substance misuse; high rates of repeat removals of children, and/or the success of similar initiatives in the region. Additional drivers for FDAC from the local authority related to the potential for local authorities to improve outcomes for children and families and deliver better justice by, for example, contributing to a cultural shift within the wider judiciary.

The final decision to set up FDAC was generally made by a steering group of local stakeholders. The composition of steering groups differed across sites, but broadly included senior managers within local authorities, judges, legal representatives (including local authority and private practice lawyers), Public Health and representatives from local

---

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix B

services such as the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) and substance misuse teams.

Case study participants identified 4 elements of the Unit's work which had been particularly beneficial in helping them to decide whether to set-up FDAC. Participants described how the National Unit had assisted with:

- the scoping exercises required of each site to assess local demographics, needs and services
- identifying appropriate professionals to invite to steering groups
- signposting local authorities towards potential funding opportunities
- providing FDAC sites with evidence to inform discussions with local stakeholders on the short and longer-term cost effectiveness of the FDAC model.

### **Set-up and implementation**

Once the decision to set up an FDAC had been made, sites worked with the National Unit to operationalise the FDAC model, described below:

#### **Guidance and support**

Case study participants praised the high quality of the guidance and support they had received from the National Unit and described how the National Unit had been very responsive to questions and queries as they prepared to launch their FDACs.

Participants particularly valued input from the National Unit across key areas including:

- what qualities and skills were key for specific roles including for example, FDAC project managers and team leaders
- the ideal composition of an FDAC team, including both essential and desirable roles
- support to develop job descriptions
- sharing expertise and set-up experiences of other sites including how other FDACs had overcome challenges.

While the guidance provided by the National Unit was valued, some case study participants expressed a preference for more advice on the practicalities of launching a new FDAC. For example, participants were keen to understand more about what had worked in other areas and the systems and processes underpinning successful FDACs. Since data were collected for this evaluation the National Unit has increased opportunities for peer-to-peer learning in response to this request.

## **Communication and visits to FDAC sites**

Regular communication with the National Unit was valued by case study participants. Examples included members of the National Unit attending local steering groups and other FDAC meetings to contribute to discussions and be on hand to answer queries; a written update on the progress and experiences of other FDAC sites, if they were unable to attend a meeting; and regular face-to-face and telephone or email contact with the National Unit throughout the set-up and implementation phases. This latter form of communication helped to maintain a good working relationship and reportedly made sites feel that they were kept informed of FDAC on a national level.

## **Resources**

The National Unit provided FDAC sites with various resources, such as job descriptions for FDAC staff and service level agreements, at different stages of the set-up and implementation process. Case study participants particularly valued the 'Getting Going' manual<sup>17</sup> and described it as a comprehensive source of information on the FDAC model. Participants also appreciated the templates, pro-forma documents and leaflets developed by the National Unit, as they enabled sites to save significant amounts of time by adapting materials to the local context rather than starting from scratch. Additionally, participants did not always have the necessary skills to develop legal documents, such as service level agreements, and so felt input from the National Unit was critical to helping them set-up successfully.

Challenges raised by participants related to the availability and quality of resources. Implementation timescales meant that sites began the process of setting up a new FDAC shortly after the National Unit had been established and before they had been able to finalise all resources. Consequently, some case study participants discussed delays in receiving information in the early stages of the National Unit's work. Participants perceived that FDAC sites who started working with the National Unit at a later stage would have benefited from early access to, and in some cases higher quality, information and resources. This was because the National Unit was responsive to early feedback from FDAC sites and reviewed and revised resources, such as templates, where this was beneficial. Sites who set up FDAC later in the year were also able to access resources which required greater time to develop such as the FDAC National Unit website.

## **Delivery**

This section describes how the National Unit supported sites to deliver a new FDAC, focusing on 2 forms of support: peer-to-peer learning and training. It concludes by describing participant views on working with the National Unit once a new FDAC team was operating and the FDAC court was hearing cases.

---

<sup>17</sup> The 'FDAC Getting Going Manual' is a comprehensive document outlining the necessary components underpinning the FDAC model and process for set-up. The manual can be [accessed here](#).

## **Peer-to-peer learning opportunities**

Case study participants reported that the National Unit provided frequent opportunities for networking among FDAC colleagues. This included networking events, invitations to observe other FDAC courts, visits to other FDAC sites, a network and forum for judges, and the linking of people in specific roles to individuals in the same role at a different site. Peer-to-peer learning opportunities were described as extremely helpful as they enabled sites to share experiences, learn from each other and see how FDAC worked in practice.

Where participants found it challenging to participate in events, this was for logistical, capacity, or cost reasons. It was suggested that the use of video conferencing may increase future engagement of a geographically dispersed group of FDAC sites. Additionally, where a dedicated project manager was in post, opportunities for networking were perceived to be reserved for individuals in this role, whereas other members of the FDAC teams said they would have welcomed the opportunity to take up similar learning opportunities<sup>18</sup>.

## **Training and guidance**

The National Unit provided a 4-day training course on the principles, practicalities, and assessment and treatment process of FDAC to all individuals who would be involved in delivering FDAC. Participants viewed the training as relevant and comprehensive. Local authority staff and judiciary staff particularly appreciated the inclusion of judges in the training session as it was viewed as an opportunity to bring everyone together on an equal footing:

‘The family judges [were] on the training as well... that was amazing for everybody, for the judges as well because... we were all on the same level and we were all doing the same training... it was a really good experience for everybody.’  
(Case study participant)

Participants valued the training provided by the National Unit as it helped sites to adhere to the FDAC standards while allowing for flexibility to tailor the model to local needs where necessary. It also helped to ensure that staff managing and delivering FDACs locally had the requisite skills to carry out their roles.

Challenges raised by case study participants centred on whether the training had been well timed with respect to the start date of the FDAC service. Furthermore, participants suggested that for judges in particular, more notice of training dates would have been preferred, as some training had to be rescheduled to accommodate judges’ availability.

---

<sup>18</sup> Since data was collected for this evaluation additional forums and networking opportunities have been established for groups such as judges and lawyers.

The National Unit also provided ongoing training and support to sites. Follow up training days were perceived to be of particular value, when sites were close to launching FDAC, to help reiterate and reinforce key principles of delivery which had been presented in the initial training. Participants suggested 2 ways in which they felt ongoing training and guidance could be usefully extended for future FDAC sites. First, participants suggested that more follow up training days would be valuable in order to ensure that sites continued to operate according to the National Unit's Service Standards<sup>19</sup>. Second, case study participants from sites who had launched their FDAC suggested that more guidance on setting realistic targets for the number of cases heard by new FDACs would have been helpful, as some sites had to reduce the number of cases in the early stages of delivery.

### **Post-launch**

Participants from case study sites that had launched their FDAC by the time the data was collected for the evaluation welcomed the continued support of the National Unit, particularly as it was not always expected. For example, it was seen as helpful for the National Unit to observe and provide feedback on judicial performance in order to encourage and support fidelity to the FDAC model. Participants felt it was appropriate for contact with the National Unit to decrease over time as sites became better placed to work independently.

### **Sustainability**

The second longer-term goal of the National Unit is to contribute to an increase in the number of FDAC sites which are sustainable in the longer-term. This section describes how FDAC sites worked with the National Unit to move towards achieving sustainability. It also considers potential funding challenges and how these might be addressed by the National Unit in the future.

Case study participants and stakeholders agreed that the sustainability of FDACs beyond the first year of funding was an important issue. It is important to note, however, that sites were not expected to achieve longer-term sustainability within the first year. Where sites had begun working with the National Unit on sustainability issues, this had taken the form of discussions about future funding, and training sessions which focused on presenting evidence on FDAC and formulating a persuasive business case to convince stakeholders that the FDAC model was worth investing in and sustaining.

Since data were collected for this evaluation, the Centre for Justice Innovation has completed analysis of the direct costs and savings to local authorities and public bodies,

---

<sup>19</sup> A complete list of the National Unit's Service Standards can be [accessed here](#).

modelled on the London FDAC 2014/15 caseload<sup>20</sup>. This work aims to help sites to better understand the value for money of FDAC, and the Unit has used the analysis to develop a cost-benefit model for each local FDAC site.

While participants spoke positively about the FDAC model, they also recognised the likely challenge of securing sufficient funding in future years. This was due to the economic climate as well as to specific concerns among some local stakeholders about whether FDAC provides value for money relative to the outcomes achieved and running costs of the court, given that information on the effectiveness of new FDAC sites was not yet available. Participants discussed several ways in which they believed the National Unit could support FDAC sites to tackle potential funding challenges and build a sound business case for the model. This included the National Unit continuing to support all FDAC sites to collect consistent and robust data to help evidence the model's relative costs and benefits. Additionally, participants emphasised the ongoing role of the National Unit in securing commitment to the FDAC model among key stakeholders and potential funders such as local and national government. Since data for the evaluation were collected the National Unit has been carrying out these strands of work.

## Data collection

The third and final, long-term goal of the National Unit is to contribute to improvements in the definition, collection, dissemination and application of evidence. This section describes the progress that new FDAC sites made in relation to data collection and explores some of the key successes and challenges.

Case study participants recognised the benefits of building a robust evidence base to demonstrate improved outcomes and a return on investment. As a consequence, FDAC sites were committed to collecting data, as long as processes were perceived to be proportionate and did not overly distract from the day-to-day operation of FDAC. Where participants had experience of data collection, they discussed 3 sets of issues, described below.

