



Understanding why young people participate in the Voices competition

Interviews with Voices entrants

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Impact & Evaluation

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Introduction

Coram Voice is a youth advocacy organisation which helps young people to access support and become involved in decisions made about their lives. It supports children in care and after care, as well as those who are otherwise in need and dependent on the state, to ensure that they are treated fairly.

Coram Voice provides advocates, a national helpline and trained independent visitors for young people in children's homes, adolescent mental health settings and residential units. The team also works with local authorities to understand children's experiences of the care system.

'Voices' is a national writing competition that was launched by Coram Voice in 2016 specifically for children who have experience of the UK care system. The competition invites all children in the UK (aged between 7 and 25) to write something about their time as a child in care based around a given theme, this year entrants were provided with the theme of 'New Beginnings'.

All shortlisted entrants are invited to attend an awards ceremony where the winners of the Voices competition are announced. In 2017 the event was hosted by actor and *Doctor Who* star Peter Capaldi. Four winners are chosen by a panel of judges for the following categories: (1) primary school winner (2) secondary school winner (3) care leavers' winner and (4) special award for migrant child in care or care leaver.

All young people who were shortlisted for the Voices competition since it launched will be showcased in a new app. Coram Voice has teamed up with educational publisher Pearson Publishing to launch *Creative Voices*, a free app featuring an anthology of writing by children in care.

Executive Summary

Coram's Impact and Evaluation team conducted eleven interviews with young people who entered the Voices competition to find out why young people decided to apply and if their experience of the competition had helped them in any way. Key findings gathered from these interviews are listed below.

1. Why young people applied to the competition

Young people applied for one of three main reasons:

1. To share their experience of care with others
2. To try something new
3. To strengthen their writing skills

2. How young people benefit from participating in the competition

All young people felt that they had benefited from participating in the competition by at least one of the following ways:

a) Inspired them to write more

- Ten out of the eleven young people stated that applying to the Coram Voices competition had inspired them to write more.

b) Improved their writing skills

- Six young people believed that by entering the competition, they had improved their writing skills.

c) Came to terms with being in care

- Four young people believed applying for the Coram Voices competition had helped them to come to terms with living in care.

d) Being recognized for their talent

- All young people appreciated being distinguished because of their writing skills rather than what they have been through.

e) Getting their work published

- Following on from the competition, three young people were offered the chance to publish their entry online.

f) Meeting other children in care

g) Gaining experience of public speaking

3. What can be done to improve the competition?

- Five young people suggested accepting different types of written entries, for example: song, rap, comic strip.
- All young people found out about the competition from a trusted adult. It was suggested that more thought could be given to enabling the Coram Voice competition to reach children in care directly; one young person suggested using social media.

- Two young people would have preferred to receive information about the awards ceremony earlier in order to plan for their trip.
- Two young people suggested they would have found it helpful if the organizers had introduced icebreakers at the awards ceremony.
- One young person suggested inviting a professional poet to the awards event.

The evaluation: aims and methods

Aim

Coram's Impact and Evaluation team was commissioned as part of the HALO programme to carry out an independent evaluation of the Voices competition.

The aim of the evaluation was to find out who is participating in the Voices competition and whether taking part benefits entrants in any way. Six key research questions were designed to address these points in detail:

1. What kind of young people is the competition attracting?
2. How did young people find out about the competition?
3. What encouraged (and discouraged) young people to apply for the writing competition?
4. Have young people benefited from participating in the competition? If so, how?
5. Have young people taken part in similar activities? How does the Voices competition compare?
6. Is there anything Coram Voice could do to improve the competition?

Method

The evaluation employed a mixed method design: analysing quantitative demographic data and carrying out qualitative semi-structured interviews with children and young people.

➤ *Demographic data*

Since the launch of the Voices competition in 2016, Voices have requested entrants to complete a demographic form that seeks information about their gender, age, and locality. The evaluation analysed this demographic data (after making it anonymous) to find out who is most likely to take part in the competition.

