



2013-14 was another busy year for Coram Voice. We directly supported 3,559 children and young people to get their voices heard, challenge things they were unhappy with, and access what was rightfully theirs. Read more about the young people we work with, and our year, below.

Why we are needed

There are over 68,000 children and young people in the UK reliant on the state for their care and wellbeing, with a further 378,600 more needing some level of support from Children's Services.

These young people are there not because of anything they have done, but because their families cannot safely care for them, or they have suffered abuse or neglect.

For many the care system is a positive experience, as of course it should be. However for an increasing number, the system designed to protect and care for them lets them down. Unaware of their rights and unsure of who to turn to for help, the complexities and inconsistencies of the system mean they struggle to access support they are legally entitled to, such as safe housing, an education, and financial support. As a result, many become mistrustful of the system and the professionals within it. They can become excluded and alienated from society, and exposed to harmful situations such as homelessness, exploitation and abuse. They can fail to realise their full potential and many struggle far more than children from stable backgrounds. Yet this isn't inevitable. Those who have been in care do not have low aspirations. They have a right to support that fully meets their needs, the sort of support that stable families automatically provide. And that's where we come in.

We enable children and young people in public care to actively participate in shaping their lives and to hold to account the services responsible for their care.

How we make a difference

We make a difference on an individual and a national level – supporting individual young people to challenge decisions or inadequate support, as well as pooling their voices and our experiences and using these to campaign for lasting change.

We provide children with a professional adult who will listen to them, establish their wishes, opinions and fears, and work with the child and the system to ensure the child's voice is heard. This support enables them to navigate the system, challenge decisions and ensure their rights and wellbeing are prioritised. It empowers them to have a role in decision-making processes. Thanks to our intervention, children are removed from harm or homelessness, able to access education, helped to stop poorly planned placement moves, and supported to resolve many other problems affecting their wellbeing.

Demand for our services continues to grow, with children and young people experiencing the negative consequences of increased caseloads, reduced budgets and service cuts within Local Authorities. Throughout the year, we have been routinely told by other advocacy providers that children seeking their help are not eligible for their support, due to limits set by their commissioning Local Authorities or because of extended waiting lists. Uniquely, we do not turn away any child who needs our help, and we provide advocacy to those who are refused a service by others.

We seek out the hardest-to-reach and most vulnerable, delivering high quality advice and support in a variety of ways.

- We provide a **National Advocacy Helpline** that children can call for support when they have problems with Children's Services. The Helpline undertakes advocacy case work and gives advice as well as taking referrals for one-to-one **Community Advocacy** support
- Our advocates also **visit** settings including residential schools, children's homes, secure psychiatric units, and foster care, to ensure these young people can have someone independent from the system to talk to and seek support from
- We provide **Independent People** for **Children Act Complaints** and **Secure Accommodation Reviews**, ensuring these processes properly involve young people
- We provide **Independent Visitors** – volunteers who support children in care, giving them a reliable consistent long-term relationship
- We are **child-driven** and engage young people in all aspects of our work. Care-experienced young people help to shape our strategy, drive campaigns, interview staff and design and deliver training
- We campaign to **fix the system** so that future children do not face similar problems. We lobby and support government, both nationally and locally, to change policies and practices so that children and care leavers have a better experience of being in care, and to adopt a more child-friendly approach to Children's Services
- We provide **training and resources** for our own workforce and other children's social care professionals, empowering them with the skills and knowledge they need to best support young people

“

“It helped a lot in terms of having the courage to communicate and share my feelings with an advocate I can trust”

“I feel better when I know that someone is on my side and listening to me”

“[Having an advocate] has given me the strength to carry on”

“Now I know what my rights are so I am able to speak up about the issues that affect me”

”



At any time there are **68,000** children in care, and another **378,000** children & young people who can use our services

416 at secure accommodation reviews or with Children Act complaints

204 at child protection conferences

30 with an independent visitor

WE DIRECTLY SUPPORTED **3,559** children & young people

203 DIRECTLY involved in SHAPING OUR WORK

That's a **31%** INCREASE in new cases

1,829 through Helpline & COMMUNITY & ADVOCACY

122 by our other services

I feel more **CONFIDENT** about myself and my future

1,212 professionals & adults helped to SUPPORT young people*

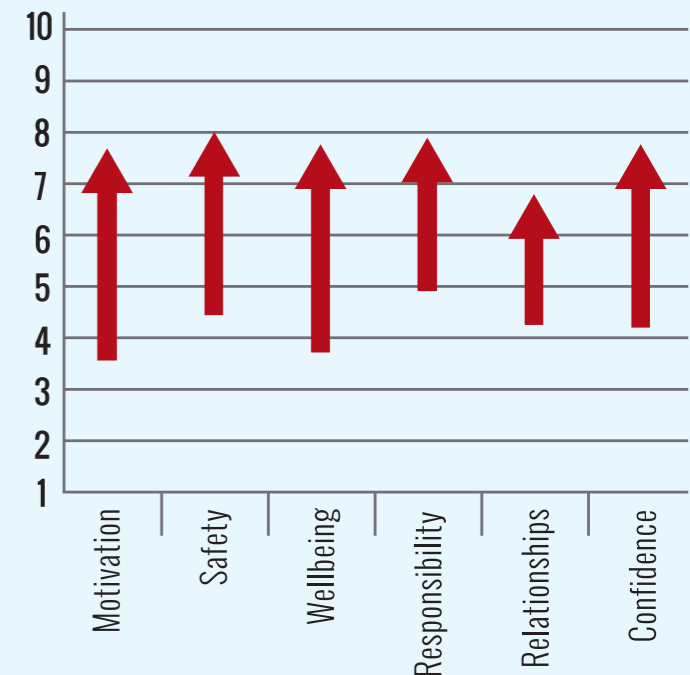
302 in mental health units

453 in residential units

"You have made my life **MUCH BETTER** I was very depressed but with all your help you have made me very, very, very joyful. **YOU ARE THE BEST EVER!**"

92%  would recommend us to a friend**

Young people told us that advocacy helped them feel better about their...



Based on young people's assessment of their situation before and after working with our advocates.

HIGHLIGHTS

133 children & young people were consulted for the first phase of the **Bright Spots Project**, which aims to give Local Authorities a better understanding of what makes a good care journey from the perspective of the child

186 young people were supported by our unique **Homeless Outreach Project** which delivers our services at a day centre for homeless youths. This included providing information about their rights and entitlements from Children's Services, advocacy to ensure they were found safe and suitable accommodation, as well as support to meet their educational and welfare needs

As part of the Alliance for Children in Care and Care Leavers, we successfully campaigned for changes to the Children Act (**Staying Put** arrangements) which now allows young people to stay in their foster placement until they are aged 21 when they previously had to leave at age 18

NO CHILD
TURNT AWAY

"...we don't feel **alone** and **helpless**"

*having attended a training course, presentation or seminar, or receiving advice from our helpline

**Based on 109 responses from a snapshot survey conducted in March 2014

Kirk★

Kirk, 14, contacted our helpline because he wanted to know why he was taken into care and wanted to live with his mother. Our advocate spoke to Kirk's social worker who said he had the reasons explained to him already and that it was unlikely that he would return to live with his mother. The advocate asked for the social worker to talk to Kirk again as he clearly didn't understand the reasons.

Kirk felt the meeting went very well and that his social worker was taking his wishes seriously. With his advocate's support he was able to contribute to his next care review meeting and even chaired parts of it himself! He said he felt confident in expressing his views to his social worker and was more accepting of his situation once he understood the decisions that had been made in the past.



“Social workers should listen to young people more.”



Tobi★

Tobi wanted to start a university course, at age 22, but needed funding for accommodation. She'd previously had to leave university when she had an emotional breakdown. Tobi felt that she was ready to return to her studies but her social worker said that she would not receive any financial support. Having overcome her personal problems and the challenges of her past experiences Tobi felt let down.

“My case was raised not just for myself but for other young people in the LA. The treatment I received from LA was in my view appalling. Voice and [my advocate] provided the catalyst to get my views heard and my outcomes achieved. Thanks!”

After a formal complaint was submitted, Children's Services completed an educational assessment and agreed to provide financial support. Tobi was extremely relieved and pleased with the outcome but found the whole process very stressful. She was very grateful for the support she received from her advocate.

Mike★

Mike was homeless after family and friends he had been staying with could no longer support him. He was 17 and had come to London for his safety after having been beaten up and threatened by gang members in his home area. Our advocate called Children's Services to raise concerns about Mike's safety and insisted that he be provided with safe accommodation, but they suggested he return home. Eventually they agreed to carry out an assessment of Mike's needs. Mike was placed in a hostel and was given a weekly allowance. He was relieved that he finally had somewhere to stay.

He had managed to get himself an apprenticeship, was enjoying the work and felt like he was making progress. However, the accommodation was unsuitable as it was in a hostel for troubled adults and Mike didn't feel safe. Furthermore, his weekly allowance was not enough to cover his food and travel costs which meant Mike would often go hungry. The advocate was able to secure additional payments for food. She ensured that Mike was placed in safe and suitable accommodation and that his needs were met after the assessment was completed.

To enable us to help more young people like Kirk, Tobi & Mike, please visit

www.coramvoice.org.uk

to make a donation

The big issues faced by looked after children are...

My views, wishes and feelings are being ignored in the decisions that are being made about me

I don't want to be moved from where I live / I don't know where I am going to live

I am not getting the support I need to continue my education

I am not getting the financial support I am entitled to

I want better contact with my family & friends

I don't have a safe place to live



BUT IT SHOULD NOT BE THIS WAY

Our vision is to live in a society that recognises and willingly accepts its responsibilities to children and young people, where children and young people are fully engaged with all decisions made about their lives, and where the inequalities and discrimination faced by children and young people are eradicated.

Looking forward

In 2014-15 we pledge to:

- Help more children and young people and ensure our services are accessible to those who need them most
- Continue our Bright Spots project, identifying evidence for best practice and promoting change
- Recruit more children and young people to make meaningful contributions across all aspects of our work
- Begin a series of reports to highlight the issues faced by children and young people
- Build on our recent amalgamation to increase our fundraising success, streamline our services and achieve financial stability

Thank you to our supporters

We would like to thank our funders and corporate partners for their vital contributions to our work this year; the 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust, the Alchemy Foundation, Augustine Courtauld Trust, the Austin & Hope Pilkington Trust, the Brian Woolf Charitable Trust, the City Bridge Trust, Coutts Charitable Foundation, Dulverton Trust, Essex Youth Trust, Garfield Weston Foundation, the Hadley Trust, the Harford Charitable Trust, Henry Smith Charity, IBB Charitable Trust, John Laing Charitable Trust, Michael Cornish Charitable Trust, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Roger Vere Foundation, the Sir John Sumner Charitable Trust, Corelogic, the Go-Ahead Group, Holman Fenwick Willan, Skylark, SNR Denton, Terra Firma Capital Partners Limited and The Centre for Strategy and Communication. We would also like to thank everyone who ran, sang, baked or volunteered to help us support so many children and young people.

To see our annual report and accounts, visit our website at www.coramvoice.org.uk