First, the data collection tools developed by the National Unit were viewed positively by case study participants who had seen them, because of the potential to increase evidence of the FDAC model, as well as preventing FDAC sites from each having to develop separate monitoring and evaluation strategies. However, National Unit staff discussed some challenges of developing tools that could be used by practitioners and provide meaningful information on complex outcomes, such as the quality of relationships between parents and children, or whether parents have gained greater insight into the effect of their behaviour on their children. The time taken to revise and roll out data

---

<sup>20</sup> The full report by the Centre for Justice Innovation, 'Better Courts: the financial impact of the London Family Drug and Alcohol Court' (Reeder et al., 2016) can be [accessed here](#).

collection tools caused some frustration among some sites who felt it would have been beneficial if the National Unit had been in a position to provide this support at an earlier point in time. However, implementation timescales set by the Innovation Programme meant that the National Unit did not have adequate time to develop and finalise all key resources before it started to work with the first sites.

Second, internal stakeholders reported that some of the earlier sites, set up prior to the NU launching, were less able to follow the data collection processes and use tools developed by the National Unit. This was attributed to practical barriers such as FDAC sites not always understanding what data to collect and how this should be done, as well as some FDAC sites not having previous experience of collecting data using tools similar to those developed by the National Unit. Internal stakeholders perceived that commitment to data collection was high among new FDAC sites as a result of the work undertaken by the National Unit to clearly explain the benefits of building an evidence base to demonstrate the business case for FDAC.

Finally, some participants anticipated that they might face practical challenges in using the tools developed by the National Unit. Concerns were raised by some participants about the amount of data which had to be collected and the time this would take staff to complete. The task of data collection had typically been assigned to individuals in managerial positions who already had heavy workloads and for whom FDAC was often an additional element to their existing roles. As data were collected at a time when sites had only recently begun using the tools, it has not been possible to explore whether, and how, the considerations were resolved over time.

Case study participants were hopeful that the evidence collected on the FDAC model would show long-term effectiveness, improved outcomes and return on investment. Case study participants felt it would be beneficial if the results of national research and evaluation could be shared with local FDAC sites on a regular basis in order that FDAC sites could use it to make decisions about the continuation of the pilot beyond the first year of funding, and build a business case for sustainability.

## **Cross-cutting issues**

This section closes by drawing together key factors supporting or preventing the National Unit from working effectively with FDAC sites.

### **Working style**

The National Unit's approach to working with FDAC sites was perceived by case study participants to have been collaborative and flexible. Participants appreciated that the National Unit was responsive to queries, listened to ideas, helped sites to work through any challenges and provided a clear explanation for recommendations based on a detailed understanding of the FDAC model.

Participants also highlighted the contribution of National Unit staff. Members of the National Unit were described as passionate, enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the FDAC model and the potential benefits it could bring. These qualities were perceived by participants to have played a critical role in enthusing sites to consider FDAC and forging effective working relationships:

‘[The National Unit] is accessible, they’re supportive, they have the knowledge...they work collaboratively...’ (Case study participant)

### **Managing expectations**

On reflection, some participants felt that it would have been beneficial for the National Unit to have been clearer upfront about the nature and level of support sites could expect. Stakeholders and case study participants felt it would have been beneficial to clarify that there would be a process of mutual learning and development:

‘We announced ourselves as a National Unit and ‘here we are, ready to help you set-up’, whereas we might’ve been better saying, ‘we’re going to learn from you what you also need to get set-up’ rather than always feeling like we were responding and slightly on the back foot’ (Internal stakeholder).

### **Nature, level and timeliness of support**

Overall, participants spoke very positively about the different forms of support provided by the National Unit such as information and advice, training, support, networking opportunities and resources. The level of contact between the National Unit and sites was deemed to be appropriate; participants spoke positively about having had more contact with the National Unit when the site was at an earlier stage of development, and less contact when confidence and knowledge of the FDAC model had grown.

Where issues were raised by participants, it was acknowledged that external factors, such as funding, project timescales and an increase in the number of participating local authorities, had influenced the way in which the National Unit had been able to work with FDAC sites. For example, implementation timescales set by the Innovation Programme meant that the National Unit did not have adequate time to develop and finalise all key resources and materials before it started to work with the first sites. Despite resourcing challenges, participants felt the National Unit had been responsive to requests for support and to feedback on how elements of its work could be enhanced or extended. Furthermore, participants believed that having a smaller staff team had helped the National Unit to develop close and productive working relationships with sites.

### **Fidelity to the model**

The National Unit encouraged sites to adhere closely to the evaluated FDAC model. Key benefits of fidelity included the opportunity to conduct further multi-site evaluation; increase understanding of the effectiveness of FDAC; support wider-roll out; and increase the sustainability of FDAC.

The National Unit played a significant role in communicating and convincing sites of the rationale for fidelity as well as the benefits of adhering closely to the evaluated FDAC model. Case study participants particularly appreciated working with the National Unit to explore issues of fidelity early on in the set-up phase in order to ensure that their FDAC service was established in line with the key elements of the evaluated model. This included the National Unit working with some sites to explore alternative approaches to FDAC which met local need, while remaining faithful to core elements of the model. This was perceived by case participants to be important to ensuring that their FDAC was relevant and sustainable.

‘[The National Unit was] very helpful and very able to acknowledge that... you work within the system that you've got and this is how we can make it work better. So I've never found them to be anything other than very helpful in offering advice when it's needed.’ (Case study participant)

In other cases, the National Unit worked with sites to limit local adaptations in order to ensure fidelity. This included where FDAC sites had asked to expand the scope of FDAC to include additional groups who they felt may benefit from a therapeutic and problem-solving court approach to justice. For example, it was felt that the FDAC model could be valuable where domestic abuse had triggered care proceedings. While a desire for greater flexibility was expressed, case study participants felt it had been wise for the National Unit to recommend that sites should adhere to the model in the early phases and review the approach at a later stage, if required.

‘I think we're probably better off starting as close as we can to the model and then looking to move from that once we really understand what it is that we're working with and the bits that make the real difference.’ (Case study participant)

Given the importance of fidelity, some case study participants felt it would have been beneficial for the National Unit to provide FDAC sites with earlier clarity about whether, and how, the model could be adapted and in what circumstances. In response to this, the National Unit worked hard to produce a set of FDAC Service Standards<sup>21</sup> which could be used to increase understanding of the key elements of the model in the future.

## **The National Unit's perceived contribution to achieving outcomes**

This section explores whether, and how, key programme objectives have been met, by describing the outcomes and contribution of the National Unit as reported by case study participants and stakeholders.

---

<sup>21</sup> A complete list of the National Unit's Service Standards can be [accessed here](#).

The section begins by describing the National Unit's programme theory before discussing the methodological strengths and limitations of the results presented in this chapter. It sets out the findings on the perceived contribution and outcomes of the National Unit in relation to the Unit's 3 long-term outcomes and 3 long-term goals. These are discussed below and articulated fully in the logic model diagram presented in Appendix B.

## The National Unit's programme theory

As outlined in the previous section, in the early stages of the evaluation, the research team worked with the National Unit to refine its theory of change<sup>22</sup>. The process resulted in the development of a programme theory presented in a series of logic model diagrams showing the National Unit's activities; intended outcomes, and long-term vision or systematic changes, the full version of which is included in Appendix B. The logic model sets out the 3 long-term goals that the National Unit is seeking to contribute to. These are defined as:

- better justice
- better outcomes for children and families
- better value for money.

The model also articulates the key short-term, intermediate and longer-term outcomes which are expected to contribute to the Unit's ultimate goals. These outcomes have been grouped into 3 pathways, which are defined in the model as:

- increase in the successful set-up of FDACs
- more FDACS are sustainable
- improvements in the definition, collection, dissemination and application of evidence.

These outcome pathways identify the links between the short and medium-term outcomes that are expected to lead to the Unit's longer-term outcomes and ultimate goals. Across the 3 pathways, the short and medium-term outcomes are interlinked and organised sequentially in the order in which they are expected to happen.

## Methodological strengths and limitations

Before presenting the research evidence, it is important to provide a brief overview of the study methodology to place the results in their appropriate context (see Appendix B for