➤ *Interviews with children and young people*

Qualitative interviews were carried out in order to gather an in-depth understanding of children and young people's experiences of the competition and discover how the competition may have impacted on their lives.

Entrants, who were aged between 12 and 25 and had been shortlisted for either the Voices 2016 or 2017 competition, were sent an email that invited them to take part in

a semi-structured telephone interview. Eleven children and young people responded and were interviewed for this evaluation.

Parental consent was obtained from children aged 16 and below. For interviewees who were living in care and aged under 16, consent was accepted from the child's carer. As part of giving consent, the child's carer was also asked to inform the child's social worker about these interviews.

The evaluation targeted shortlisted entrants as these young people would be the most invested in the competition and would also be able to offer their views on the awards ceremony organized by Coram Voice. Although data may be richer as a result, it does limit our ability to apply findings to all young people who applied to the competition; this is discussed further in the limitations section of this report.

Who applied to the Coram Voices competition?

One of the aims of the evaluation was to understand what kind of young people the competition is attracting. The Coram Voices competition has been running for two years (2016 and 2017) and each year it has requested entrants to complete a demographic form when they submit their entry. Using the data collected from these demographic forms we can find out the characteristics of those who entered the Voices competition. Results show that girls in secondary school, aged between 12 and 18, are most likely to take part.

In total, Coram Voice has received 151 entries to their Voices competition since it launched in 2016: 59 applications in 2016 and 92 applications in 2017 (see table 1). During 2017, applications increased by 56%, Coram Voice received 33 more entries in 2017 compared with 2016.

Table 1: Number of competition entries

Year of entry	Number of entries
2016	59
2017	92
Total	151

Gender

More females have taken part in the competition than males. Out of the total number of applications Voices has received (151), 70% (104) have been from females and 30% (44) from males (1 young person preferred not to say and 2 left this question blank).

However this year, the competition did see an 11% percentage point increase in male participation; in 2016, 23% of competition entries were submitted by males, this increased to 34% in 2017 (see table 2).

Table 2: Percentage of male and female participation in Voices 2016 and 2017

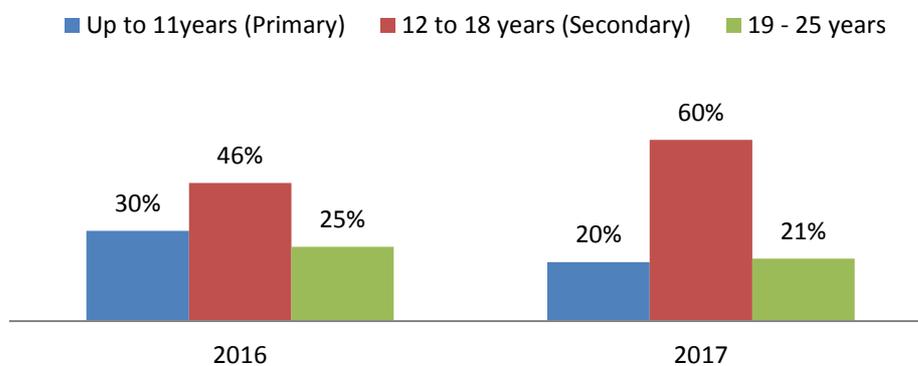
	2016	2017
Female	77%	66%
Male	23%	34%
Total	100%	100%

Age of profile of entrants

The competition is open to all children and young people aged 5 to 25, who have experience of the care system. Data shows that children and young people of all ages are applying; but the competition is most popular with secondary school students (aged between 12 and 18).

In 2016, secondary pupils represented 46% of all entries, similarly in 2017, 60% of all entries were submitted by secondary students, see figure 1 below. Voices attracted nearly double the number of entries from secondary students in 2017 (51), compared with 2016 (26). In addition, the eleven child migrants who took part in the competition in 2017 were aged between 12 and 19.

