



coram

better chances
for children
since 1739

A fair chance for all
children

Spring Newsletter 2024

Dear Friends,

Every year in the UK courts there are hundreds of thousands of cases involving children, whether through private family law disputes, immigration hearings, the criminal justice system, or through parents and carers trying to secure the rights of those with special educational needs or disabilities.

Pressures on courts and local authorities mean that children and young people often face uncertainty and delays, and many struggle to access free and early legal advice that could help them resolve issues before they reach the courts.

Coram Children's Legal Centre (CCLC), part of the Coram charity group, is the country's leading provider of specialist legal support for children and young people. For over 40 years, CCLC has promoted the rights of children, with its support covering education, discrimination, immigration, asylum, community care and family law.

Every day, the charity fights for all children to have a fair chance in life, providing in-person, phone and online advice to families who could not otherwise access legal support.

CCLC's free service **Child Law Advice** answers legal queries from thousands of families every year and sees around two million annual downloads of its online legal information pages. CCLC provides legal casework advice, assistance and legal representation, including for children and young people needing support through the immigration and asylum process.

The charity also plays a prominent national role in advocating for policy change, successfully securing changes to laws and policies in order to further protect the rights of children and young people. Every child should have a fair chance at life, and we will do our best to ensure they do.

Mark Foster

Head of Fair Chances for Children & Young People



Changing lives, laws and systems

Thanks to the kindness of our supporters, we directly helped over 140,000 children, young people and families last year. In this edition of the Coram newsletter, discover how through changing lives, laws and systems, Coram can give children a fair chance in life.

The long-lasting effects of the Coronavirus pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and pressures on services mean that more and more children and families are falling through the gaps, unable to access the support and



services they need. This is where Coram comes in - we are there to fight for better chances for every child, now and forever.

Coram's Children's Legal Centre helps individual children and young people to access the support they are entitled to and ensure all children have a fair chance to build strong educational foundations. Through our Charter for Children, we are calling for long-term systematic change to create better chances for children now and forever.

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Helping children, young people and families to secure their rights

Every minute of every day there are children across the country who are denied the security, education and opportunity which should be theirs by right. Coram Children's Legal Centre fights to ensure all children have the support and opportunities they need to thrive as the country's leading provider of specialist legal support for children and young people.

Tyler found herself on the verge of homelessness after she left inpatient treatment for her mental health issues. She was supported by Kelly, a Senior Solicitor for CCLC and is now living in a safe and comfortable home. She tells us about how her experiences have given her a passion for supporting young people.

Please tell us about your volunteering work and how you are supporting young people who are experiencing mental health issues?

I was asked by my previous worker in the Adolescent at Risk team at the hospital to talk to other young people who feel 'hopeless' and struggling with their mental health. I have met young people with my old worker to listen, support them and hopefully show them that they can work through things.

I now also train staff, doctors and interview staff at the hospital.

Why is working with young people who are experiencing mental health issues important to you?

Because I know what it feels like to feel sad, lonely and like there is no point. I was in a horrible place and young people listen to each other who have experienced the same.

How have your own experiences helped you with your volunteering?

I can empathise and understand what they are going through.

What assistance did Coram provide to you and what have you managed to secure? How has this left you feeling?

Kelly listened to me and my mum. I was in psychiatric hospital three times and homeless at one point.

I had a placement and whilst I was in hospital lost it; social services stopped paying it. I had to stay in hospital longer as I had nowhere to go.

Kelly has been amazing; helping me with things I don't understand such as my rights and explaining them clearly. She was always there. I have a lovely flat, I'm happy, don't get into trouble and can help other people. I feel more confident.

What advice would you give to a young person who is currently fighting to secure their rights?

To speak to someone who understands the system. Not just your social worker. I had so many social workers who didn't know me and Kelly stayed.

What are you looking forward to in the future?

Being happy, boxing, being with my partner and family. Helping other young people. Being a personal trainer.



Be inspired by children's and young people's voices

The Voices creative writing competition by Coram Voice for children and young people who are in or who have left care is back for 2024. Co-host Claire, a former Voices winner, recently wrote to share her experience and inspire children and young people to take part.

"Being care-experienced will be one of the most challenging things you will ever go through. But it could also be one of the most rewarding. The thoughts that will run through your head, the feelings that will overwhelm you...they are all

brilliant writing inspirations.

