



2014-15 was another busy year for Coram Voice. We directly supported 3,719 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 68,800 children and young people in the UK reliant on the state for their care and wellbeing, with a further 397,000 more requiring some level of support from Children's Services. Too many don't get the help they need.

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.

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. 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.

Demand for our services remains high, 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. No child or young person seeking advocacy is turned away without advice or support from the Coram Voice advocacy service.

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 gives advice, undertakes advocacy case work and takes 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 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 children's social care professionals, empowering them with the skills and knowledge they need to best support young people

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“Since I've had my advocate I've felt secure and supported.”

“She was always eager to listen to me and always act on my behalf and sort things out for me. This showed me I can trust her and she was always there for me when I needed her. Something I never got with social services.”

“I see myself as being articulate and able to say things but as I didn't feel listened to by my social workers I tended to give up. Having had an advocate who confirmed and supported me in what I wanted to express, I realised that I had a right to ask questions and get answers. I am now more inclined to speak up for myself.”

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At any time there are
68,800 children in care,
and another
397,000 children & young
people who can
use our services

788 professionals & adults helped to
SUPPORT young
people*

I am
MORE CONFIDENT to speak to people about what's going on.
It has helped knowing about my rights and entitlements. I would
recommend other young people to **CALL CORAM VOICE!**

199 helped at secure
accommodation
reviews or with Children
Act complaints

192 **DIRECTLY**
involved in
SHAPING OUR WORK

26 with an
independent
visitor

**I felt like giving up but now I feel it is
worth FOLLOWING YOUR
GUT INSTINCTS**

WE DIRECTLY
SUPPORTED **3,719**
children & young people

549
at child protection
conferences

That's a
169% INCREASE
in new cases

1,717
through helpline
& **COMMUNITY
ADVOCACY**

452
in residential
units

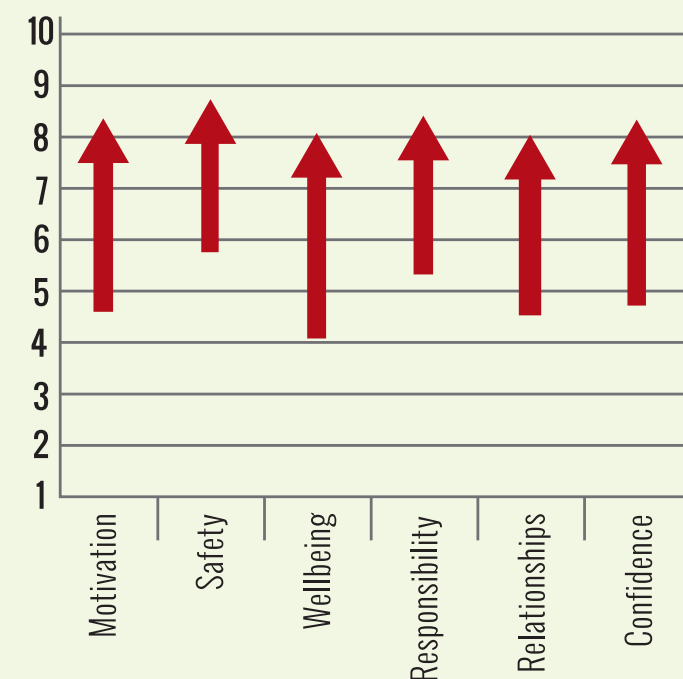
191
by our other
services

This
includes **365**
homeless children
and young people

393
in mental
health units

98%   
of whom 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

– We published the report, **'The Door Is Closed'**, highlighting the failure of many Local Authorities to comply with their legal duties to protect homeless children & young people. The report details the experiences of children who were homeless and approached their Local Authority's Children's Services department but were turned away with no support, or too little – some without having been assessed.

– We supported **365** children & young people who were homeless or facing homelessness, including **266** supported via our unique **Homeless Outreach Project**. The project recognises and removes the barriers homeless young people often face when seeking help by taking our support directly to them. We provide information about their rights and entitlements and advocacy to ensure Children's Services find them safe and suitable accommodation, as well as support for their educational and welfare needs.