Figure 1: Age of entrants



During the most recent year of the competition (2017), participation from children in primary school (younger than 12 years) and those who have left school (aged 19 to 25) dropped. In 2016, primary children represented 30% of all entries, this fell to 20% in 2017. Similarly in 2017, 21% of entries submitted were from young people aged between 19 and 25, this is 4% lower than 2016.

Location

Demographic data reveals that every year the Voices competition attracts entries from across the country. Nearly a quarter of entries have come from those who live in London, in 2016: 23% and 2017:22%. Across the two years (2016 and 2017), the competition has received an equal number of applications from those who live in east, south east and south west of England for example places like Buckinghamshire, Essex and Exeter. For the first time, this year the competition received entries from Scotland and Wales.

Interviews with Voices entrants

Eleven interviews were conducted with children and young people, all of whom who were shortlisted for the Voices competition in 2016 and 2017; to explore how the competition may have impacted on their lives. In 2017, 24% of entrants were shortlisted.

Sample

Four females and seven males were interviewed. Most interviewees (7) were in secondary school aged between 14 and 18, three of these young people were child migrants. Four care leavers were also interviewed, who were aged between 21 to 24 years.

Five interviewees were chosen as winners for the following categories: secondary school winner, care leaver winner and special migrant award.

Interview findings

The young people we contacted were very pleased to have had the opportunity to participate in the Coram Voices competition. They valued the initiative as a means of offering young people a chance to share their experiences of the care system in a safe and anonymous way. All young people involved in this evaluation believed they had benefitted from taking part in the competition and would recommend others who have experience of care to apply. To preserve anonymity and confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms have been used to discuss interview findings in the following sections.

Why did young people enter the Voices competition?

In order to understand what attracts young people to apply to the Voices competition, all eleven participants were asked to explain how they heard about the competition and why they had entered.

Nine of the eleven young people told us how they heard about the competition, all of whom had been encouraged to apply by a trusted adult who was familiar with Coram. Three of these young people were recommended to enter by professionals who worked in local children's services including foster carers and youth advisors. Three young people found out about the competition from Coram employees directly and a further three heard about the competition from other organizations including Care Free, the Dost centre for young refugees & migrants and the school. Interestingly, none of the young people discovered the competition by themselves but relied on word of mouth.

All eleven interviewees provided details about why they decided to apply to the competition and revealed three key motivations: (1) an opportunity to share their experience of care with others (2) a chance to try something new and (3) a way they could strengthen their writing skills. These reasons are discussed in detail below.

1. Share their experience of care

All young people described the Voices competition as a unique opportunity to write about and share their experiences of the care system anonymously. Nobody had come across or knew of a similar opportunity available and this largely contributed to their decision to apply. The Voices competition presented most young people with the chance to share their opinions and experiences of care publicly for the first time:

"I've always thought maybe I should write something or a blog [about my experience of care] and then I saw this"

a. Using their voice for change

Most young people believed that the competition was not only an opportunity to showcase their work but a chance to attract positive attention and offer the public an improved understanding about children in care. Specifically for instance, Javid¹ saw the Voices competition as an opportunity to share a positive message about child migrants:

"[The competition was] an opportunity to tell people my story and let them hear my voice and to show them we [child migrants] are something else. We have some skills and we are not just here to get benefits, we are here to improve our skills"

Scott hoped that by sharing his story he could encourage more adults to foster young people:

¹ Names have been changed in this report.

“I’ve always liked writing but then I thought writing about something I know a lot about can help certain people. I thought maybe putting it out there would make people want to foster children”

Similarly, Peter hoped his competition entry would encourage people to see children in care in a positive light.

