



**coram clc**  
**Children's Legal Centre**



## **Coram Children's Legal Centre**

Celebrating 40 Years



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The test of a civilised society  
is the way it treats its children.

**Nelson Mandela**



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## Foreword

Every year in the United Kingdom courts there are hundreds of thousands of cases involving children. Children stand at the centre of private family law disputes between adult family members or may be party to public law care proceedings. Separated children and those in families trying to secure their future and safety in the UK are subject to immigration hearings. Some are caught up in the criminal justice system and parents and carers of those with special education needs and disabilities are active in seeking to secure their right to appropriate education through the Tribunal.

Every week the pressures on the courts and local authorities mean that there are children and young people who face uncertainty and delays. Thousands more children and their carers struggle to access free and early legal advice that could help them resolve issues before it reaches the court.

The provision for disabled children in the UK is under strain and young people who are homeless struggle to achieve assessment for their needs whilst those leaving care face a postcode lottery in terms of support.

Every day around the world, children are subject to violence or other forms of abuse, to poverty, neglect, to lack of education and health care to which they are entitled. Millions of people are displaced with migrant children facing severe hardship, perilous journeys and many challenges to find the security they need for their future.

These are long standing, age-old concerns at the heart of Coram Children's Legal Centre's work and within a sector which struggles to meet demand in the face of great need, particularly at a time of legal aid and funding constraints.

Now is the time for a step change in the legal support of our young citizens. The impacts of the pandemic have fallen disproportionately on their shoulders and on particular disadvantaged communities, accentuating pre-existing trends and bringing mental health and wellbeing to the top of the agenda.

This is the first digital generation facing the disjuncture between the benefits of technology for social connection and learning and the risks it creates by the inappropriate sharing of

personal data and the pressures of living life in public view.

It is in this context that we mark the achievement of Coram Children's Legal Centre in championing children's rights and access to justice for 40 years and rededicate ourselves to sustaining and increasing that impact for the next generation. Thanks, and appreciation go to our staff, volunteers, partners, supporters and all those who work to uphold and advance the rights of children.

*Carol Homden Celia Dawson*

Dr Carol Homden CBE,  
Group Chief Executive



Her Honour Judge Celia Dawson,  
Chair of Trustees, Coram  
Children's Legal Centre



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We are paying a great deal more attention to what children are saying these days, and - to a large extent - that is owing to the efforts of Coram Children's Legal Centre, because you took up all sorts of cases which other people weren't taking. The biggest example that I can think of is schools exclusions, where nobody had really thought of it from the child's point of view and the damage that school exclusion does. The complete lack of due process in excluding children from schools - that is something you took forward and have changed the system for the better.

The Rt. Hon. Baroness Hale of Richmond DBE



# Championing Children's Rights for 40 years

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We shall not rest until every child can access their rights in accordance with the UN Convention.



oldest children's charity and has been supporting vulnerable children for over 280 years. Coram's long history of providing practical support to large numbers of children, coupled with the Coram Children's Legal Centre rights-based approach, has enabled the Centre to expand its reach both nationally and internationally.

Today Coram Children's Legal Centre (CCLC) is an award-winning independent children's rights charity, providing free legal information, advice and representation to children, young people, families, carers and professionals in immigration, community care, education, and family law, as well as training and practice development, policy leadership, and research and consultancy on children's rights in the UK and internationally.

With tens of thousands making legal enquiries and two million downloads of legal information, Coram Children's Legal Centre works to support the network of statutory, voluntary and legal organisations to extend access to justice and to build capacity through training and resources in education, community care, family and immigration law.

Coram Children's Legal Centre was chosen as one of two **Charity of the Year** partners (2021-23) for Baker McKenzie, the world's largest law firm.

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At Baker McKenzie we are thrilled to support Coram Children's Legal Centre, both as our London Charity Partner and through our pro bono work for their Children's Nationality Project. The work which CCLC has been doing for forty years is truly life changing for children across the UK and we are extremely proud to support them in their mission. Happy birthday CCLC!

Staś Kuźmierkiewicz, Senior Pro Bono Associate at Baker Mckenzie.

