

Coram-i: insight, innovation and impact

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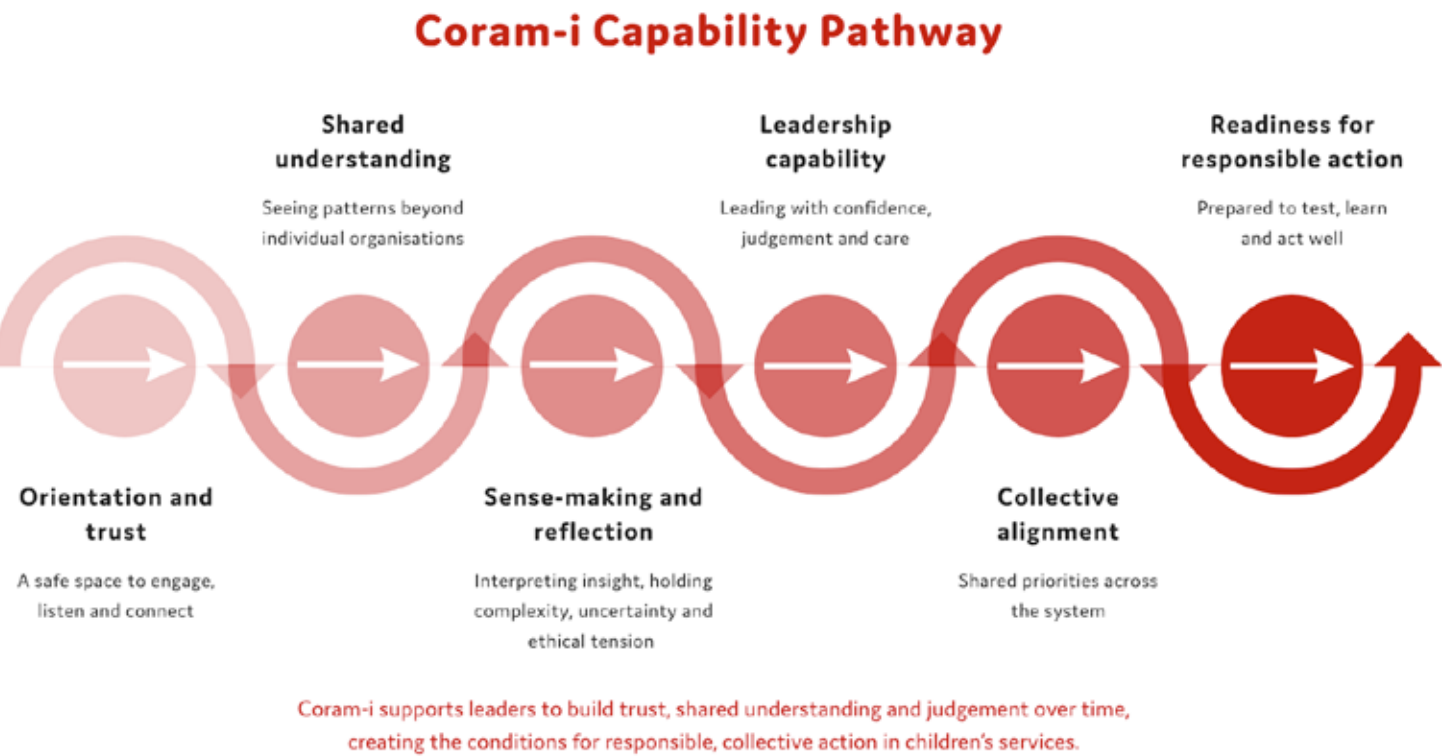
The period from April 2025 to March 2026 marked a year of transition for Coram-i. Rather than driving a large programme of new delivery, this was a year intentionally shaped around listening, convening and sensemaking – creating space to understand how children’s services are changing, where risks and opportunities are emerging, and how collective responses might be shaped with care and intent.