“My main ambition was to take it [children in care] to a better place, because of all the [negative] stories in the media; I want to change it for the better”

Finally Charlotte, who volunteers for her local council, believed that her competition entry offered another and perhaps more effective way of making life better for children in care:

“Improving the service and giving people a voice I think is so much easier when [I’m talking] about myself or something I have done”

2. An opportunity to try something new

All young people revealed that they had not heard about the Voices competition until it was recommended to them by a trusted adult. For three young people, adult encouragement played an important role in helping them to finally decide to apply. Alex heard about the competition from her mum who *“persuaded me to have a go”*. In turn, Charlotte explained that she was encouraged to submit a story to the competition by someone who knew she already enjoyed writing songs; this instilled the confidence in Charlotte to write her first story.

3. Strengthen writing skills

Perhaps as expected, all entrants had an interest in writing and some young people looked at the Voices competition as an opportunity to practice and strengthen this skill. Jasmin explained while she lived in Haiti she used to write raps and poems in Creole and the competition offered an opportunity to practise her talent in English, her second language:

“It gave me the opportunity to go back and do what I like”

Scott also saw the Voices competition as an opportunity to strengthen his writing skills and improve his CV. Scott realised that the competition was a good opportunity to distinguish himself from his peers:

“I thought entering the competition might be something fun to get involved in and not a lot of people in the school were doing it. I thought it would give me something above everyone else”

How young people benefited from participating in the competition

All of the young people stated they had benefited personally from participating in the competition and recognized that the competition offered advantages to all those who applied.

The young people noticed that since submitting their entry they had become confident and eager to write and share their work with other people. Young people acknowledged that the competition offered all young people who applied a chance for their talent in writing to be recognized and possibly published. Some young people also revealed that the process helped them come to terms with their experiences of care. In this next section these benefits will be discussed in more detail.

1. Improved confidence with writing

Nearly all interviewees (ten out of the eleven) revealed that applying to the Voices competition had inspired them to carry on with their writing and six believed that the process improved their writing skills and confidence to produce more material.

“Since [the competition] I have been writing more, I haven’t really thought about it [before], but [my entry] was awarded an award and I can write more stuff like this”

“After the competition whenever we had to do some writing...I had a lot of ideas”

a. Sparked more writing

Young people enjoyed using writing to express how they were feeling and were eager to explore different techniques and styles. A couple of young people provided examples of other writing they have produced since the competition. For instance, once Charlotte found out her entry was shortlisted she decided to share it with her friends on social media (Facebook and Twitter) and the positive response inspired her to start an online blog where she continues to write about and share her experiences with others:

“I had never shared anything about myself, online or anything, and I got an email about the competition saying [my story] had got shortlisted, I thought maybe I’ll just share it online. If you guys thought it was an OK read, other people might enjoy reading it”

Jacob described how the competition not only encouraged him to participate in more writing competitions but helped him to recognize his own talent. Subsequently he felt inspired to pursue his ambition of being a musician and writing his own music and songs.

“I’m a musician and I haven’t really done that much...and I haven’t really given it much effort” “It [the competition] helped me reach for my goals; because I have been invited to competitions before but I never have taken them on...it’s inspired me to take on more”

b. Improved writing skills

A few young people found it really helpful that Coram Voice requested entrants to produce work that addressed a specific theme. They explained that the topic allowed for them to concentrate on their writing skills and to deliver something of high quality, without the added pressure of deciding what to write about. One young person also added that the competition requirements were well suited for those who are looking to improve their writing skills, *“I can go to that one piece and work on it more once and expand on it”*

“If I hadn’t been given a theme it would have been hard to come up with some ideas”

“...it was free to enter and the word limit was quite good as well, it didn’t put too much pressure on people to write an essay or something”

Peter, who has found creative writing difficult in the past, believed the competition encouraged young people of different writing competencies to practise their skills. He noted how Voices had helped him experiment with language. Additionally, John used the competition to write about his experience of care in a different way:

“It has helped [with] my writing skills and English language; I was able to use different words”

“I have written about my experiences of care in a very structured way and I wanted to create something that was a bit more liberating and free. I wrote a poem and I didn’t used standard syntax because the whole point of this is that I am free now”

Entrants who did not speak English fluently noted that the competition offered them a creative and enjoyable way they could practise their English. These young people expressed frustration with not being able to write as confidently in English as they do in their mother tongue and recognized they could use the competition to help them express themselves more clearly in English. One young person in particular hopes he can go on to write a book in English about his experience as a migrant child.