The Voices creative writing competition gives care-experienced children and young people the opportunity to have their voices heard and to express their feelings in creative ways. I was like many of you, a nervous young person who has just gone into care and needed an outlet. I entered this competition SEVERAL times, but nothing came out of it. Until 2020.

In 2020, I decided I wasn't going to enter the competition anymore. I gave up. I'd

never been shortlisted, never been able to go to the amazing awards ceremony I'd heard so much about.

My older brother changed my mind. He said to me, "Do it for me. Try one more time." I wasn't going to take part, but then the most devastating thing that could have happened actually happened. He died.

All of a sudden, I didn't have a brother anymore. The one person who truly believed in me, and my potential, was gone. But I wasn't going to let it be in vain. So, I wrote a story, his story, and submitted it.

I didn't hear anything for weeks, thought I'd been unsuccessful again but next thing I knew an email came through saying I'd been shortlisted and invited to the virtual awards ceremony, due to lockdown. So, the day of the event came, third and second place were announced, and then... "The winner of the Upper Secondary age category is Keys by Claire". I won. After five years of entering and not being shortlisted, I won the Voices creative writing competition.

The next year, I became a young judge, which was an incredible experience to actually be able to attend the awards in person. And this year, I'm delighted to have the opportunity to co-host the awards alongside Peter Capaldi.

Winning poems are available to read on the Coram Voice website: shorturl.at/dCNUo

Sheru the Lion, Sheru, age 5

Hi am Sheru

Nice to meet you

How do you do?

I am nearly 6

I am full of tricks

I make everyone happy wherever I be

I love sunshine

I like to glow

I love the winter

And love the snow

My birthday is

on new years day

Lots of presents coming my way

I am good at everything I always work hard

And my teachers say

I am a super STAR!!!

I love my family

They all love me

We love going on travels to cities

And the sea

My favourite colour

Is sparkly blue

If you love me

Then I love you!!!

Sheru's poem was a finalist in the primary category of this year's competition.

Supporting children with SEND to access their educational rights

In 2014 the Children and Families Act introduced the largest education reforms in a generation for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). It was claimed that the reforms would offer simpler, improved and more consistent help for children with SEND. Ten years later, however, local authorities face an unprecedented demand in the face of limited education and local government budgets leading to a dramatic reduction in support for children.

Parents of children with special educational needs are increasingly engaged in protracted and costly disputes with local authorities to ensure their children get access to the education that they need to thrive. The global pandemic and cost-of-living crisis has exacerbated the struggles that these families face.

Our dedicated legal team support and represents families in lodging appeals to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal or to bring claims in the county court if there is a claim of disability discrimination. We also challenge the actions of public bodies to the High Court through Judicial Review.

Qaisar Sheikh, Head of Education Law at Coram Children's Legal Centre, and Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year in Public Law 2022, said,

“It is essential that all children have access to an adequate and suitable education which enhances their opportunities in later life, instils self-confidence, promotes independence and all-round personal development. However, there are far too many vulnerable children who are falling through the gaps in the education system, because they have undiagnosed or unmet special educational needs, are unlawfully excluded and off-rolled, or face bullying and discrimination. At Coram Children's Legal Centre, we stand by such children and work tirelessly to uphold their legal rights and entitlements.”



Celebrating creativity

Kira is a 15 year old GCSE student who fled Ukraine to avoid the ongoing conflict and is now living in the UK as a refugee.

She was recently one of the winners of Coram Shakespeare School Foundation's What You Will competition where children and young people wrote the speeches that Shakespeare "forgot to write". Kira was awarded The World's Mine Oyster Award an award for children with English as a Second language at the Criterion Theatre in London's west end in front of an audience of supporters and celebrities including Alfred Enoch (Harry Potter), Ben Willbond (Ghosts) and John Heffernan (The Crown).

It was a longstanding love of Romeo and Juliet that inspired Kira's writing: "I've had the opportunity to meet the famous Verona Passionist many times, but it was only now that I had the opportunity to experience the characters of Romeo and Juliet more deeply.

And by examining them more, Kira discovered hidden depths that led to



a drive to discover more about Juliet: "Juliet was shown in an interesting light, combining the qualities of strength, stubbornness, and contrasting vulnerability with her love for Romeo."

Tybalt's death was a powerful moment, but Juliet's reaction, for me personally, was an arrow through the heart. I unbearably wanted an act of revenge for Tybalt."