The insights shared throughout this edition of *Collective Insights* reflect that process. They have been surfaced through dialogue across local authorities, charities, academic partners, practitioners, young people and responsible organisations beyond the sector. Together, they offer a picture of a system under pressure, but also one rich in expertise, values and commitment to doing better by children and families.

Coram-i’s role in a shifting ecosystem

Coram-i sits within the Coram Institute for Children as a bridge between research, lived experience and practice. Our role is not to prescribe solutions, but to **create the conditions for better questions to be asked**, to convene people who do not often share the same space, and to translate insight into forms that can inform action.

During this transitional year, that role became clearer. As children’s services confront sustained demand, workforce strain, market instability and fastmoving technological change, there is a growing need for sectorled spaces that are neutral, reflective and grounded in children’s lived experience. Coram-i sought to provide those spaces – supporting learning across organisational boundaries and helping to surface patterns that are difficult to see from within any single authority or discipline.



What the year surfaced

Across Coram-i events, roundtables and leadership development activity, several themes consistently came into focus – many of which are explored in depth elsewhere in this publication.

Digital practice and AI emerged as a dominant area of curiosity and concern. Conversations repeatedly highlighted uneven readiness across organisations, gaps in workforce confidence, and the risk of tools entering practice faster than governance, ethics or evaluation frameworks can keep up. At the same time, there was strong interest in approaches that could reduce administrative burden, improve data quality and strengthen children’s participation – provided these are used responsibly and transparently.

Placement sufficiency and stability surfaced as a deeply structural challenge. Roundtable discussions reinforced that this is not simply a matter of supply, but of incentives, data, workforce capacity and crossagency accountability. Participants consistently emphasised the need for better collective understanding of need, earlier intervention, and models that reward stability rather than crisis response.

Workforce confidence and capability cut across all discussions. Whether talking about digital change, market pressures or leadership, contributors highlighted the psychological and practical demands placed on practitioners and managers, and the importance of creating environments that support learning, experimentation and professional judgement.

Children’s voice in data and systems remained a central thread. Insights from young people, reflected in several case studies in this publication, reinforced the need for systems that support safety without undermining dignity, trust or agency.

Importantly, these themes did not emerge as abstract policy debates. They were grounded in lived experience and operational reality, shaped by those working closest to children and families.

Investing in the conditions for innovation

Alongside convening, Coram-i focused on strengthening the conditions that make responsible innovation possible. The **Innovation Leadership Programme**, delivered in partnership with Magnetic, supported middle and senior leaders to build confidence in leading change amid uncertainty. Rather than focusing on tools or techniques alone, the programme emphasised psychological safety, collaboration and reflective leadership – recognising that innovation in children’s services is as much a relational and cultural challenge as a technical one.

The launch of the **Digital Practice** newsletter similarly reflected a commitment to supporting shared learning. Designed as a practicefocused space for insight on data, technology and AI, it aims to inform, question and invite dialogue – rather than promote particular solutions.

These activities are best understood not as interventions in their own right, but as **infrastructure for learning**: helping the sector build a shared language, surface ethical questions early, and reduce duplication by learning together.

From insight to collective direction

The purpose of convening and reflection is not to stand still. Building on the insights gathered during 2025–26, Coram-i’s focus for the year ahead aligns closely with the themes explored throughout *Collective Insights*.

In 2026–27, activity will increasingly centre on two interconnected areas: **digital practice for children’s services**, and **placement sufficiency and market innovation**. The intention is to move carefully from exploration toward codesign, testing and shared learning – supporting sectorled approaches that are ethical, evidenceinformed and grounded in real practice.

This next phase will continue to prioritise children’s lived experience, workforce readiness and collective responsibility. Not because innovation is an end in itself, but because the challenges facing children’s services demand thoughtful collaboration, honesty about risk, and commitment to learning together.

A collective endeavour

The contributions in this publication make clear that meaningful change in children’s social care does not come from technology alone, nor from any single organisation. It emerges from sustained dialogue, shared evidence, and the willingness to hold complexity rather than rush to simple answers. Coram-i’s role in this work is to support that collective endeavour – helping the sector pause, reflect and move forward with clarity, care and intent.