## Awards

The **Sigrid Rausing Foundation** recognised Professor Dame Carolyn Hamilton with their **Inspirational Leadership Award**. (2005)

CCLC received the **International Peace Award from the Gandhi Foundation** for its work in establishing the Girls Support Centre in Tajikistan. (2009)

Noel Arnold, Director of the CCLC Legal Practice, won the **Legal Aid Practitioners Group's Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year** award in the children's rights category. (2015)

**Best Public Sector Project at the Big Chip Awards** recognising creativity and excellence in digital media for First4Adoption's *First Steps* e-learning resource. (2015)

**Law Works Award** for CCLC's work in Children's Pro Bono Legal Service with law firms Allen and Overy and DLA Piper also winning the CSR Innovation award for the specialist legal clinic assisting children of immigrant families. (2015 & 2016)

Professor Carolyn Hamilton was made **Dame Commander of the British Empire (DBE)** for Services to Children's Rights and Education in the Queen's Birthday Honours List. (2017)

Solicitor Sophie Freeman won the Social Welfare category in the **Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year Awards**. (2018)

Young Citizens, Coram's young ambassador programme for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, were awarded the **Diana Award** for their outstanding contribution to society. (2019)

CCLC awarded **Centre of Excellence** status by the London Legal Support Trust. (2019)

Qaisar Sheikh, Head of Education Law at CCLC, was ranked in **Band 1 of Chambers and Partners in the category of Education Law**; Senior Solicitor in community care, Marian Shaughnessy was also ranked in Chambers and Partners for her education work. (2021)

Coram Children's Legal Centre was shortlisted in the **Excellence in Access to Justice category in the Law Society Awards** recognising legal teams that go above and beyond to provide fair and equal access to those most at risk of being excluded from our legal system. (2021)

Shortlisted by LawWorks for their **Pro Bono Awards** in the Best New Pro Bono Activity category for our project with Linklater's. (2021)



Out of 125 million children born in 1978, 10 to 15 million would die before reaching their first birthday.

Address by Estefania Aldaba-Lim, Assistant General Secretary, United Nations, 1979

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) designated 1979 the International Year of the Child to mark the 20th anniversary of the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child and draw attention to problems such as malnutrition and lack of access to education affecting children throughout the world.

The main response in the United Kingdom was the creation of what was to become Coram Children's Legal Centre. Since our establishment in 1981, we have been dedicated to using the law to promote and uphold the rights of vulnerable children. This began with legal advice, information policy development featuring the publication of the journal *ChildRight* and the progressive development of direct services. In 2011, we became part of the Coram Group of children's charities to further this mission.

Established by Thomas Coram as The Foundling Hospital in 1739, Coram is the UK's



# Our history

**1981**  
Following the International Year of the Child, the Children's Legal Centre (CCLC) was registered as a charity with the primary purpose of promoting the rights of the child.



**1986**  
We were at the forefront of advocating for the abolition of corporal punishment in British state schools and this was achieved in 1986.

**1989**  
The Children Act 1989 was enacted which established the legislative framework for the current child protection system in England and Wales.

**1997**  
The Education Law and Advocacy Unit was established providing legal representation and advice to children and parents.

**1997**  
The International department, today known as Coram International, was established with Graca Machel, the former UN expert on the impact of armed conflict on children.

**1999**  
The Access to Justice Act 1999 permitted organisations with legally qualified staff, to obtain legal services contracts changing the nature of our work.

**2005**  
Professor Dame Carolyn Hamilton, then Director, CCLC, was awarded the prize for Inspirational Leadership by the Sigrid Rausing Trust. The prize money was used to establish the Children's Rights Centres in Tajikistan and Moldova.



**2012**  
We marked 10 years of the Migrant Children's Project with the publication of the toolkit '*Seeking support – a guide to the rights and entitlements of separated children*'.

**2012**  
The Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment Act 2012 introduced funding cuts to legal aid.

**2015**  
Our research on *Legal protection from Violence: Analysis of Domestic Laws relating to Violence Against Children in ASEAN States* was chosen as one of the 'top 12' pieces in the Best of UNICEF Research 2015.

**2015**  
Noel Arnold, then Director of Legal Practice CCLC, won the prestigious Legal Aid Practitioners Group's Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year award in the children's rights category.



**2017**  
*Respected & Protected* exhibition in the Central Family Court.

**2017**  
Professor Carolyn Hamilton was granted the award of Dame Commander of the British Empire (DBE) for Services to Children's Rights and Education in the 2017 Queen's Birthday Honours List.