---

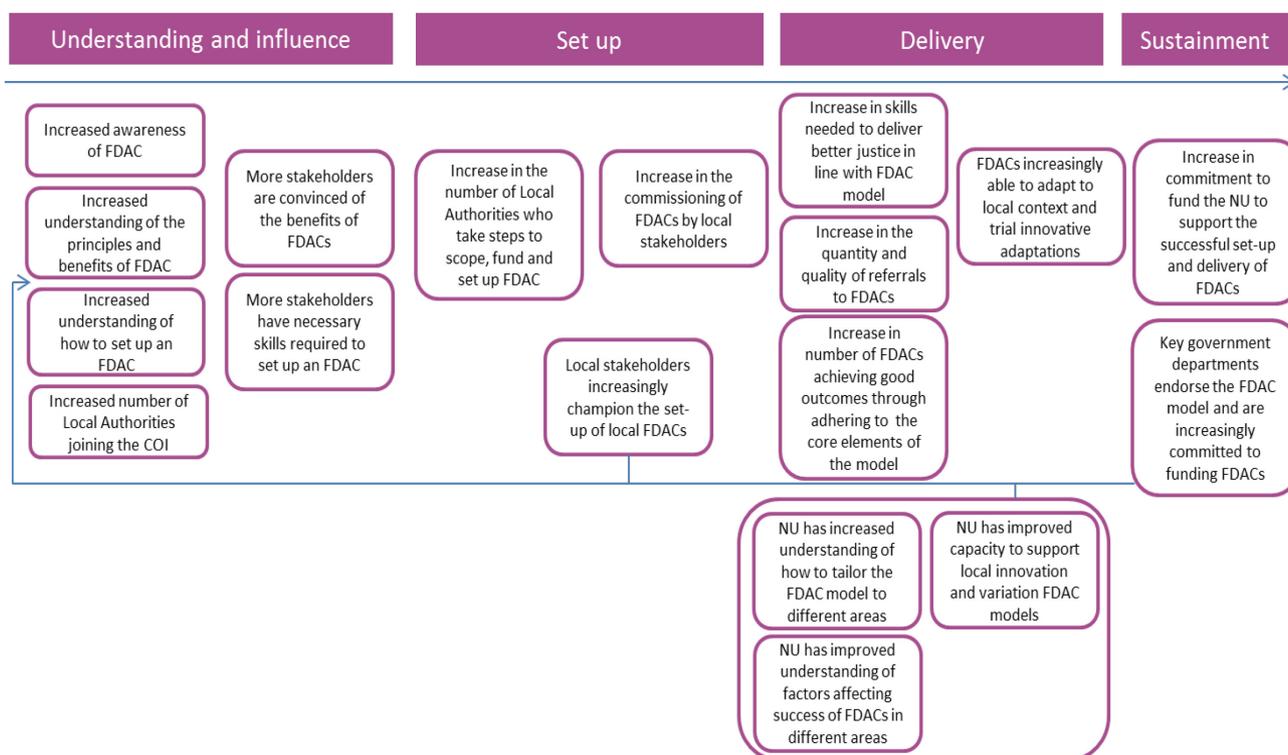
<sup>22</sup> A theory of change is a product of a series of critical thinking exercises. It defines all building blocks required to bring about a given long-term goal. These building blocks, referred to as impacts, outcomes, results, accomplishments, or preconditions, are depicted on a map known as a pathway of change or change framework, which is a graphic representation of the change logic. Refer to the [Centre for Theory of Change](#) and the [Harvard Family Research Project](#).

more information). As outlined earlier in the report, the evaluation was conducted using qualitative in-depth interviews to gather evidence on whether and where the National Unit had made progress in relation to outcomes which could be feasibly achieved within the timescales of the evaluation. It is beyond the scope of the evaluation to draw definitive conclusions about longer-term impacts.

## Defining ‘success’

Interviews explored whether the long-term goals, that is, systematic changes or impacts, and outcomes presented in the theory of change resonated with case study participants and external stakeholders. Case study participants largely defined ‘success’ in relation to the Unit’s work to support the set-up, implementation and delivery of new FDAC sites. For external stakeholders, ‘success’ was also defined in relation to the National Unit’s efforts to increase commitment to the FDAC model among key stakeholders such as government departments and potential funders, and the National Unit’s work to make FDAC sites sustainable in the longer-term. The accounts of participants therefore indicate that the National Unit’s key stakeholders have a good understanding of the key changes it seeks to achieve, aligned with the theory of change.

**Figure 1: Outcome pathway for long-term outcome ‘Increase in the successful set-up of FDACs’**



## Set-up of new FDACs

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 with the inclusion of 5 West Yorkshire local authorities and Southampton.

Nine new FDACs were created in the first year of the National Unit<sup>23</sup>. Participants were pleased with the progress made, relative to the target number of FDACs which had been set for the Unit.

‘I think that’s a pretty amazing outcome. We’ve actually overachieved in terms of the number of FDACs that we’ve opened. And the fact that we’ve trained all those sites. We’ve produced a handbook, we’ve given them an incredible amount of resource. It’s fantastic.’ (Internal stakeholder)

Participants perceived that the National Unit had made an important contribution to the set-up of new FDACs. Case study participants at different stages of the set-up process highlighted positive examples of working with the National Unit and concluded that it had been highly beneficial to have the support of a group of experienced and committed professionals who could guide sites through the necessary steps and share best practice.

‘There is a team that you can refer to that can talk you through how it's been done in other areas, how it's been evaluated. I think it gives you a degree of security going into it... without [the National Unit] I think...it would feel like we were trying to persuade people to do something with no grounding.’ (Case study participant)

While case study participants were positive about the contribution of the National Unit, views differed on whether the Unit had been a necessary condition for setting up their FDAC. Participants who reported that the local authority might have set up an FDAC in the absence of the National Unit believed that this was because the key building blocks, such as a strong local commitment to the FDAC model, were already in place at a local level. A contrasting view, expressed by other case study participants and external stakeholders, was that the local authority would have been unlikely to have considered FDAC without the encouragement, support and resources of the National Unit given the scale and ambition of the challenge:

‘You couldn’t get going with something as kind of left-field as this without a group of people that can get in there and explain how it works and show you it working’.  
(External stakeholder)

Irrespective of whether case study participants believed that the National Unit had been a necessary condition for setting up their FDAC, there was agreement that the National Unit had been instrumental in the supporting and encouraging the set-up of new FDACs and helping to keep local sites on track:

‘We could have done it on paper, but whether it would have had the same impact and the same sort of achievement from us doing it as it did from having all that

---

<sup>23</sup> Figure provided by the National Unit in May 2016.

training and understanding of knowledge that the national group [has provided].’  
(Case study participant)

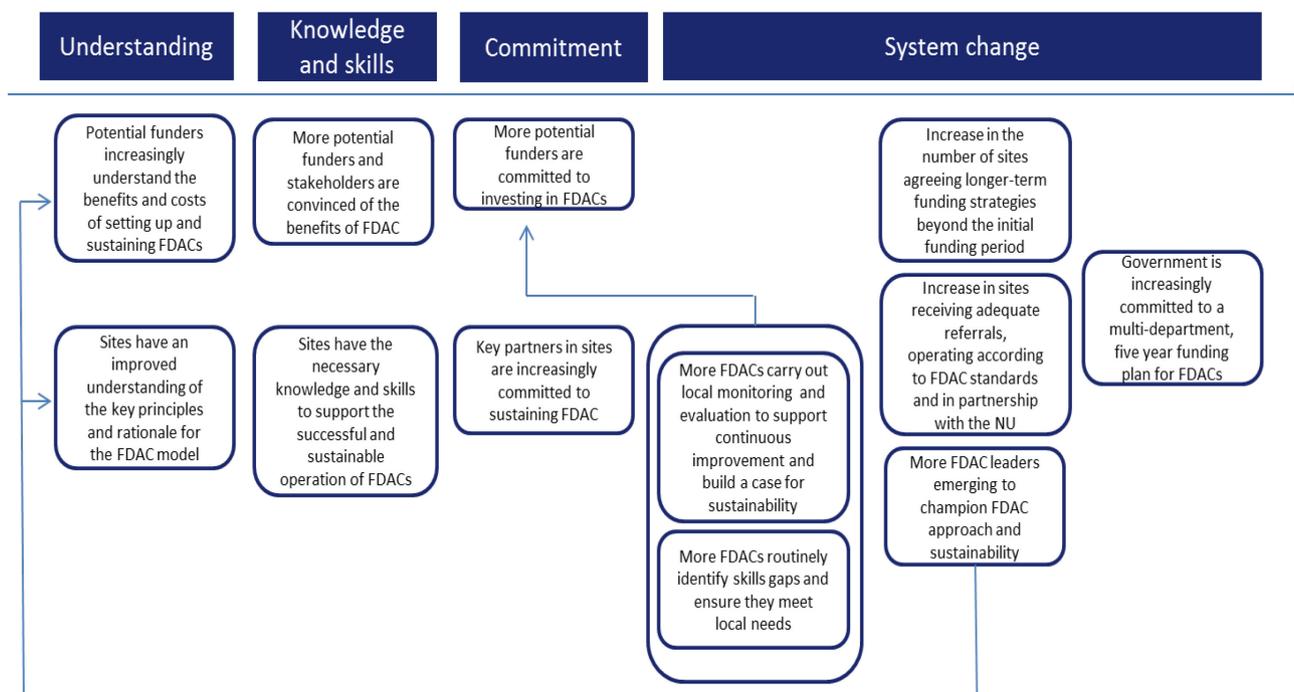
More specifically, the National Unit helped sites to better understand the FDAC model, and how it might be appropriately tailored to local needs. Consequently, case study participants had a clearer understanding of goals and components of FDAC and the key steps involved in setting up the court. The National Unit also helped bolster the skills required to set-up a new FDAC through ongoing support and guidance; resources; networking opportunities; and training (see ‘views and experiences of working with the National Unit’ from page 21). Without the National Unit, participants explained that their approach to launching and delivering FDAC would have been less successful; required longer time, and been more resource intensive than it otherwise could have been.

Participants also highlighted the important contribution of the National Unit in bringing together and fostering commitment to FDAC among key local stakeholders who were essential to the success of the initiative. Some case study participants who had taken a leading role in creating a new FDAC felt they would not have been able to coordinate input from key senior stakeholders from the local authority and judiciary without the support of the National Unit. Participants also described how the National Unit had helped demonstrate the benefit of FDAC to local stakeholders through supporting sites to use evidence on the effectiveness of model. Participants perceived that members of the National Unit had helped to bolster local confidence and commitment to FDAC by demonstrating their own enthusiasm and belief in the model, which was critical to success.