And Kira's piece was a reminder that although they are the leads in the play, it's important to remember that age plays a significant factor in the tragic events that unfold. "This tense scene seemed like a grand opportunity to show Juliet as a teenager who, due to her lack of education, can make rash but also fatal decisions that she will regret afterwards. Or won't she?"

To learn more about Coram Shakespeare Schools Foundation, visit www.shakespeareschools.org

The Charter for Children, a call for change for the next generation

Too many young lives are blighted by poverty. Every day, there are children and young people who are not getting the love, security, education and opportunity they need to thrive. The pandemic and cost of living crisis have worsened existing trends, and we need to turn the tide.

In December we launched our Charter for Children in Parliament calling for a 'triple key' of financial commitments from government to give children and young people a fair financial settlement. The Charter was launched in the House of Commons at an event co-hosted by former children's minister Edward Timpson MP and Baroness Floella Benjamin and was well attended by MPs, Peers, children's organisations and Coram staff.

The Charter calls for a realignment of the social contract between society and its children and young people, giving them the same measure of economic security afforded to older citizens through the pensions triple lock, and sets out a route map for change for the coming decade and beyond.

Opening the event, Edward Timpson commended the work that had gone



into producing the Charter and argued that its core demands should be endorsed across the political spectrum.

Baroness Benjamin expressed pride in being a patron of Coram and a supporter of the Charter, believing it will prove its value by making an impact over the coming years: "This Charter will change society, change the world and make a difference. There is a tsunami of worries coming at children right now. We have to give them happiness and hope, and this Charter does that."

What does the Charter ask for?

A triple key to unlock the future

A fair share

... of the nation's resources so all children and young people can develop skills for the future, built on:

- **A guarantee** that in school and early education spending per-pupil rises in line with the size of the economy;
- **Reform of childcare**, implementing current commitments and enabling all children to access high quality early education targeting areas of shortage;
- **Fair and timely** access to high quality and consistent special educational needs (SEND) and mental health support no matter where.

A secure future

Ensuring all children have a loving home, with the stability, resources and support they need to be healthy and happy:

- **Automatic increase** in child-related benefits in line with earnings or prices, whichever is higher;
- **Extension** of free school meals as a minimum to all primary school children and all secondary pupils on Universal Credit;

You can find full details of the Charter for Children including our costings at coram.org.uk/charter



- **Focus on what matters most for children** – timely decisions, making them safe and settled where they live, and enjoying trusting relationships;

An equal chance

Irrespective of age or background children and young people deserve access to justice and to have their voice heard:

- Raising the **Early Years Pupil Premium** so it matches the per-hour rate of the Pupil Premium for school-aged children;
- Benefits for young people leaving care to match those paid to those over 25, **all children** in any family **to be eligible** for receipt of benefits, and no child left without recourse to public funds;
- Free **legal advice** and representation for all children where it is needed.

Coram's School Exclusions Hub - a vital lifeline to families facing exclusion

Last year there was a concerning increase in school exclusions with 6,495 children permanently excluded and 578,280 suspended. With schools facing growing pressures and shrinking resources this number is only set to rise. What does exclusion mean for a young person? It's a loss of opportunity. It's potential cut short.

Coram has launched the UK's largest online resource covering every aspect of school exclusions. The hub explains the law on school exclusion and includes step-by-step guides on topics relating to exclusions.

The school exclusions hub gives professionals, charities, and community organisations working with families and young people the vital information they need to understand the exclusion process and challenge exclusion.

We also have a specialist team of lawyers who take on school exclusion cases when they have been deemed unlawful.

Sabrina Simpson is a CCLC solicitor who specialises in school exclusions. She speaks about her role:



What is your role?

“There is no legal aid for school exclusions and unfortunately, there are many school exclusions which are unfair, discriminatory and unlawful.

I am the Supervisory Solicitor of the School Exclusion Clinic. The School Exclusion Clinic is a legal service which provides free representation to children permanently excluded from school. This representation is made possible by dedicated pro bono lawyers who are trained in challenging school exclusions.”

What's the best thing about your job?

“I feel a great sense of purpose in my role. I get to support vulnerable and disadvantaged children and I'm in the position to make a life changing difference for children excluded from school.