**2020**  
We published our *Call for Change*, our manifesto for policy makers and sector professionals setting out the changes that need to happen to make children's rights and welfare a reality.



**2020**  
Publication of *Children Left Out: Securing Children's Rights To Stay In The UK Beyond Brexit* championed the rights of children in the EU Settlement Scheme, the largest ever system of its kind in the UK, and influenced public, political and parliamentary debate.

1979

**1982**  
The free advice service today known as the Child Law Advice Service, was established to provide advice on child law to adults and children and the first major report, *Locked up in care*, analysed the use of secure accommodation in the care system.



**1984**  
Our *Congress 84* was attended by 250 representatives from 100 young people's organisations, advancing specific and practical proposals for changes in legislation and policy to benefit children and young people.

**1991**  
The UK ratified the United Convention on the Rights of the Child which is a human rights treaty that grants all children and young people a comprehensive set of rights.

**2004**  
CCLC was awarded funding from the Nuffield Foundation, together with the National Children's Bureau and the Children's Commissioner to provide 'child impact statements' scrutinising new proposed legislation to ensure that any potential violations of children's rights are brought to the attention of policy makers and the drafters.

**2004**  
Creation of the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England.

**2009**  
Coram International, in partnership with the Tajik Government, established the Girls' Support Service in Tajikistan for sexually abused, trafficked or exploited girls, accompanied by a Presidential Decree leading to the end of administrative detention for girls. CCLC was awarded the Gandhi Foundation International Peace Award for this initiative.

**2011**  
The Children's Legal Centre amalgamated with Coram to form Coram Children's Legal Centre based at the Coram campus in Brunswick Square, London launched with a visit by HRH The Duke of Gloucester.



**2013**  
First4Adoption, the national information gateway for people interested in adopting a child in England, was launched and delivered for five years, winning the Public Sector Digital Service of the Year in 2015.

**2014**  
Coram International's Final Evaluation of UNICEF's Justice for Children Project in Montenegro is recognised as one of the 'best UNICEF evaluations' for 2014.

**2014**  
The Children and Families Act 2014 improves services for vulnerable children and aims to support strong families. It reinforced wider reforms and the importance of early permanence planning.

**2018**  
Her Majesty The Queen opened our new centre dedicated to children named in her honour.



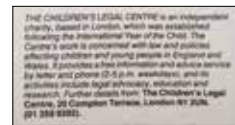
**2018**  
*Rights without Remedies* reported on the impact of 2013 legal aid cuts on children's access to justice. We produced *Unfair Results: pupil and parent views on school exclusion* which uncovered a worrying lack of support for excluded children and their families.

**2021**  
Coram International is commissioned by UNICEF to develop a global guide on legislative responses to online child sexual exploitation.

**2021**  
The 40th anniversary is marked with a debate on championing children's rights with The Rt. Hon. Sir Andrew McFarlane, Children's Commissioner Rachel de Souza, and a contribution from The Rt. Hon. Baroness Hale of Richmond informing our policy report for 2022.



# Access to legal advice and support



Ensuring access to free legal advice has been at the heart of Coram Children's Legal Centre's work benefitting 10.5 million users in the last decade alone.

## Child Law Advice

Since the early 1980s the Child Law Advice Service has provided free legal advice for children, young people and those caring for them on child, family, and education law. We help enquirers on family law issues such as children's living and contact arrangements as well as parental responsibility. In 1996, we advised 500 clients each month; today the free Child Law Advice Service supports and assists nearly 200,000 clients each month through online information, telephone and email.

The demand for the service step-changed in 2013 following the introduction of The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO), which effected the withdrawal of legal aid in private family cases unless they involved domestic abuse or child abuse.

The volume of unique callers to the Child Law Advice Line increased 74% in the year following the introduction of Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, from 23,017 in 2013 to 40,047 in 2014.

**By 2021, the number of unique callers had increased to 97,262.**

Coram Children's Legal Centre's Child Law Advice Service remains distinct in England for the provision of free legally assured advice across child, family and education law.

The service is made possible by the Department for Education and evaluation shows that 98% of our surveyed service users felt more confident dealing with their issue having spoken with an adviser.

Digital resources now provide two million downloads of specialist legal information per year.