### **Fidelity to the FDAC model**

As discussed, the National Unit played a significant role in communicating, and convincing new sites of, the benefits of closely implementing and delivering key elements of the FDAC service that is faithful to the FDAC model, as evaluated. This included supporting sites to appropriately adapt the model to local context, or, in other cases, limiting local adaptations where the changes veered too far from the evaluated FDAC model. Case study participants felt it had been wise for the National Unit to encourage sites to adhere closely to the FDAC model and review the approach at a later stage if required.

**Figure 2: Outcome pathway for long-term outcome ‘More FDACs are sustainable’**



The second longer-term outcome of the National Unit is that more FDAC sites are sustainable<sup>24</sup>.

As discussed, sustainability was an important issue to case study participants, given the financial climates which local authorities were working within and the difficulties this created in securing funding, particularly for new projects. With this in mind, participants acknowledged the importance of finding sustainable ways of delivering FDAC beyond any start-up funding they received, including through the DfE Innovation Programme<sup>25</sup>.

Where the National Unit had started to support sites on sustainability issues, it was by increasing awareness and understanding of the relative costs and benefits of the FDAC model and through helping sites begin to have conversations with potential funders about how the programme might be funded in the future.

Stakeholders were positive about the potential for FDAC sites to achieve sustainability in the longer-term. The National Unit was felt to have created and sustained a brand and kept the idea of problem-solving courts on the political agenda. It was anticipated that the National Unit would build on this profile-raising work, with the aim of sustaining the model beyond March 2016,<sup>26</sup> as well as expanding it in the future. It was felt that a strong

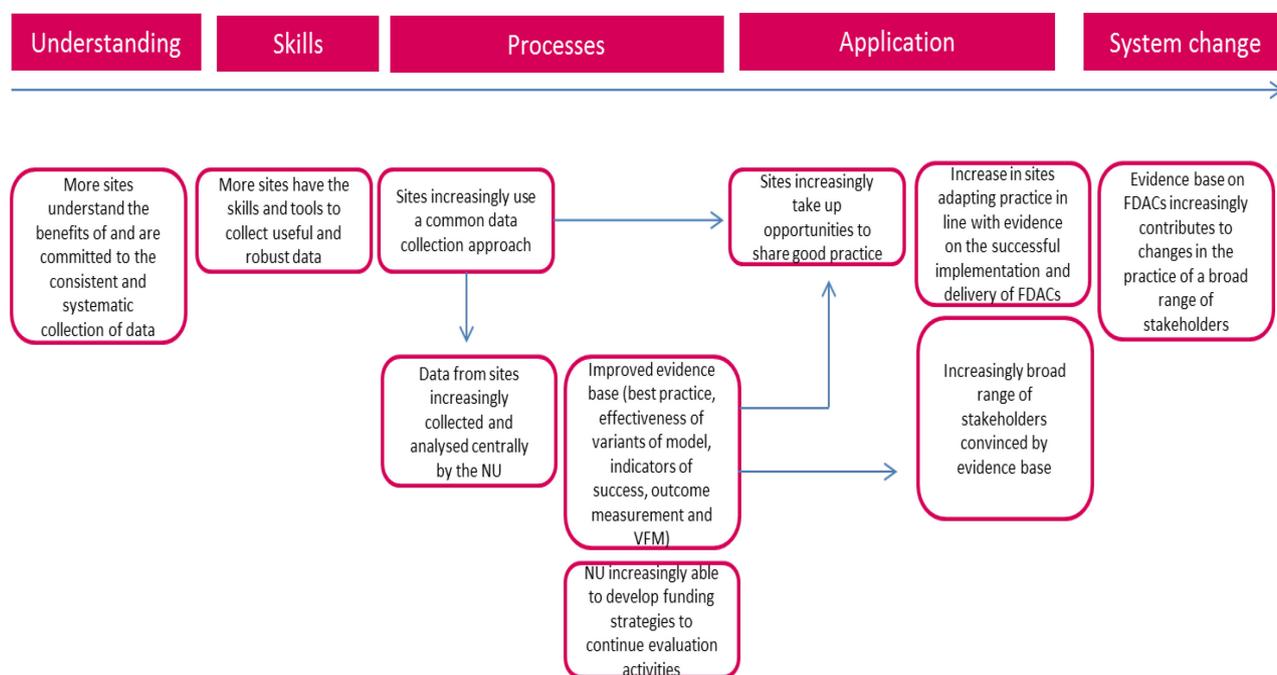
<sup>24</sup> More information on the National Unit definition of ‘sustainability’ for the theory of change can be found at Appendix B.

<sup>25</sup> Note, only the 4 initial FDAC sites that the National Unit worked with and named on the DfE bid received money through the Innovation Fund.

<sup>26</sup> The original funding from the Innovation Programme to set up the National Unit and part-fund the initial 4 FDACs included in the bid ran from March 2015-March 2016. The National Unit has since been awarded funding to continue its work via DfE’s transitional funding arrangements.

acknowledgement of the value of the model from national government would help build the case among local authorities that FDAC is a model worth investing in. Linked to this was an acknowledgement of the National Unit's role in the development of a robust evidence-base to build and maintain support for sustained funding.

**Figure 3: Outcome pathway for long-term outcome 'Improvements in the definition, collection, dissemination and application of evidence'**



The third longer-term outcome of the National Unit is to improve the collection of standardised data to provide an evidence base for the FDAC model.

Case study participants reported that the National Unit had helped them understand that they would be required to collect information on a range of indicators on an ongoing basis and feed this back to the National Unit, using tools and templates provided to them. Based on guidance from the National Unit, participants appeared to be committed to monitoring and evaluation; understood why it was beneficial; and wanted to support the National Unit in its effort to generate an evidence base to assess the effectiveness and value for money of the FDAC model.

As discussed, issues raised about data collection related to delays in appropriate tools and practical challenges gathering local data. Participants, however, appreciated that monitoring and evaluation challenges were common when delivering a new set of activities, and perceived that issues were being addressed.

Case study participants believed that the National Unit should continue to take a lead on data collection in future years, as local authorities and FDAC teams were reported to lack the confidence to carry this out independently. Case study participants felt it was critical for the National Unit to continue to work towards creating a national data-set, because of the challenges of using local data, with small numbers of cases, to assess impact or

value for money. Ongoing research on the impact of the FDAC model on children and families by the National Unit and its partners was also seen as having a crucial role to play in fine-tuning the FDAC model.

Stakeholders also believed the National Unit should have an ongoing role in generating additional evidence on the FDAC model and identified a number of ways in which the Unit's work could be expanded in future years. This included exploring options to link data from FDAC with other national data sets, and the considering ways to create a system through which data could be inputted and reported on more rapidly. Participants felt that both suggestions would directly benefit FDAC sites and the National Unit by making collection and processing activities more efficient.

'The whole idea is to create a family court system which knows where it is and what it's doing and...judges need to learn, 'that decision that I made last year was rubbish or it was really good – and here's the evidence'''. (Stakeholder)

## **Progress towards achieving long-term goals**

In the long-term the National Unit is seeking to contribute to systematic change across 3 key areas: better justice; better outcomes for children and families; and better value for money. These goals are closely aligned with a number of the Innovation Programme's areas of focus including:

- value for money across children's social care
- better life chances for children receiving help from the social care system.

As the National Unit has only been fully operational for 1 year, it is not possible to assess longer-term impact. Instead, this section provides early insight into whether the National Unit is perceived to be on track in relation to its longer-term goals, as reported by case study participants and stakeholders.

Participants felt it was too early to draw conclusions about the longer-term contribution of the National Unit. However, case study participants were optimistic about the National Unit's potential for success for 2 key reasons. Firstly, participants were convinced of the rationale for FDAC and understood how the National Unit's programme of work was linked to the outcomes it was seeking to achieve. Secondly, participants reported positive experiences of working with the National Unit to meet short and medium-term outcomes, especially in relation to setting-up their FDAC. This appears to have given participants some confidence in the likely success of any future work by the National Unit.

The National Unit's perceived progress in relation to its 3 long-term goals is described in more detail below:

## **Better justice**

The National Unit wishes to contribute to wider improvements in the justice system including through a more collaborative, less adversarial, approach to proceedings; more parents getting a chance to be heard, and a clearer focus on the child's needs, with a preference for allowing children to be brought up safely in their family of origin, wherever possible.

There was strength of feeling amongst participants that delivering FDAC could lead to improved experiences of care proceedings for families through the enhanced support and opportunities available. While it was beyond the scope of this evaluation to explore the outcomes of FDACs themselves, participants from sites that had started hearing cases believed there were indications that FDAC could deliver better justice for those involved. Examples of positive outcomes reported by participants included families having a greater voice in proceedings, and building more productive relationships with the judge and others involved in the process.

Stakeholders welcomed the National Unit taking an active role in considering how better justice could be achieved across the justice system more widely. The National Unit was in the process of piloting Early FDAC with mothers who had had children removed previously, and some felt that the principles of problem-solving courts could reap rewards beyond the remit of FDAC.

## **Better outcomes for children and families**

The second longer-term goal of the National Unit is to contribute to better outcomes for children and families. These include, for example, more children being able to live safely at home with their parents or families, or having an alternative long-term placement secured in a timely manner<sup>27</sup>.

Participants were hopeful that the National Unit's efforts to set up and sustain FDACs would lead to better outcomes for children and families. Strong evidence, opportunities for learning, and appropriate flexibility within the model were described as critical to achieving success. As discussed, participants acknowledged the methodological and practical difficulties of carrying out robust evaluation on the FDAC model. In this context, participants noted the importance of thinking carefully about how evidence about improved outcomes for children and families is accurately and widely communicated and used.