“I don’t have much confidence in my English and it actually gave me a bit more confidence”

2. Willingness to talk about their time in care

Four young people believed applying to the Voices competition had helped them come to terms with living in care. These young people explained how it is still difficult and uncomfortable for them to talk about being in care. Voices presented a safe

space where they could reflect on their experiences and emotions during this time. Allie spoke about how the competition was a *“safe opportunity to share your personal story...it’s a wonderful way to embrace your history and yourself”*.

Catherine appreciated that the competition gave her an opportunity to share how she truly felt about the care system without having to worry about what professionals might think.

“I gained confidence to share parts of my life that I would have been ashamed to share before”

“To put what you feel on a piece of paper is quite therapeutic”

Similarly John who wrote about the challenges he experienced as a care leaver explained:

“For care leavers sometimes the most liberating thing is to be able to talk about other things that are not so nice”

Charlotte used the protagonist in her story, a butterfly, to describe and represent the vulnerability, strength and bravery she exhibited during her time in care and how these experiences have shaped who she is today. Charlotte explained being able to share stories of her childhood with others without speaking in the first person was helpful for her to be able to reflect on her own experience and for others to *“understand how I feel...and understand me a bit better”*.

3. Being recognizing for their talent

All of the young people explained how they appreciated being distinguished from other young people because of their writing skills rather than what they have been through.

“If someone said something good about work that you have done and you don’t know them it kind of means a bit more...it’s more about the work than me as a person and I like that”

“When you have other people, people who you don’t know, come up to you and congratulate you, it feels really good”

Charlotte believed that entrants who did not get shortlisted also benefitted the same way:

“You still get recognized even if you don’t win a category or shortlisted you still get recognized for doing something good for yourself”

4. Getting work published

All young people interviewed were shortlisted and agreed that being selected was not only an exciting prospect but had also attracted opportunities for further exposure.

“It is kind of like opening a door, it can be the start of a journey for you if you let yourself open that door. It opens up new opportunities and also it shows people the potential you have”

Following on from the competition, three young people were offered the chance to publish their entry competition online for other young people and professionals working in children’s services to read.

Jasmin explained *“when I was applying I just wanted to give it a go and see if I can do it”* however her social worker was very impressed with what she had written and (with Jasmin’s permission) she shared her work with other colleagues and published it on the council’s website:

“I was nervous [about publishing the work on the website], but when people were coming up to me and saying it was really good, I actually felt happy about it”

Scott also spoke about how since he applied to the competition last year (2016) he has and is still is being offered opportunities to share his written piece publicly with others. Scott has been invited by Coram to record a YouTube clip of his entry and read it out loud to young people who were shortlisted for the competition this year.

“I read it for [-] from Coram, she recorded it and then that went on YouTube and the interview [I did] as well”

Scott also explained he wouldn’t have known how supportive his school peers were if it wasn’t for the opportunity he had to share his work on stage with his year group:

“I was kind of nervous because I didn’t know how people in the year group would react, but after [I shared my work] some people were like ‘if you ever need to talk...’ [and] just because of that one piece I have got a lot of people who have my back”

Finally Charlotte explained she didn’t expect to receive as much attention as she did for her competition entry and valued the opportunity of having her work recognized:

“I thought it [the competition] was quite a closed thing and that not many people would see it, but actually since the competition [my entry] has been all over Twitter and Facebook. I logged on to Facebook and saw my story and was like ‘woah’. It was kinda nice”

5. Meeting others like you

All interviewees were invited to Coram’s Voice’s award ceremony. Of those who could attend, all enjoyed the event and particularly liked the opportunity to meet other young people who had had experience of the care system:

“I met a lot of competition entrants and because we were all in the same situation we all got along really well. I felt like I made some friends that evening, we are all in the same situation and I can understand what they are writing about”

Some young people explained that speaking to other young people in care and hearing their stories made them feel less lonely and helped them deal with problems of their own:

“You feel it’s not just me going through a really hard and difficult problem. You see other people...and see other people have gone through it as well and it will help you deal with situations”

6. Experience of public speaking

The winners of the Coram Voice competition were invited to read their competition entry out loud to everyone at the awards ceremony. All interviewees who had this opportunity explained that although it was a nerve racking experience, they felt proud and more confident to be able to speak in public in the future.

“I did not want to do it, [my social worker] pushed me out of my comfort zone and it felt so great. The way I read it was the way I wanted it [to be done], no one else could do it the way I did it and it felt so great”

Conclusion

The aim of this evaluation report was to understand why young people decide to apply to the Voices competition and find out if the competition helps them in any way. After conducting eleven interviews with competition entrants aged between 14 and 24 who had experience of the care system, we were able to gather an insight into what kind of young people the competition had attracted and what impact (if any) participation had on their lives.

Demographic data collected when young people apply to the competition revealed that girls in secondary school, aged between 12 and 18, are most likely to take part. However this looks to be changing, this year (2017) the competition saw an 11% percentage point increase in male participation, compared with 2016.

Findings from eleven interviews conducted with entrants offered a good understanding of the reasons behind why young people decide to apply to the competition. For all the young people, the Voices competition offered them a unique opportunity to share their experiences of care creatively and anonymously. Interestingly, all young people revealed that their decision to apply was influenced by the possibility they could improve public understanding of children in care. Interview responses also revealed that young people applied to the competition for one of three additional reasons: (1) to share their experience of care with others (2) to strengthen their writing skills (3) to try something new.

Having had time to reflect on their experience of the Voices competition, young people participating in the interviews were in a good place to comment if they thought the competition had impacted on them in any way. All young people revealed they were pleased they took part and believed they had benefitted in some way from doing so. The process of producing a written piece exploring their experiences of care, offered a chance for young people to practise their creative writing skills with a subject they felt passionate about. Young people found it helpful that the competition offered entrants structure through the provision of a theme and word limit. This was especially the case for entrants who did not speak English fluently who used the opportunity to practise expressing themselves more clearly in English. Perhaps unexpectedly though, this process also helped some young people come to terms with their time in care. Young people spoke about how the process of writing as "*liberating*" and as a cathartic experience where they could explore how they really felt about the care system.

For some young people, the competition sparked a journey of writing and sharing more about their lives. A few respondents revealed that they had started an online blog or have intentions to write a book or share their feelings through music. In addition, young people also acknowledged the competition offers all entrants who are shortlisted the opportunity for their talent to be recognized by people who they don't know and possibly having their work published online by Coram Voice.

Overall, this evaluation has revealed that young people felt that the competition paved a different path and unique way for young people to share their views of the care system. Young people also felt that Coram Voice was committed in promoting their voice by actively sharing their entries with other people. Finally, young people described Voices as much more than a writing competition, it provided a chance to prove to themselves and to other people what children in care are capable of.

Recommendations

Ten young people put forward suggestions about what could be done to improve entrants' experiences of the competition.

1. Opening the competition up to different kinds of written entries

Five young people suggested broadening the competition requirements to allow for different types of written entries to be submitted. Many of the young people who applied revealed they also had an interest in writing and producing songs and would welcome the opportunity to send the judges a performance of their song. These young people believed that the chance to submit more creative pieces (for example song, rap, comic strip) could encourage a larger talent pool to the competition.

"I think it will attract different people. Not everyone who is looked after wants to write a story, they might want to write a rap or a song"

"Not everyone is into spoken word...they might want to rap it...and more people would actually be interested in doing it instead of thinking it is like a English writing [homework]"

John thinks this change could make the competition "something less traditional" and "you'll get more people who want to join the competition". John, who participated in 2016's competition, also suggested more thought could be given to the competition writing theme to allow for entrants to share not only positive but also challenging moments of their time in care.

