



coram

better chances
for children
since 1739

**50 years of getting
young voices heard**



50 years of getting young voices heard

Coram Voice is the first and longest continuing voice for the child in care. As we mark its first 50 years, we call for a renewed commitment to listening to and acting on the views of children and young people who depend upon the support of children's services to realise their right to be heard.

The pioneering past

Established by social worker Gwen James in 1975 as the Voice for the Child in Care before joining Coram in 2013, Coram Voice has pioneered advocacy services to support children in and around the care system.

We have been instrumental in embedding the right to advocacy in law, developing national standards for children's advocacy, creating the national advocacy helpline and safety net, and pioneering specialist advocacy services. By being child led, we have influenced and changed the policy and practice landscape across the decades, including through Bright Spots, the largest and most systematic research on children's views and experiences of care.



50 YEARS 

500 YOUNG AMBASSADORS

5,000 VOLUNTEERS

500,000 YOUNG PEOPLE

Rachel's story, trustee of Coram Voice

Rachel was four years old when she first entered care in North Yorkshire and from the age of nine was looked after by her grandmother so she and her younger sister could stay together. Today Rachel works in the financial service sector and is a trustee for Coram Voice. "I knew it would put me in a unique position to bring my experience of growing up in care with my corporate experience and achievements to really be a voice for young people."

"While there is good intention in the system, it is shocking that today there are still the same issues for children and young people in care that were there decades ago. So often they don't feel safe."

Rachel Malik, trustee of Coram Voice

Leading professional practice today

Every year Coram Voice works with thousands of children and young people so they have their voices heard in decisions about their lives through advocacy, influencing and practice development.

Voices in partnership

We partner with local authorities, residential settings, and health providers to provide high quality advocacy, independent visiting, independent persons' services, and coproduce practice changes working with young people.

Voices in research

The Bright Spots surveys has captured over 29,000 voices from children and young people in and leaving care about the things that are important to them. Through this research our care experienced consultants then inform and collaborate with academics to develop new insight.

Voices in need

Our specialist advocacy team champions the needs and views of care leavers, children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and those with mental health issues or who are at risk of homelessness and school exclusion.

A National Voice

We ensure thousands of children and young people have a say in their individual lives through our advocacy services and collectively through *A National Voice*, the national children in care council that has amplified young voices for 25 years.

Voices in action

Our young ambassadors and Youth Board, all of whom have lived experience of homelessness, school exclusion or the care system, work with us to make change happen.

Creative voices

Voices is the only creative writing competition dedicated to care experienced children and young people, celebrating their stories and creative talent.

177,000 

NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS UP TO 25

The voice of the future

Inspired by the thousands of young people it works with and working in conjunction with others in Coram and across the sector, Coram Voice advocates for policy and practice development working with government and partners at national, regional, and local level to make positive change happen.

- We will champion and deliver access for children and young people to Children's Rights Services and independent advocacy at validated national standards
- We will build sector and system capacity through training, practice guides and resources in co-production with young people to ensure consistent and responsive best practice
- We will publish findings from our Bright Spots surveys including a new analysis of the largest collection of children and young people's own views of what would make care better
- We will host and amplify A National Voice, the national children in care council (CICC) to bring CICC's together to campaign on what is important to them including the Grand Campaign to end the postcode lottery for care leavers' Setting Up Home allowance
- We will publish reports and reviews identifying and addressing trends to inform policy development
- We will work to embed Bright Spots wellbeing measures to inform local authority service development and partner with them to enhance services based on their own data
- We will expand specialist advocacy and outreach and innovate in service delivery including the redesign and extension of independent visitor type support for care leavers.



The story of the Voice for the Child in Care

1948 **Creation of statutory Children's Services**

1975 Coram Voice established as the Voice for the Child in Care by social worker Gwen James, followed by the first advocacy cases and helpline

1979 Our *Voice in Their Lives* campaign promotes the need for young people to have an independent person to act as an advocate

1987/9 We deliver the first **visiting advocacy service** to secure children's homes

1989 **The Children Act (1989)** incorporates the need to listen to the wishes and feeling of children and young people in decision making and a complaints process for children in care

1990/1 **First service** providing Independent People for Children Act complaints and first community advocacy service in the London Borough of Greenwich

1995 Launch of the first **advocacy help line** and our London-wide advocacy services

2000 Led by John Kemmis as CEO, we found and co-chair the **National Children's Advocacy Consortium** to campaign for advocacy as a legal right

2001/2 First edition of *Sorted & Supported*, our guide for young people, explaining their rights as care leavers

2003/4 We publish *Start with the Child, Stay with the Child* – a Blueprint for a child-centred approach to children and young people in public care

2005/8 We form the **Alliance for Child Centred Care** and launch our specialist advocacy services for children with disabilities and care leavers

2010/11 *It's My Review* launched to put children in the driving seat of reviews

2012 The ground breaking **Homeless Outreach Project** launches in London, ensuring young people receive support from children's services

2013 Voice of the Child in Care joins Coram as Coram Voice and our **Bright Spots programme**, a partnership with the University of Bristol, launches to understand children's care journey from their point of view

2014/15 *The Door Is Closed* report provides evidence of children who are homeless because they are not provided with the services they are entitled to

2016 The first *Our Lives, Our Care – looked after children's views on their well-being* report is published

2017 Coram Voice becomes the home for **A National Voice (ANV)** – the only organisation run by and for children and young people in and leaving care

2019/20 **New Belongings programme** starts supporting eight local authorities and their care leavers to improve services based on care leavers' views