---

<sup>27</sup> More detailed information on the specifics of this long-term goal of improved outcomes for children and families is included at Appendix B.

## **Better value for money**

The final longer-term goal of the National Unit is to contribute to better value for money through, for example, an increase in the number of FDAC sites delivering short and longer-term cost benefit.

Participants expected that financial savings would be achieved if the FDAC model resulted in more families staying together, thus reducing the burden on social services. The National Unit was seen as playing an important role in helping to show that FDAC could save money to local authorities who were increasingly facing difficulties in allocating stretched budgets to a range of vital services. Furthermore, participants felt that the National Unit could broaden and develop data collection and analysis processes to demonstrate savings across different departments and organisations involved in children's social care, which would strengthen the value for money case.

## **Facilitators and barriers to achieving success**

This section concludes by drawing together a number of cross-cutting factors which appear to have supported or reduced the National Unit's contribution to its 3 longer-term outcomes.

### **Facilitators**

Participants identified a number of factors related to the work of the National Unit which were perceived to have contributed to successful outcomes. For example, case study participants said they trusted and respected the National Unit because it made decisions, and provided recommendations, based on a detailed and intricate understanding of the FDAC model. The personal qualities of members of the National Unit, such as their professionalism and passion, were also identified as crucial in fostering local commitment to FDAC and in motivating sites to move forward with the initiative:

'[The National Unit] has provided us with a format to take forward based on their experiences, their expertise, their competence and their learning... It also provides a sense of perspective and normalises challenges... It's...been helpful, their ability to provide perspective and informed view based on their own experiences.'

(External stakeholder)

Flexibility was highlighted as important as it enabled the National Unit to work with sites in different ways depending on local context. Participants appreciated that the National Unit was receptive to different working styles; responsive to requests for support, and to feedback on how elements of its work could be enhanced or extended.

In relation to fidelity, the National Unit played a key role in communicating and convincing sites of the benefits of closely adhering to the evaluated FDAC model, and supporting sites to appropriately adapt the model where possible. It was noted that diverging from the evaluated model would not necessarily result in the delivery of less effective services,

but that it would be difficult to assess whether they were better or worse than those sites that were faithful to the model.

## **Barriers**

Participants also described factors which had the potential to reduce progress. External factors, such as funding, project timescales and an increase in the number of participating local authorities, influenced the way in which the National Unit had been able to work with sites. For example, participants perceived that it had sometimes been challenging for the National Unit to balance competing priorities, which had affected the level and timeliness of support which could be provided to sites on occasions. However, participants acknowledged the efforts and ambition of the National Unit to be responsive to feedback and to give as much support to sites as possible with the somewhat limited resources available.

Another challenge, identified by some stakeholders, related to a perceived lack of clarity around the division of roles and responsibilities within the National Unit. While this was not felt to be particularly limiting, some stakeholders felt that greater clarity could have been established from the beginning to enable more efficient working practices.

Participants also discussed a number of external resource-related barriers. Lack of sufficient funding was reported to have prevented some local authorities who were considering setting up an FDAC from doing so. There were also case study participants who raised concerns about sustaining their FDACs beyond the first year of their pilot, which they felt could compromise the achievement of longer-term outcomes and impacts.

Uncertainty over the future role of the National Unit was also seen as a potential barrier to success as case study participants were unsure about what support they would continue to receive in the future. Linked to this, participants expressed their concerns about the future of the FDAC model, the sustainability of sites, and the continued roll out of FDAC without the work of the National Unit.

While the future funding arrangements for the National Unit were unclear beyond March 2016 at the time of data collection, transitional funding from the DfE had been confirmed before the publication of this report. The National Unit had also received funding from the Ministry of Justice to continue to deliver the activities and outcomes described in this report.

# Limitations of the evaluation and future evaluation

## Rationale for evaluation design and limitations

This is the first research study carried out on the FDAC National Unit. For this reason, the evaluation was designed to enhance understanding of the early activities, contribution and perceived outcomes of the National Unit using a methodology appropriate for an intervention or programme which is at a relatively early stage of development.

The first phase of the study focused on reviewing the Unit's theory of change in order to refine the articulation of key programme components, such as activities, outcomes and impacts, and to create a framework for evaluation. The data collection phase of the evaluation was conducted using in-depth interviews, because the open and generative nature of qualitative methods makes them particularly well suited to studying 'new' subjects, and for providing a rich and contextualised understanding of how things operate in practice and the factors enabling or hindering successful programme delivery and outcomes.

While the evaluation has contributed to addressing the evidence gap and has identified lessons which can inform the future roll-out of FDAC, as with any research, there are limitations and it is good practice to acknowledge them.

The design of this evaluation was intended to capture the views and experiences of individuals who had been involved in varying ways in deciding to implement the FDAC approach and/or, where applicable, in setting-up and delivering FDAC, alongside having direct experience of working with the National Unit. However, there were some challenges recruiting participants. This was primarily because there were competing demands on staff time during the fieldwork period which meant that the research team were not always able to capture all key perspectives within sites. Additionally, gaining ethical approval to interview members of the judiciary and recruiting them was challenging within the timescales available for the evaluation. This means that while the overall sample is diverse and the results provide a good indication of the range of perspectives, the views of certain groups, such as the judiciary and members of multi-disciplinary teams, are not fully reflected.

The extent to which case study participants were able to assess the work and contribution of the National Unit varied according to the participant's level and duration of contact with the Unit, as well as how far into setting up an FDAC the site was. Therefore, participants from sites who had launched FDACs, and those who had greater contact with the Unit, appeared better placed to reflect on the National Unit.

Additionally, it is important to highlight that while the study increases understanding of the work, and perceived contribution, of the National Unit from the perspective of FDAC sites and stakeholders, due to the timing of the evaluation, NatCen were not commissioned to

carry out an impact evaluation. As such, the evaluation findings cannot be used to measure outcomes quantitatively, or assess whether any observed outcomes can be attributed to the National Unit using statistical analysis.

## Further evaluation

The findings from this research will sit alongside other evaluation activities to build the evidence base relating to FDAC. As discussed, an important strand of this evaluation is to provide methodological guidance on 2 separate pieces of research on FDAC being carried out by Brunel University and the Centre for Justice Innovation<sup>28</sup>. This input will help to enhance longer-term evaluation capacity in the organisations involved in FDAC

Further evaluation of the National Unit could comprise visiting FDAC sites at a future point in time to better understand the role of the National Unit in supporting ongoing delivery, as well as to assess the National Unit's contribution to longer-term outcomes and goals. The collection of both qualitative and quantitative information, including collecting data before and after sites have worked with the National Unit, could help to build a fuller understanding of the work of the National Unit. Consideration could also be given to including a wider range of perspectives, such as the judiciary, volunteer parent mentors<sup>29</sup> and families involved in FDAC, depending on the aims and focus of any future evaluation activities.

---

<sup>28</sup> Brunel University has conducted follow-up research to explore the effectiveness of FDAC. The Centre for Justice Innovation has conducted research assessing the value for money of the FDAC model (Reeder, N et al. 2016).

<sup>29</sup> Families involved in FDAC receive extra support from volunteer parent mentors who experienced the threat of losing care of their children because of the concerns of Children's Services.

## Recommendations for policy and practice

The research indicates that the National Unit has played a critical role in the set-up of new FDACs. The continued existence of the National Unit was also seen as important to improving understanding of the benefits of the FDAC model as well as to ensuring the sustainability of FDAC sites. Consequently, participants felt it was important that the National Unit received sufficient funding to be able to continue to deliver a high quality programme in the future:

‘If we want FDAC not only to exist, but to survive and continue to produce good outcomes, I think you do need a National Unit that is there for longer than a year and actually potentially in perpetuity as FDACs change over time.’ (Internal stakeholder)

Participants believed that the National Unit should continue to deliver its work with the same approach and enthusiasm adopted in their first year. In particular, it was seen as important that the National Unit continued to be flexible and forward-looking in the context of increasingly challenging funding environments.

Participants valued the contribution of the National Unit and made recommendations on how the National Unit could continue to enhance support to new FDAC sites in future years. However, it is important to acknowledge that these recommendations have resource implications and would require the National Unit to reallocate resources if possible or receive additional funding. Furthermore, participants recognised that the National Unit had responded to feedback on how elements of its work could be enhanced and expected that ongoing development would continue over time.

### Expand the range of resource materials available to FDAC sites

The resources developed by the National Unit were valued by new FDACs. Participants therefore felt it would be beneficial for the National Unit to have an increased role in supporting dissemination and learning activities, especially in relation to best practice. This was considered important, as participants believed that some FDAC sites would find it challenging to find the time to share learning with one another, or attend all meetings. Participants suggested that one way for the National Unit to do this could be to develop dedicated space on the website for FDAC staff, in order to help sites to maintain regular contact and have access to resources and guidance when needed.

### Increase networking opportunities

The National Unit has played an important role in facilitating peer-to-peer learning among new FDAC sites. Consequently, participants said they would like the National Unit to expand its work in this area. For example, it was suggested that the National Unit could explore options to extend invitations to meetings and events across sites so that more staff could attend and benefit from networking opportunities if time permitted. Annual conferences and quarterly workshops were also proposed as potential ways to increase

networking and learning between sites. FDAC sites welcomed having more opportunities to learn from one another and suggested this could help to alleviate burden on the National Unit.