If a child stays in school, supported and included, instead of excluded, that child has a fair chance to achieve their full potential in education. Legal representation also means that an excluded child has a fair chance of being heard. Research shows that a disproportionate number of children excluded from school have special needs. After exclusion they are at serious risk of child criminal exploitation and unemployment. Therefore, legal representation for school exclusions is incredibly valuable,

not just for the child, but for wider society too.

The lack of legal aid available for young people facing exclusion is deeply problematic but it's something we're working to change. My client was granted permission to challenge the lack of legal aid in school exclusions at a high court, judicial review hearing. This is a momentous case and if we win at the final hearing, this case has the potential to reintroduce legal aid for the second stage of school exclusion hearings (Independent Review Panels).

We are calling for legal aid to be offered to young people going through the second stage of a school exclusion in cases where discrimination could be argued. We are also calling for greater clarity on when legal aid can be offered for school exclusions.”





The first Charter Lunch organised by the Old Coram Association.

An insight into the former Old Coram Association

There has been an unprecedented interest in the story and history of the Old Coram Association (OCA) since it closed its doors eighteen months ago. John Caldicott, a former Foundling Hospital pupil, Coram governor and Hon. Secretary of the OCA told us more:

“The OCA was formed in 1947 with collaboration between the governing body of The Thomas Coram Foundation for Children (The Foundling Hospital), now known as Coram, and ‘old boys and girls’, now known as former pupils. It was set up with the aims of helping former pupils meet up

events, keep in touch and help each other, produce a regular newsletter and further the interests of Coram. Membership of the OCA was restricted to boys and girls educated at the Thomas Coram School and Governors and staff of the Foundation.

The first ever reunion of former pupils of the Foundation took place in May of 1946, and was such a success that it was decided to make the reunion an annual event. At the following reunion held in Berkhamsted in May 1947, with almost 500 former pupils of the Foundling Hospital present, the inauguration of OCA took place.

The formation of the OCA is an important part of the development of the aftercare of young people leaving the safety of the foundation. Former pupils could meet and found it easier to keep in contact with each other sharing their post-school experiences. The foundation appointed a welfare officer to help former pupils. No longer were girls being put into domestic service or the boys serving in the military. These young people were instead being found employment in offices, factories and serving apprenticeships with the Foundation helping them to manage their lives as independent individuals; the precursor of Coram’s services for young people leaving care today.

In the early days, management of the association was dominated by foundation staff, with the roles of President, Committee Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and Editor of the newsletter, being held by governors of the Foundation. Within a couple of years, former pupils held all these roles, and the OCA was completely independent.

Perhaps it is not surprising that with the Second World War having ended just two years earlier, OCA members should finance a book of remembrance with the names of those who lost their lives. The Foundation governors readily agreed the Book should be on display in the Berkhamsted School Chapel.

Something very close to the hearts of former pupils was the question of

birth certificates. Children taken into the Foundling Hospital were given new names to create a new identity and a new start in life. However, they did not have an automatic right to a birth certificate. The OCA brought this matter to the attention of the governors who, after overcoming legal aspects, agreed that former pupils were able to obtain a legal shortened form of birth certificate.

Over its seventy-five-year history the OCA has endeavoured to support former pupils and Coram both practically and financially. Annual events included a Charter Day lunch held on the nearest Saturday to 17 October, the date of the signing of the Royal Charter in 1739 establishing the Foundling Hospital, and a family Christmas Carol Service.

Having been in the care of Coram it is natural that former pupils should take great interest in, and support Coram’s work with young people today whose lives they see as being far more difficult that when they were children.”



Upcoming challenge events

Coram has lots of exciting events coming up in 2024, so why not sign up for a running, cycling or swimming challenge and help create better chances for children?

For the first time, we are offering our supporters the opportunity to take on the **Yorkshire Three Peaks Challenge**! The one-day trek on 13 July is a fantastic way to see the beautiful Yorkshire Dales and raise money for Coram. Find out more at coram.org.uk/event/yorkshire-three-peaks

Or join us at the **Royal Parks Half Marathon** on 10 October. The route is through four of London's most beautiful Royal Parks, and is central London's first half marathon. Sign up and see why it is one of London's most loved running events!



If you're looking for something different, you can browse all of Coram's challenge events by scanning the QR code or email challengeyourself@coram.org.uk to find out more.



Keep up to date through our channels:

Website: coram.org.uk
X: @Coram

Facebook: @Coramsince1739

Instagram [Coram.uk](https://www.instagram.com/Coram.uk)

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