Our how-to-guides and website are a first point of call for legal information, supported by email and phone advice for more complex issues

Volunteers add capacity to the Child Law Advice Service. Last year 22 university law students helped 9,877 users and also gained skills for their future careers. A study of the social return on investment showed a **return of £115 for every £1 spent.**<sup>1</sup>

## Advancing children's access and understanding

### At What Age Can I?

was first published in 1984 as a guide to age based legislation setting out at what age children and young people can do certain activities. It remains one of the most popular resources on our website [www.lawstuff.org.uk](http://www.lawstuff.org.uk).

### LawStuff

Produced by a young editor, the free advice service for children and young people, *LawStuff*, provides mobile first information about their legal rights and reaches 185,000 unique users per annum. Children and young people can request advice on their individual circumstances via telephone or email.

## Legal advice and information on the rights of migrant children

Since our early work on asylum and children we have sought to be an open and accessible source of legal advice on the rights of children affected by immigration control. We have played a crucial role in delivering legal advice not just on asylum, nationality and immigration law, but also on how immigration status intersects with other areas of children's lives including access to all stages of education, support, housing and healthcare.

We have played a pivotal role in providing legal guidance to the children's workforce since 2004, including publishing five editions of the guide, *Seeking Support: A guide to the rights of separated children*.

We also deliver legal education workshops to children, young people and families on their rights or particular aspects of the law (see pp. 18-19).

## Securing futures through the EU settlement scheme

Between 2019 and 2021 we ran a ground-breaking project for children in care and care leavers eligible to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme, through which the service supported over 380 children and young people to secure their futures in the UK after Brexit.

<sup>1</sup> Halo Evaluation Report, 2019



# 8,000

Our dedicated immigration legal advice line has dealt with over 8,000 queries related to migrant children's rights, with over 2,000 beneficiaries.



Today, our free Child Law Advice Service supports and assists nearly 200,000 clients a month via telephone and email as well as through online information pages.

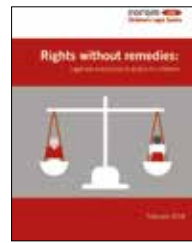
# “

I wanted to get in touch and say thank you to your team. I am a full time working single mum. When I contacted the Child Law Advice Service I was very nervous about the case going to court and your staff were very sympathetic and helpful. I can't thank your charity enough for the support and advice that has been offered. I felt like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders.

Kate, CCLC client



# Legal Aid in Action



Without legal aid funding for advice or representation, **children can be left without a home**, without legal status, excluded from education and separated from their family.

Coram Children's Legal Centre has worked to promote access to justice for children and young people and to protect their rights in line with the UNCRC through legal aid representation, strategic litigation, outreach advice and innovative pro bono models to reach those excluded from legal aid.

The legal aid system, introduced in 1949, was based on the belief that every person should have equal access to and protection under the law, regardless of financial position or status. It was designed to ensure 'equality of arms' before the law.

However, the types of cases in scope of legal aid have been progressively narrowed, threatening children's and young people's access to justice.

## Ensuring representation for those in need and advancing legal practice

Our Legal Practice Unit began as a small team of case workers, predominantly providing representation on education. Today our legal practice is LEXCEL accredited and staffed with solicitors regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority, trainee solicitors and paralegals, providing advice and representation to around 1,000 clients a year.



It is estimated that as many as 15,000 children per year were left without access to free legal advice when the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act was introduced in 2013.<sup>2</sup>

## 2019

The Legal Aid for Separated Children Order 2019 brought non-asylum immigration and citizenship matters into the scope of legal aid for separated children most of whom are in care. We were at the forefront of engagement with government on this issue.

We hold legal aid contracts in immigration and asylum, education, community care, family and public law and conduct expert casework, often on the most complex cases. We bring judicial reviews to hold government to account for its decisions and pursuing appeals at all levels of the courts. With our child-centred approach and focus on getting the most comprehensive and permanent resolution for children's legal problems we:

- Obtain refugee status, leave to remain and citizenship for migrant children and young people;
- Ensure children in care and care leavers receive the full range of local authority support they are entitled to;
- Secure appropriate educational provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities;
- Ensure children's best interests are served and their voices are heard through family law proceedings.