### **Increase communication about national research and evaluation activities**

While case study participants were aware that the National Unit was carrying out monitoring and evaluation of the FDAC model, there was some uncertainty about how and when this evidence would be available to sites. Participants therefore expressed a preference for ongoing information about the National Unit's evaluation work as FDAC sites wished to make good use of the wider evidence base.

### **Develop FDAC regional teams**

While the National Unit was committed to visiting local sites, there were limits on the extent to which this was practically possible. It was felt that the development of regional management teams could enable the National Unit to have an increased local presence. It was suggested that regional FDAC teams could be created alongside any future expansion of FDAC across the UK.

### **Increase and strengthen financial sustainability**

Participants believed it was important for the National Unit to receive funding from a diverse range of organisations including government departments and charitable organisations. Participants believed that the National Unit would be increasingly well placed to secure ongoing funding if it developed increased specialism in this area. It was suggested that the National Unit could continue to operate sustainably without diverting resource from other key areas of work, such as supporting the roll out of FDAC, by increasing staff capacity. Increased activity to raise the profile of the FDAC model and ensure buy-in from a wide range of stakeholders at policy and strategic levels were also considered to be vital to the ongoing sustainability of the National Unit.

Key developments relevant to the recommendations outlined in this chapter include:

- the National Unit has launched a specific area of the website (in May 2016) that FDAC members can access with unique log-in details. This area of the website contains a wealth of information and resources to support new sites to set-up and deliver their FDAC
- the National Unit has expanded the range of training and networking on offer to FDAC sites. This includes separate events for lawyers and judges and the development of a substance misuse forum for service providers.

## References

Harwin, J., Alrouh, B., Ryan, M. and Tunnard, J. (2014) *Changing Lifestyles, Keeping Children Safe: an evaluation of the first Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) in care proceedings*. London: Brunel University. [Access here.](#)

Harwin, J., Alrouh, B., Ryan, M., McQuarrie, T., Golding, L., Broadhurst, K., Tunnard, J. and Swift, S. (2016) *After FDAC: Outcomes 5 years later*. Lancaster: Lancaster University. [Access here.](#)

Reeder, N. and Whitehead, S. (2016) *Better Courts: The financial impact of the London Family Drug and Alcohol Court*. London: Centre for Justice Innovation. [Access here.](#)

Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., McNaughton Nicholls, C. and Ormston, R. (2013) *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. London: Sage.

W. K Kellogg Foundation. (2004) *Logic Model Development Guide*. Michigan: W.K.Kellogg Foundation. [Access here.](#)

# Appendix A: Qualitative methodology

## Recruitment approach

The National Unit provided the NatCen research team with the contact details of the FDAC strategic lead for each area. In some cases the National Unit also sent an introductory email about the evaluation on NatCen's behalf. The research team made contact with the local FDAC lead to ask whether they or a colleague would be able to assist the evaluation by helping to recruit potential participants. Information sheets, developed by the research team, were then sent by the local gatekeeper to potential participants. On agreeing to have their contact details passed to the NatCen research team, individuals were contacted directly to obtain consent to arrange an interview. It was made clear in all recruitment materials and during interviews that participation in the research was voluntary.

## Sampling approach and criteria

Case study sites and individual participants in qualitative samples were selected to achieve range and diversity with respect to carefully chosen sample criteria. Samples were not intended to be statistically representative of the wider research population as qualitative research does not aim to measure prevalence, but instead to map the range of perspectives and explain the varying influences of different factors on views and experiences. Therefore, qualitative studies do not have to include large numbers of people (by quantitative standards) for findings to be robust. Case study sites were selected to achieve diversity across the stage of their FDAC set-up and delivery, and local area context.

Within sites, the research team aimed to gather the perspectives of a diverse range of local FDAC stakeholders who had direct experience of working with the National Unit. As far as possible, the research team worked with local facilitators to identify individuals who met the inclusion criteria (experience of working with the National Unit) and select a sub-sample to invite to participate in the evaluation. However, it was not possible to achieve the target number of interviews in all sites because some areas had not progressed as far with FDAC set-up and delivery as anticipated. This meant the number of people who had direct experience of working with the National Unit was smaller than expected. Resourcing pressures also made it challenging for some potential participants to assist with the evaluation. As a consequence, the number of participants taking part at each site ranged from 1 to 8. Despite some recruitment challenges, the sample as a whole included a diverse range of local FDAC stakeholders (FDAC strategic leads; project managers; members of local multi-disciplinary teams and partner agencies; and

members of the judiciary), who have direct experience of working with the National Unit. The table below summarises the achieved sample<sup>30</sup>:

**Table A1: Achieved sample of participants across case study sites**

<b>Job role in relation to FDAC</b>	<b>Total</b>
FDAC lead/strategic overview	12
FDAC project manager	6
Member of multi-disciplinary team/partner agencies	5
Judiciary	3
Local authority stakeholders	6

Interviews were also conducted with 13 strategic stakeholders. This included members or partners of the National Unit (internal stakeholders); FDAC project managers or leads from sites who launched their FDAC before the National Unit was established and key government stakeholders (external stakeholders).<sup>31</sup>

## Topic guides

A topic guide was used in all in-depth interviews to help ensure a consistent approach across interviews and between interviewers. The guides were used flexibly to allow interviewers to respond to the individual nature and content of each discussion, so the topics covered and their order varied between interviews. Interviewers used open, non-leading questions and answers were fully probed, in order to identify examples of positive practice as well as more negative experiences.

The main headings and sub-headings used for the interviews with participants across the case study sites are provided below.

### 1. Introduction

- Introduce self and NatCen
- Aims and objectives of the research
- Length and nature of discussion
- Issues of confidentiality and anonymity

---

<sup>30</sup> We have not provided a breakdown of participants by site as this would compromise anonymity. Participants may have had more than one job role in relation to FDAC, so roles have been allocated based on their primary role.

<sup>31</sup> Again, we have not provided a further breakdown of the number of achieved participants as this would compromise anonymity.

- Use of digital recorder
- Questions
- Consent to participate

## 2. Background information

- Overview of role and organisation they work for
- Nature of and involvement in FDAC
- Brief overview of local area (including demographics, child protection cases)
- Existing family justice approaches

## 3. Awareness and perceptions of FDAC and the NU

- Understanding of the aims and objectives of FDACs
- Strengths and risks of the FDAC model
- Understanding of the role of the NU and their aims
- Expectations of working with the NU

## 4. Setting up a sustainable FDAC

- How far along the process of setting up FDAC they are
- Explore decision to set up FDAC, including the NU's role
- Explore whether and how site worked or is working with NU to set-up and deliver FDAC
- Probe for whether and how site worked or is working with NU to achieve sustainability
- What worked well or less well about involvement of NU
- Suggestions for improvement

## 5. Data collection

- Overview of data expect or will be required to collect
- Perceptions of the benefits and disadvantages of collecting data
- Whether and how site has worked with the NU around data collection
- What has worked well or less well about involvement of the NU
- Suggestions for improvement
- Plans for data collection going forward
- Evidence and plans for sharing learning and best practice

## 6. Experiences of working with the NU

- Overview of contact with, or support from the NU

- Overview of perceptions of working with the NU

## 7. Perceived effects, learning and lessons

- Perceived short and medium-term effects of working with the NU
- Views on effect the NU is having or will have in relation to long-term outcomes
- Views on effect the NU is having or will have in relation to long-term impacts
- Added value of working with the NU
- Explore key lessons and recommendations
- Lessons or learning the NU should take forward in supporting sites or future FDAC roll-out

A slightly different version of this guide was used for the interviews with strategic stakeholders.

## Qualitative analysis

The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview data were managed and analysed using the Framework approach developed by NatCen (Ritchie et al., 2013). Key topics which emerged from the interviews were identified through familiarisation with the transcripts. An analytical framework was then drawn up and a series of matrices were set up, each relating to a different thematic issue. The columns in each matrix represented the key sub-themes or topics and the rows represented individual strategic stakeholders or operational staff. The NatCen research team were given a thorough briefing about the analytical framework and a detailed description of what should be included in each sub-theme, to ensure consistency of approach.

The Framework method is embedded into NVivo version 10<sup>32</sup>. This software enabled the summarised data from the research to be linked to the verbatim transcript. This approach meant that each part of a transcript that was relevant to a particular theme was noted, ordered and accessible. The final analytic stage involved working through the charted data, drawing out the range of experiences and views, identifying similarities and differences, and interrogating the data to seek to explain emergent patterns and findings. Verbatim interview quotations are provided in this report to highlight themes and findings where appropriate.

---

<sup>32</sup> More information on how NVivo supports the Framework method can be [found here](#).

## Appendix B: National Unit theory of change

Pages 50-57 set out the theory of change developed with the National Unit for this evaluation. Included here is:

- a brief definition of the FDAC National Unit's long-term goals: better justice, improved outcomes for children and families and Better value for money
- definitions and diagrams of the 3 outcome pathways; increase in the successful set-up of FDACs, more FDACs are sustainable and there are improvements in the definition, collection, dissemination and application of evidence
- final combined outcomes model setting out the 3 pathways and the way in which they interlink.

In addition, the research team developed a table of associated programme inputs, activities and outputs which has not been included in this report.

# FDAC programme long-term goals

The FDAC National Unit has three interlinked long-term goals. These relate to better justice, improved outcomes for children and families and better value for money. The work of the National Unit indicates that tackling parental substance misuse in line with the principles that FDAC adheres to can deliver more positive experiences for those who come before the courts as well as better outcomes for children and families and greater value for money for the public purse and taxpayers.