2021 *What makes life good* – care leavers' views on their well-being published

2021 **Coram Voice**, the only charity to work directly with the review to gather the views of over 300 children in care and care leavers

2021 First ANV awards at the Amplify conference celebrates the work of Children in Care Councils

2021 **What makes life good** – care leavers' views on their well-being published

Bright Spots pilot in Scotland starts in partnership with CELCIS

Bright Spots Resource Bank launched showcasing examples of how local authorities are making life better for children in care and care leavers

2022 Managing Director, Brigid Robinson (above right) receives an MBE for her distinguished service to children and young people

2022 *Staying Connected* report shares 7,500 children and young people's views on family time

2023 Government publishes *Stable Homes, Built on Love* strategy and ANV supports DfE to engage young people around the strategy

2023 **Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel** recommends that all children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings should have access to independently commissioned, non-instructed advocacy

2024 ANV ambassadors co-create a **guide to engaging care experienced people for the Local Government Association (LGA) and Grand Campaign report** on Setting Up Home Allowances

2024 **Ofsted start inspecting supported accommodation providers** informed by work with Coram Voice care experienced consultants

2024 *Disability, disparity and demand* report shares insights on numbers and experience of disabled children in care and care leavers

2025 *The Door is Still Closed* report shows that – 10 years after the first analysis – homeless 16- and 17-year-olds continue to be denied care

2025 Coram Voice marks **50 years of the Voice for the Child in Care** with the launch of the Coram Voice Care Ambition

Where's my Advocate? scoping report commissioned from Coram Voice by the Office of the Children's Commissioner, is the first of its kind

Children and Families Act 2014 Staying put with foster carers to 21 and virtual school become statutory

The National Advocacy Advice Line and Safety Net is created and delivered by Coram Voice as Always Heard

Children and Social Work Act 2017 PA to 25 for all care leavers and care leaver Local Offer introduced

Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's review into the deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson and Competition and Markets Authority review of children's placements

Independent Review of Children's Social Care final report informed by the **National consultation** by A National Voice and Bright Spots

Independent Review of Children's Social Care launched

Ofsted publishes the Big Listen, informed by children in care's views gathered through Coram Voice and ANV network

VOICE FOR THE CHILD IN CARE
coramVoice
50
FIRST FIFTY YEARS

Our Care Ambition

The story of Coram Voice shows both how far we have come over the last 50 years and demonstrates how much more there is to do. We call for a triple key of commitments to unlock the future of the next generation of children and young people in and leaving care.

No voice without action

Services are more effective when children and young people are seen and heard and adults both listen and act on what they say.

- National youth engagement mechanisms to ensure meaningful engagement with children and young people in all new significant changes to policy and practice including A National Voice (ANV) – the national children in care council
- Measurement of the views and wellbeing of children and young people in and leaving care
- Systematic collection of data to ensure accountability and responsiveness of the system

A Secure Future

Addressing the needs of young people leaving care with a consistent national offer underpinning the local offer and informed by young people's needs and views

- Advocacy support to address housing, immigration, and transition to adult services for those with health conditions and disabilities

- A National local offer for care leavers ensuring consistency across local areas including setting up home allowances and removing the local connection requirement and intentional homelessness decisions for care leavers
- Access to tailored mental health support and the extension of reimagined independent visitor type services for care leavers to tackle loneliness and promote wellbeing

Someone to stand by my side

Access to high quality, independent advocacy for children and young people to keep them safe, understood, and informed, including:

- Legal entitlement to advocacy during assessments for children who are disabled, homeless or living in kinship arrangements
- Regular visiting advocacy for children in residential provision including non-instructed advocacy
- Publication of updated national children's advocacy standards and statutory guidance on: children's advocacy, the 1989 Children Act and homeless 16- and 17-year-olds, creating versions for children and young people

Your support matters

Thank you to all those who help us to make this a reality. If you can support, visit coram.org.uk/donate



Support our Care Ambition today by pledging your own commitment to:

Listen and act on the views of children and young people in and around the care system and make sure they understand their rights so they can get the support they need.

coramvoice.org.uk

£50 ENABLES US TO ANSWER THE CALL THAT GETS A YOUNG VOICE HEARD

£850 ENABLES US TO PROVIDE AN ADVOCATE TO ADVISE AND SUPPORT

£5,000 ENABLES 5 YOUNG PEOPLE TO WORK WITH THEIR LOCAL AUTHORITY TO CREATE CHANGE

£50,000 ENABLES A NATIONAL VOICE TO WORK WITH HUNDREDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

“There is no doubt that the creation of the Voice for the Child in Care changed the landscape for children forever and 50 years on Coram Voice is a vital champion for change”


Jenny Coles, Chair of Coram Voice and Former President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services



Claire's story, care experienced consultant

Claire entered care at the age of 13 and lived with a foster family for three years before moving to supported lodgings from the age of 16 to 18. Claire was a winner of the 2020 Voices Creative Writing Competition in the Upper Secondary category because “I wanted people to know my emotions and I ended up winning. I was shocked when I received the email that I'd been shortlisted and even more shocked when I heard that I'd won.” Claire went on to become a care experienced consultant with Coram Voice, supporting Ofsted to create a film about social care inspections, participating in the youth steering group of the Independent Care Review and doing media interviews. Claire says: “Coram has provided me with opportunities I could never have dreamt of. The care system was supposed to be a 'stain on my record' but really it projected me into positions such as working with Parliament and Councils. Because of Coram Voice, I have really become a better version of myself, and I can't wait to continue growing.”



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since 1739

“Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times, for example during immigration proceedings, housing decisions or the child’s day-to-day home life.”

Article 12, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