**Coram Children's Legal Centre is the longest standing provider of the Legal Aid Agency's CLA Education Law contract for remote advice and remains one of only two national providers delivering legal services across England and Wales.**

## Championing access

When the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO) was introduced in April 2013, at least 6,000 child claimants a year were left without access to free legal advice and representation in many areas of civil law. Some estimates are as high as 15,000 and even more, since official figures did not count children within families.

Coram's *Rights without Remedies: Legal Aid and Access to Justice for Children* report in 2018 found that – over the first five years – the removal of most of family, immigration and education law from the scope of legal aid caused thousands of miscarriages of justice that have

led to the breakup of families, the costly and often unlawful exclusion of children from education, and widespread destitution and exploitation among migrant families. The report urged the government to examine the impact on children's rights of the legal aid changes, and argued that no child should be left without access to justice.

Significantly, Immigration Legal Aid was reintroduced for children in October 2020, meaning that separated children, who are mostly in care, can access free legal aid representation in their application to remain in the UK or to become British. Coram Children's Legal Centre was at the forefront of campaigning for change, having consistently highlighted the negative impact of the government's prior removal of legal aid for this particularly vulnerable group.

## International progress

Coram International has grown to be a leading provider of consultancy services in the design and implementation of legal aid programmes. Our first legal aid project took place between 2005 and 2009, when we used our award from the Sigrid Rausing Trust to establish two legal aid centres, one in Tajikistan and one in Moldova. The two centres, which were located within the Non-Governmental Organisation sector (NGO), were staffed by qualified national lawyers and paralegals and provided free legal information, advice and representation on a range of child rights issues.

Since then, our team has worked alongside UN organisations, the Inter-American development Bank, Governments, NGOs, community groups and, most importantly, children, to design and implement innovative legal aid models for children to enable them to access legal information, advice and representation in criminal and civil cases. Our work has included the design of a national legal aid programme in Belize, as well as community-based legal aid centres in Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zanzibar.



From international conventions flowing through to a myriad of domestic legislation, common law, policy and practice, children's rights in the United Kingdom are tied up in a complex legal system. Navigating that system to ensure that children's rights are protected and upheld and their best interests and voices are at the forefront of decisions that affect their everyday lives, is the work of our expert lawyers within the legal practice unit. We are dedicated to securing access to justice for all and to the principles on which the legal aid system was founded.

Rosalyn Akar Grams, Managing Director of Legal Practice and Children's Rights



Rosalyn Akar Grams

## Supporting legal aid in Belize

Funded by the Inter-American Development Bank, in 2019, our international lawyers and economist worked with the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation in Belize to assess the demand for legal aid over the next five years and map existing legal aid services. The purpose of the project was to develop a set of 'options' for reform to respond to the demand for legal aid through the delivery of a range of legal services. Following extensive consultation, our team prepared a business plan outlining the cost of establishing legal aid services to meet this need, as well as an implementation plan for a national two-year pilot of a legal aid programme targeting children. Our recommendations for reform are in the process of implementation, including the establishment of an online legal information portal for children, which was integrated by Belize's Child Justice Steering Committee into the national Child Justice Action Plan 2020-2025.



<sup>1</sup> Extract from LEXCEL report 2020

<sup>2</sup> Figures supplied to JustRights by Ministry of Justice, 2017



# The rights of children where the State is involved in their care

## Family and Community Care Law



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The weight of evidence from both research and submissions suggests that too often the voices of children go unheard in the court process or are muted in various ways.<sup>1</sup>

In 1987, Coram Children's Legal Centre published a manifesto in the lead up to the general election. The proposals aimed to give children and young people greater rights to participate in society. In the manifesto, we advocated for young people to have the right

to participate in legal action on their own behalf. Two years later, this was partly reflected in the new Children Act 1989: The Act legislates that all children in public law care proceedings are automatically a party to proceedings, with the result that they can be legally represented, and in private law cases, the court has discretion to make a child party to proceedings.

In the late 1990s, we established the Family and Child Unit, to provide legal representation in the area of family, child and community care law. Initially, the unit took on cases involving looked-after children and former-looked after children. Today our growing community care team, based in London and Colchester, remain particularly well-known for taking on complex cases involving care leavers' transition to adulthood, ensuring that local authorities are meeting their statutory obligations to this vulnerable group of young people.