The group spent some time at the second session defining what the long-term goals in the model meant:

## **Better justice**

- Family justice system is increasingly delivered in line with principles and standards of practice that FDAC adheres to. FDAC is grounded in problem-solving justice, where judges and multi-disciplinary teams work in partnership to address the complex needs that bring families into contact with the courts.
- Families are increasingly treated with fairness, respect and understanding when engaging with the family justice system.
- Families have improved experiences of the family justice system and are increasingly motivated to engage with courts and services and overcome the challenges they face.

## **Improved outcomes for children and families**

- Improvements in the emotional and physical wellbeing of children whose families are supported by FDACs
- More children are able to live safely at home with their parents or families or enter the best possible placement in a timely manner
- Children who are returned to their families experience neglect and abuse at reduced rates
- Parents are increasingly committed to addressing problems and are optimistic about recovery and change
- Improvements in the emotional and physical wellbeing of parents
- Reduction in rates of problematic substance misuse
- Reduction in domestic violence
- Parents have increased resilience and are better able to parent their children
- Improved social networks for parents
- Reduction in parental anti-social behaviour and crime
- Increased parental participation in education, training or employment
- Families live in more appropriate housing
- Over time, the intergenerational transmission of harm is prevented

## **Better Value for Money**

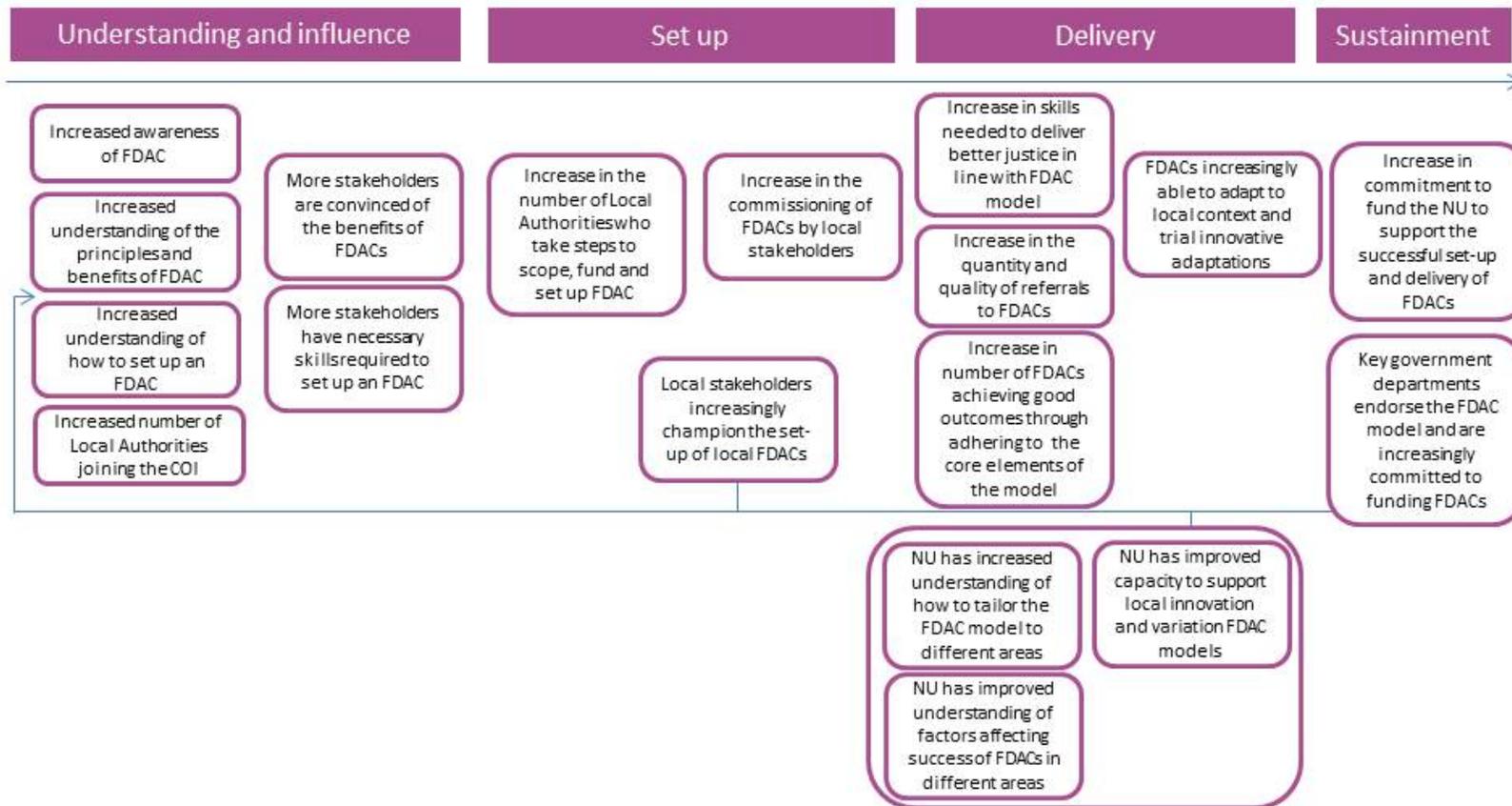
- Improvements in understanding of return for money invested in FDAC. Returns should be seen as outcomes that support better justice and better outcomes for children and families, in addition to the far ranging benefits of preventing harm before it occurs
- Family justice system increasingly considers both short and longer-term outcomes when allocating resources
- FDACs deliver increased short and longer-term cost benefit

## Long-term impact 1: Increase in the successful set-up of FDACs

*“What does the ‘successful set-up of FDACs’ mean?”*

- FDACs are faithful to the core elements and intended outcomes of the model e.g. judges work in close partnership with a multidisciplinary team who offer interventions that are person-centred and shown to be effective.
- FDACs are resilient and can successfully negotiate challenges and adapt to the local context.
- Over time, FDACs trial innovative and creative adaptations, while remaining faithful to the core elements of the model.
- Key local stakeholders are committed to working collaboratively to tackle parental substance misuse in line with the principles that FDAC adheres to.
- Local authorities make appropriate and timely referrals to FDACs.

## Increase in the successful set-up of FDACs

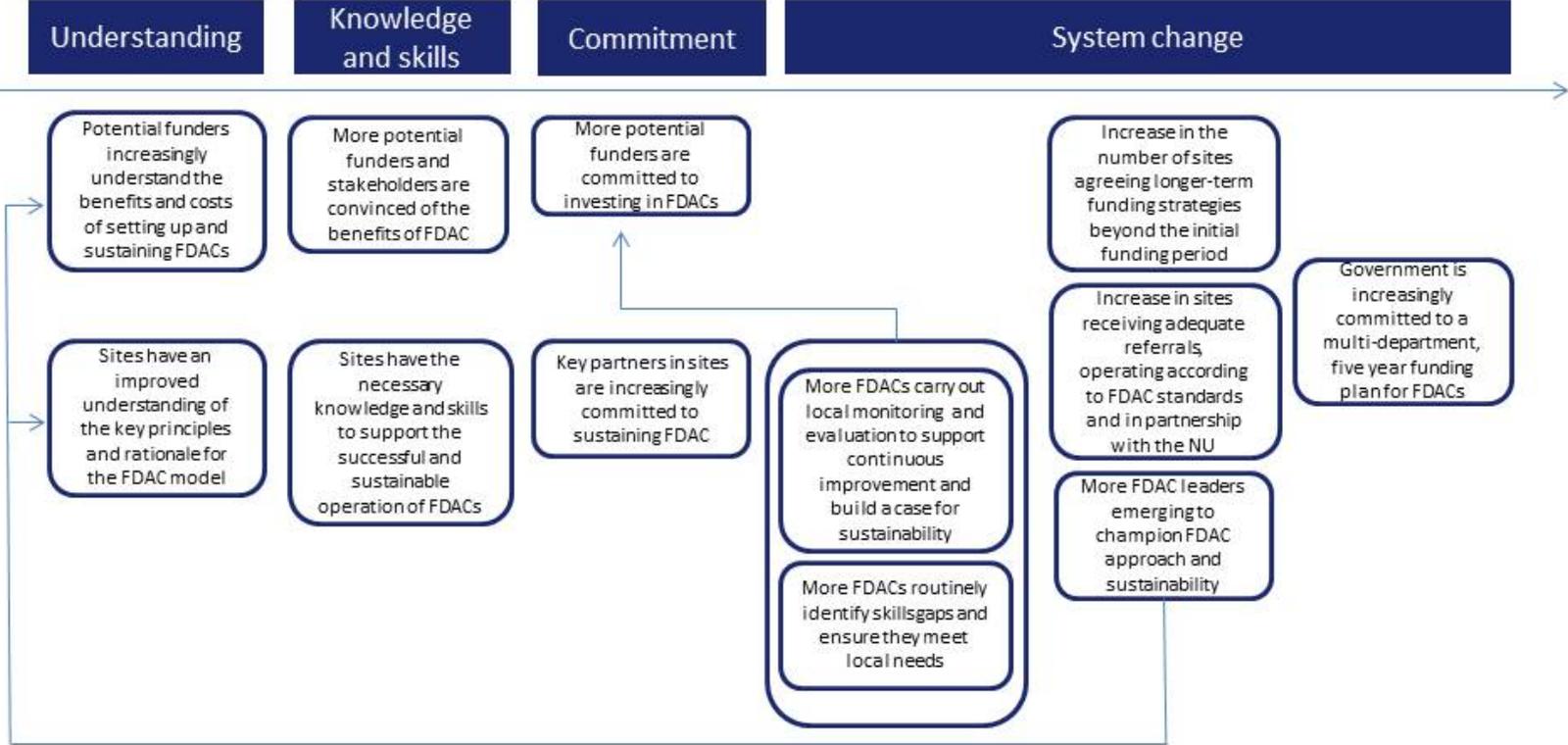


## Long-term impact 2: More FDACs are sustainable

*“What does sustainability mean?”*

- FDACs have secured funding for 3-years plus and after this are operating financially independently of the National Unit.
- Local teams (such as judges and intervention team members) have the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to support the successful and sustainable operation of FDACs.
- FDACs carry out local monitoring and evaluation of process and outcomes to support continuous improvement and build a case for sustainability.
- FDACs receive an adequate number of referrals from Local Authorities.
- Stakeholders such as Local Authorities, courts and agencies working across a range of disciplines are aware of FDACs and champion and support their sustainability at local level.
- New leaders emerge from new sites and champion FDACs locally, regionally and nationally.
- There is high level commitment to FDAC by government, high-net-worth individuals and funding bodies.