"I think people interpret a care leaver competition as write something sappy about something that happened in your life and I don't think that necessarily represents everything that care leaver goes through"

2. Wider advertising across different media

All young people found out about the competition from a trusted adult and as one young person explained "if it wasn't for the worker telling me I wouldn't have known". Perhaps then more thought can be given into how Coram Voice can reach children in care directly; one young person suggested using social media to connect with potential entrants:

"There's loads of young people that are really talented with writing and I would want to say 'do this' but I don't always have the information and I don't know when it is coming up"

"I think definitely promoting it more through social media and also within [children's] the service, because a lot of professionals in the service didn't know about it either"

3. Adaptations to the awards ceremony

Findings reveal that those young people who attended the awards ceremony very much enjoyed the event, seven entrants offered suggestions on how the event could be run even more smoothly.

a. Access to event details earlier

Two out of the five would have preferred more information from organizers about the location and plan for the awards evening. Jacob, who lives a couple of hours from London, would have found it helpful to know the location of the awards ceremony earlier in order to give himself and his foster carer more time to prepare for the travel. Catherine took part in the competition last year when the ceremony was held in the afternoon however could not attend as she works full time, Catherine stressed the importance of holding the event at a time suitable for those who work during the day. In addition one young person also suggested hosting the event in a bigger venue.

b. Introduce ice breakers

Young people appreciated the opportunity to meet other young people in care at the awards ceremony and two suggested they would have found it helpful if the organizers introduced activities that encouraged young people to get to know each other and keep in touch:

“Some activities at the beginning [of the event] to help us socialise with the other people who took part, because I felt very shy, and it would’ve helped me to feel more comfortable”

c. Offer all shortlisted entrants a chance to share their work

All shortlisted entrants were invited to the awards ceremony however only the winners and runners up were offered the opportunity to read their written piece aloud to everyone. Two young people were particularly disappointed they could not share their work and explained although they didn’t win they would have still liked to have their work recognized. Peter was excited about the thought of sharing his work and had been practising reading his piece aloud for the event; as such he was very disappointed to hear that he would not be able to share his work because he was not selected as a winner:

“I did [want to share my work] I was obviously a bit nervous but I still wanted to do it to see how it goes”

d. Provide entrants with expert advice on developing their writing

For many young people who applied, the competition was the first time they had shared or tried writing about their experience of care. John, who attended the ceremony in 2016, thought that the event could have supported and encouraged young people's writing skills more. John suggested perhaps inviting a professional poet or writer to the awards ceremony to share some of their work and offer advice to young people on how to carry on with and improve their writing.

"It would have been nice if they had someone speaking who was a poet who shared some of their work"

John also spoke about how he would have found it helpful if the competition offered some basic writing tips or guidelines to help him get started with his entry:

"I would have appreciated some sort of workshop as I don't have any experience of writing"

However not all young people were keen on Coram Voice offering writing tips, Jasmin explained *"actually I would prefer without...when you do it yourself it is 100% you"*.

Limitations of the evaluation

This evaluation has limitations and the impact of the Voices competition would benefit from further scrutiny.

Interviews were conducted with those entrants who were shortlisted or chosen as winners for the Voices competition. As such findings included in this evaluation report reflect young people who have had particularly positive experiences of the competition. Further research is needed to understand if all entrants who apply can benefit from participating in the competition or if only shortlisted entrants are exposed to particular advantages.

In addition, interviews were only conducted with children over the age of 12; however children as young as seven had applied to the competition, this means our evaluation findings exclude the experiences of very young children. Further research could be carried out to explore why young children take part and if they have experienced benefits (if any at all) that are similar or different to older children.

Finally, more longitudinal data over a longer period of time could offer an opportunity to assess for how long young people experience benefits of the Voices competition and if participation encouraged positive progress in other areas of their lives.