– As part of the **Bright Spots** project, we piloted our "Your Life, Your Care" survey measuring how well children & young people feel their Local Authority is supporting them, based on what they told us was important to them. 40% of the looked after children in the pilot Local Authority took part and the authority is reviewing areas for improvement as a result of the survey findings. Over the next year we will further test and roll out the survey, working with Local Authorities and children & young people to set out what can be done to ensure a good care journey for looked after children.

Lola★ tells us her story



"I came to England on my own fleeing from religious persecution when I was only 13. I had lovely foster carers and developed a strong bond with them, they're my family. I feel lucky that I was able to stay with them the whole time I was in care – it was a nice time.

I had to leave the placement when I turned 19 and that's when I started facing problems. My social worker hadn't sorted out any accommodation but my foster family let me stay with them for a while. I was facing homelessness. A friend told me to get in touch with Coram Voice. They helped me fight to get a place to live – and it was a fight!

I was still studying and had to move around a lot. It was a rough time but I'm in shared accommodation and am happy where I am for now. I'm looking forward to getting a place of my own!"

Liam★

At age 17 Liam's mother forced him to leave the family home. Being at risk from gangs in the local area, Liam presented himself as homeless to a Local Authority in an area where he felt safe. He was wrongly advised that he needed to return to the area where he grew up and that his Youth Offending Team (YOT) worker should arrange accommodation. His YOT worker secured a hostel place but Liam soon lost this placement due to rent arrears.



When our outreach advocate met Liam he was street homeless, aged 19. He wanted to return to education and get a job. The advocate contacted Liam's responsible Children's Services who refused to help. Liam's advocate referred him to a solicitor whose contact with Children's Services led to Liam being provided with temporary housing, retrospective care leaver status and a Leaving Care worker. Our advocate supported Liam through the Pathway Planning process and helped ensure that he received all his entitlements – including priority needs points to bid for council housing.

Kate★



Kate is 17 and has learning difficulties. She struggles to speak out about what she wants. Her social worker contacted us knowing that an advocate could assist Kate in articulating her wishes about her transition to adult life. At their first meeting her advocate used multiple communication methods to aid Kate's understanding. The advocate helped Kate practice how she could put forward her thoughts about where she would live when she turned 18.

With the support of her advocate, Kate had the confidence to stand against her family's wishes and explained that she wanted to live independently. It was felt Kate didn't have the ability to maintain her own home, so she requested support to learn the required skills.

The advocate supported communication between Kate and her social worker while arrangements were made. It was confirmed that Kate could remain with her foster carer while she improved her independent living skills. Kate later stated that she felt positive about the steps she was taking towards independence and felt she could continue the process without her advocate's support.

To enable us to help more young people like Lola, Liam & Kate, please visit

www.coramvoice.org.uk
to make a donation

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



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 2015-16 we pledge to:

- Provide direct support to at least 3,700 children and young people – including 350 homeless children and young people
- Expand our Bright Spots programme, launching a survey into children's views on what constitutes a good care journey and encouraging all Local Authorities to adopt identified best practices
- Adapt the way our helpline and community advocacy services work in response to the increasing complexity of children and young people's support needs – ensuring that we can provide the best support as quickly and efficiently as possible
- Introduce a suite of online tools to support young people who want to advocate for themselves

Thank you to our supporters

We would like to thank our funders and corporate partners for their vital contributions to our work this year; Capita Group plc, Children England (The Amos Fund), City Bridge Trust, Comic Relief, Emerton-Christie Charity, Fowler, Smith and Jones Trust, Goldman Sachs International, Harford Charitable Trust, Harold Hyam Wingate Foundation, John Laing Charitable Trust, London Legal Support Trust, Michael Cornish Charitable Trust, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Rotary Club of Royal Wootton Bassett Town, Royal Masonic Trust for Girls & Boys - Stepping Stones, Servelec Corelogic, Skylark, The Allan Charitable Trust, The Beatrice Laing Trust, The Drapers' Charitable Fund, The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, The Evan Cornish Foundation, The Francis Crick Institute, The Hadley Trust, The Javon Charitable Trust, The John Apthorp Charity, The Oak Trust, The Sandringham Estate Cottage Horticultural Society Trust, Saracens Solicitors, The United Benefice of Moseley, St. Mary and St. Anne, The Westminster Foundation, The Wixamtree Trust, Waitrose Islington and Zurich Community Trust. 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.