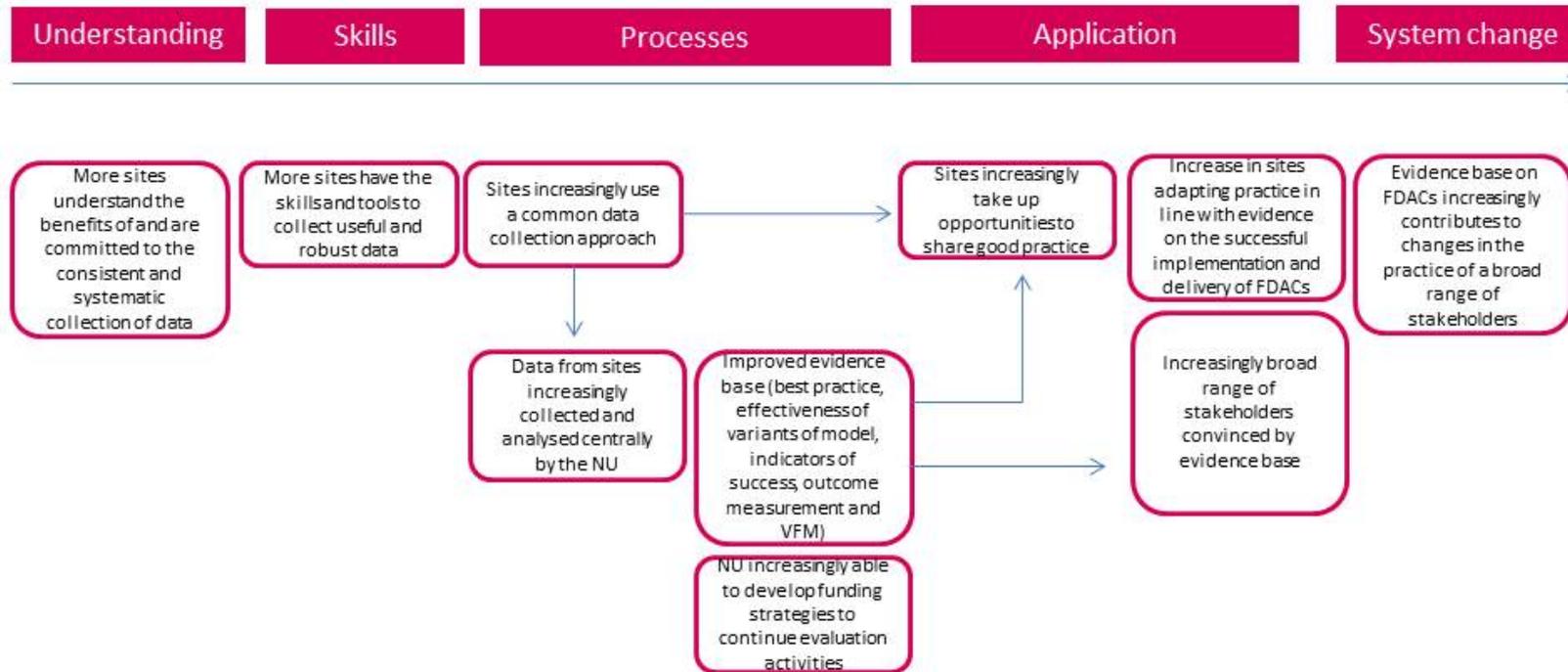
# More FDACs are sustainable

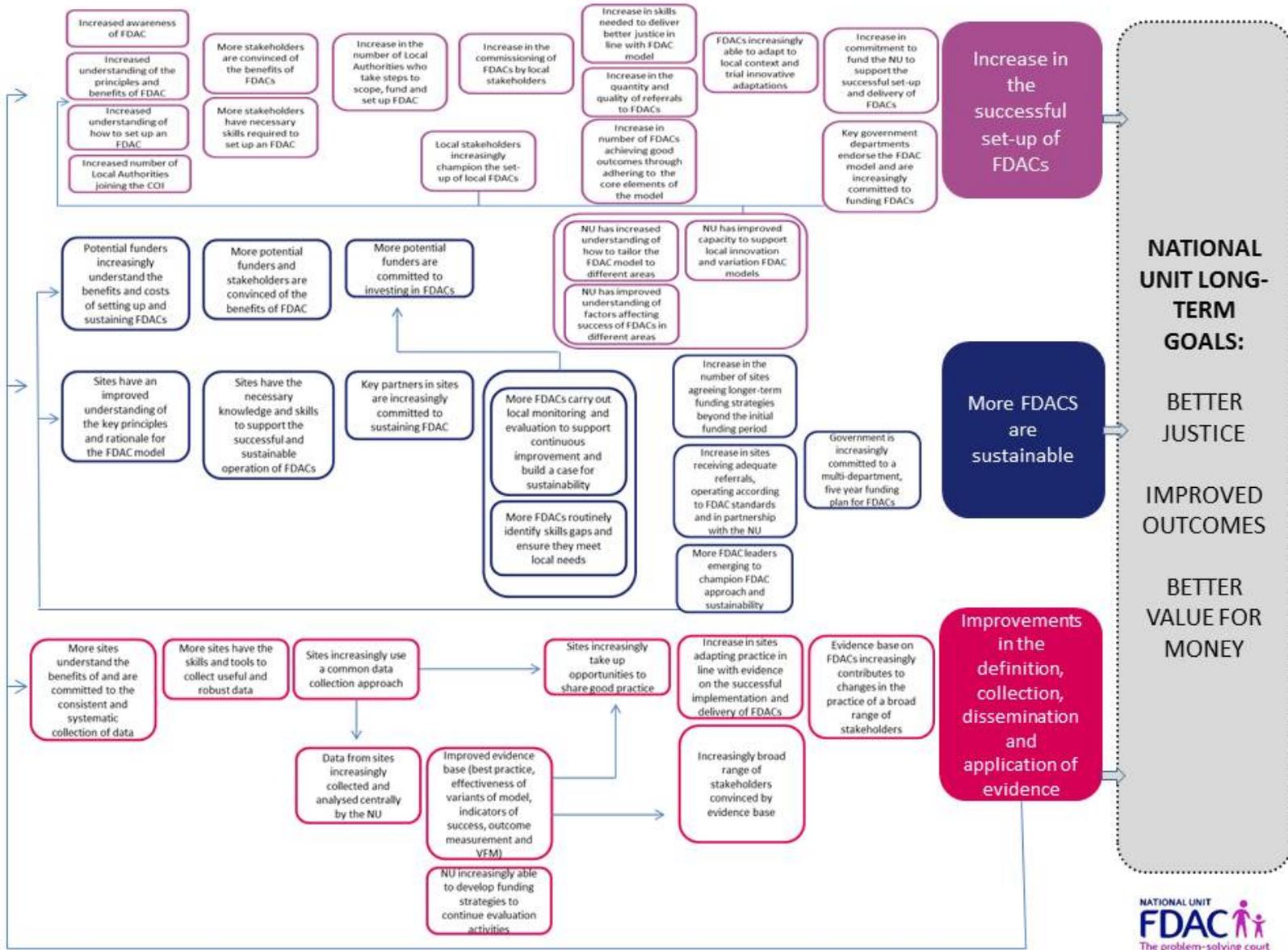


### **Long term impact 3: Improvements in the definition, collection, dissemination and application of evidence**

- Sites collect information on outcomes for children and families in a consistent and systematic way in order to provide a greater evidence base on the FDAC model.
- Over time, the evidence base is used to:
  - Better understand the short and longer-term outcomes of FDACs
  - Explore differences in outcomes between FDAC sites and between FDACs and ordinary care proceedings
  - Identify the factors (including elements of the FDAC model) associated with success.
- Research evidence is used to strengthen the FDAC model, improve the practice of local sites and build a case for sustainability.
- The National Unit contributes to wider discussions around how to define and measure outcomes for services working with children and families.
- The strengths and successes of FDACs are demonstrated to a wider group of stakeholders and contribute to improvements in thinking and/or practice across a range of disciplines.

## Improvements in the definition, collection, dissemination and application of evidence







Department  
for Education

© Department for Education

**Reference: DFE-RR538**

**ISBN: 978-1-78105-594-6**

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

[richard.white@education.gov.uk](mailto:richard.white@education.gov.uk) or [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus)

This document is available for download at [www.gov.uk/government/publications](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications)