

How will we know we are succeeding?

We will know we have achieved the best for all children dependent on the state when the number of moves and changes of social worker experienced by children in the looked after system has fallen.

We will know we have ensured security for every child in our community when no child is unable to access education because of uncertainty in their status or because of exclusion from school.

We will know we have enabled the best chance for the next generation when every school is fostering positive social norms as part of a whole school approach to personal, social and health education and the reported health and wellbeing of young people has increased.

We will know we have secured early intervention for those in distress and narrowed the gap when there is fair, equal and speedy access to mental health services for young people in all areas.

We will know we have succeeded when children tell us their lives have improved and the UK stands at the forefront of the international community in realising the commitments of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

*“I believe
that any
one ought
in duty to
do any good
they can”*

Thomas Coram



coram.org.uk

For further information on the outputs and outcomes from Coram's work, please see the [Digest of Achievements \(2014-2015\)](#).

Registered Charity no. 312278 Cover image by Steve Caplin

coram | better chances
for children
since 1739

Charter for Children 2015



Children have the power to change their own future; we have the power to help them.

Coram believes that by 2040 when we celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Act of Parliament which gave birth to children's social care, it is possible for us together to ensure that every child in our society can have the best possible chance in life.

To achieve this, we must put children first and ensure there is consistent and reliable access to quality services, with the variation in performance between different areas narrowed so that the nation's promise to our children is the reality for all.

At Coram, we believe that we can nurture children's welfare, learning and positive development as citizens and future parents if we together ensure that they grow up **feeling secure**.

We also believe that, by providing children with direct **access to information, advice and the advocacy** alongside critical thinking **skills**, we will enable children to take **responsibility** for their own lives.

By appreciating what children are communicating through their behaviour, ensuring their voices are heard and enabling access to services, we can collectively strengthen the **fabric of our fair and just society** so that every child has the best possible chance in life.

The need for change

As a society we now know much about the developing child. Findings from neurological science demonstrate the physiological consequences of early development for future life.

Research evidence reinforces the importance of early permanence decisions for children and the benefits of lifetime relationships, including those secured through adoption for those who need it.

This reinforces what society has always known – that children can thrive when there is a consistent and loving adult in their lives.

Despite this knowledge, we still do not provide this security consistently for our most vulnerable children. The numbers entering care and the problems of families with drugs and alcohol in particular are at a generational peak while placement orders have fallen to an all time low.

Professionals of all kinds share a positive commitment to improving outcomes. There is welcome investment in innovation and in what works, but the variation in opportunities and outcomes across the country is unacceptable in the context of defined standards.

We face a demographic time bomb with children in the smallest minority of the population and a perceived crisis in both physical health prospects and mental health concerns.

As we mark our 275th year, Coram calls for a cross-party, cross-sector approach to a *Charter for Children* which reinforces the UK's commitment to the United Nations Convention and commits itself to working with government, partners, judiciary and supporters further to improve the chances of the next generation.

How can we achieve this change?

That children's lives are significantly better in the UK than they were when Thomas Coram fought for the establishment of his charity is not in doubt.

What is at issue 275 years later is how we can ensure that the best becomes the norm - everywhere and for every child - by applying the lessons we have already learned consistently and without distraction.

Systems are inevitably complex and balancing the needs and rights of children and families in the interests of justice requires careful judgement.

In each field, the UK's professionals are amongst the best in the world and our society is built upon fundamental principles of fairness and equality.

We can access research and evidence from innovation and excellence here and abroad and can draw on the shared commitment and expertise across sectors with which to effect change.

If history shows us anything, it shows us that change is possible.

We have many advantages and much commitment to build upon.

Do we have the courage of Thomas Coram to see the children who are invisible and create new ways to help them?

Coram's vision for the future

To develop, deliver and promote best practice in the support of children and young people, Coram will work with partners to advance insight and innovation.

We will develop The Queen Elizabeth II Centre on the Coram Campus as a national centre of excellence for children so that together we can continue to ensure better chances for children.

Coram's Charter for Children

Consistency of care decisions for all children

A concerted effort to achieve greater **continuity and consistency** in the key professional playing a significant role in the lives of children at risk and to make timely decisions.

The reduction of obstacles to adoption to improve the lives of children in need of a new permanent home and for **concurrent planning** to be used in every area of the UK to minimise delay which is harmful to children.

Access to justice for all children

Access to advocacy and to **free legal advice and representation** for all children who are dependent upon state support or where circumstance requires these forms of help.

Enable children and young people who are long term residents of the UK to regularise their status promptly through timely processes and decisions on immigration that **prioritise their best interests and need for permanency**.

Health progression for all children

Assured access to reliable information on their own development and physiology to all children and young people.

Wider provision of information and **engagement of parents of adolescents** to enable them to distinguish between typical behavioural changes and more worrying developments.

Increased provision of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services to secure **fair and timely access** for young people as a reality in all parts of the country.

Development of the existing positive entitlements for adopted children to assessment of support needs and for looked after children to have priority in health and education into a real **entitlement to referral to specialist centres**.

Educational participation for all children

All schools to be able to support timely access to a range of approaches to help children and young people **navigate transition to secondary school** and to ensure that the level of **educational exclusion is progressively reduced**.

Action to **prevent uncertainty** about residence status from disrupting access to further and higher education, healthcare and support for young people.

Positive results

Greater focus and tools for the **promotion of positive social norms** through schools and communities to reinforce positive trends.

Robust **implementation of the new OFSTED personal development, behaviour and welfare judgement** to support work in schools to improve children's health and wellbeing.

Greater incentives to drive **aspiration for excellence** in services for children and to narrow the gap in performance and cost between different areas of the country.

No child should be invisible.

Join the Charter for Children at coram.org.uk