Working collaboratively with our Migrant Children's Project we are recognised in the sector for having also developed a specialism in the community care and broader public law rights of migrant children. This includes bringing challenges when a migrant's child's age is not accepted. We also provide expert legal support to children and young people in care entering and leaving young offenders institutions to ensure they have the full support they are entitled to as they reintegrate into society.

Over time, our family law solicitors have taken on: private family law cases especially those involving vulnerable families such as where domestic abuse is involved; pre-proceedings cases where the local authority is considering commencing care proceedings; full care proceedings cases representing mostly children, instructed by the Children's Guardian; and where appropriate separately representing children, for example, those facing Deprivation of Liberty orders.

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I have worked for the Colchester and Tendring Youth Service for over 10 years, and I would not have been able to do my job to support the young people I work with without the support, guidance and excellent work from the team at Coram Children's Legal Centre.

Claire Hughes, Housing and Homeless Caseworker.

### Campaigning for change

Published in May 1982, our first major report analysed the use of secure accommodation in the child care system. *Locked Up In Care* contended that the restriction of liberty of looked-after children solely on the basis of an administrative decision, by officers of the local authority and without recourse to any form of judicial review or appeal, was in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Government subsequently acknowledged that Britain might be in breach of the European Convention in relation of the use of secure accommodation and included legislation to provide safeguards in the Criminal Justice Act 1982.

Since our inception, we have advocated for children to be able to participate in decision-making processes which affect them in accordance with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 1984, we surveyed 63 local authorities and discovered that only 15 were in the practice of inviting looked-after children to review meetings<sup>3</sup>. This became a key ask in our 1987 children's manifesto.

In 1997, we initiated a specialist project, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, to examine the rights of children in child contact cases. This involved setting up an advice line where legal advice on child contact was provided, and conducting a survey to analyse the problems experienced by those involved in such disputes.

The subsequent report we published concluded that in only 16 out of 111 cases heard by the courts was it felt that children's wishes were made known in full, and that in 73 cases they were not reported to the court at all<sup>4</sup>.

Working with Coram Voice and CoramBAAF, Coram Children's Legal Centre continues its work to inform policy including the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

At the end of March 2020<sup>2</sup>, there were:

- **389,260** children on a child in need plan
- **51,510** children on child protection plans
- **80,080** children who are looked-after

1. *Assessing Risk of Harm to Children and Parents in Private Law Children Cases*, Ministry of Justice.  
2. *Characteristics of children in need*, gov.uk, 2020  
3. *It's my life not theirs*, Children's Legal Centre, 1984  
4. *Report on the Children's Legal Centre Contact Dispute Line*, Carolyn Hamilton, 2000  
5. *Justice data, courts data, family court*, 2020  
6. *Children's Commissioner State of the Nation Report* 2015



Client, Lucy, with Kelly Everett, Senior Solicitor

### Lucy's Story

"I had a lot of childhood trauma, I ended up in a very uncomfortable place with children's social care, and Coram helped me with all of my issues and to get the outcome that I needed.

Kelly helped me with misinformation and gave me the confidence that I needed to stand my ground. She gave me reassurance that what I was asking for wasn't unreasonable. Feeling safe and feeling happy—that's not too much for any child to ask for.

It made rebuilding the broken pieces much easier when we were given the time to do it off of our own backs.

You can't fix a puzzle by putting all the pieces in a box, you have to take the time to put them back together one by one, and being away from my family in foster and social care really gave me the time I needed to reconstruct my family.

Aside from the actual support in emails and phone calls, just the option of being told what there was, it was incredible.

My mental health has settled a lot more now that I feel settled, I'm very grateful.



In the last 5 years, we have opened 280 community care cases and 98 family law cases.

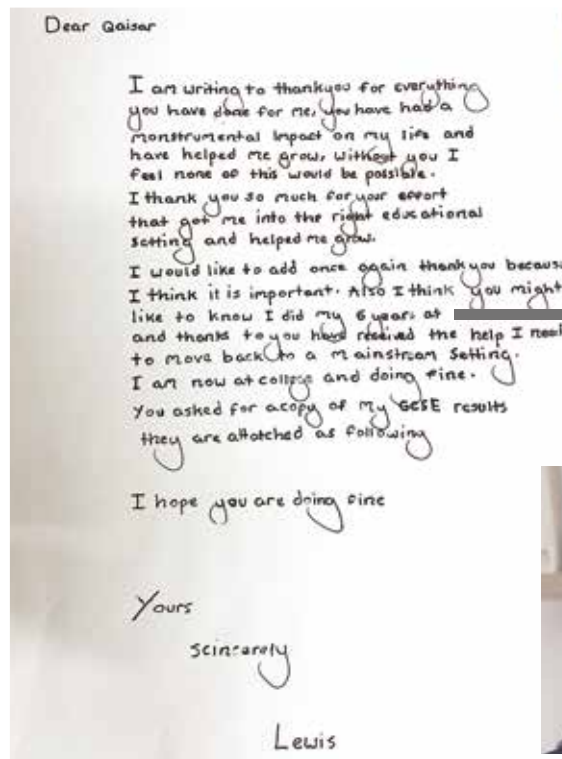


55% of children in care do not know that they can access an independent advocate.<sup>6</sup>

**18,051**

public child law cases started in 2020 involving 29,674 individual children<sup>5</sup>.





## Championing access to education



In 2020/2021 our Child Law Advice Service provided advice on 2063 calls relating to education law.



In the last five years our legal practice has advised and assisted 3,000 clients in their fight to access education that is suitable and right for their needs.

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Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities deserve the same quality of education and to get the same value from our education system as their peers. Disturbing disparities identifying pupils with special educational needs and disability, and in provision for them, point to underlying problems that can only be addressed through proper data collection and information. These children, already facing extra hurdles and challenges in this life, must not find themselves discriminated against several times over.

Meg Hillier, Chairwoman of Public Accounts Committee

### The challenge today

The Children and Families Act 2014 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.

However, seven years later, local authorities face an unprecedented demand of applications for Education, Health and Care Plans in the face of limited education and local government budgets leading to a dramatic reduction in support for children with less complex needs. Parents of children with special educational needs are increasingly engaged in protracted and costly disputes with local authorities who all too often are failing to deliver on their legal duties. The global pandemic has exacerbated the struggles that these families face.

### Child Law Advice Service

Our Child Law Advice Service provides information and advice on education law issues, such as special educational needs, exclusions and admissions. By 1997, our free advice line was receiving an unprecedented number of enquiries relating to education and so with a generous grant from BBC Children in Need, we launched our specialist educational unit.

### Education Law Practice

Our dedicated legal team, who are spread across our London, Colchester and Leeds offices, support and represent clients in lodging appeals to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal if they disagree with a decision the local authority has made about a child's Education Health and Care Plan 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. All the children and young people that we help have disabilities or special educational needs, which directly hinder their educational potential. For many years we were one of only two organisations in England and Wales with Legal Aid contracts in education which has led to us becoming one of the most active education law practices and we remain the only charity providing the service.

Our dedicated legal practice team support and represent clients in lodging Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal if they disagree with a decision the local authority has made about a child's Education Health and Care Plan or to bring claims in the county court if there is a claim of disability discrimination by a school against a child. We also challenge the actions of public bodies to the High Court through Judicial Review. All the children and young people that we help have disabilities or special educational needs, which directly hinder their educational potential. For many years we were one of only two organisations in the UK with Legal Aid contracts in education, which has led to us becoming one of the most active education law practices in England and Wales and we remain the only charity providing the service.

### Advocating for change

In 1997, we conducted a research project to mark the European Year against Racism. The results were published in our 1999 report titled *Racism and race relations in predominantly white schools: preparing pupils for life in a multi-cultural society*. We were concerned that international and national initiatives were neglecting the role of schools in addressing racism and preparing children for life in a multi-ethnic and multicultural society. Our researchers set out to find out what schools in ethnically homogeneous areas of Essex, Norfolk, Bedfordshire and Suffolk were doing to combat racism and increase awareness of these issues. The report had a significant impact on the renewed debate about educational initiatives to tackle racism in the wake of the publication of the MacPherson Report on the Stephen Lawrence murder.

In 2018 the government called a review in response to worrying statistics that school exclusion rates were rising and disproportionately affecting certain groups of children, including those with special educational needs. In 2019, Coram produced its report, *Unfair results: Pupil and parent views on school exclusion* which contributed to the Timpson Review of School Exclusion. Our research gave direct insight into the experiences of children and parents currently experiencing education exclusion. School exclusions remain on the increase with particularly high rates amongst some groups such as Black Caribbean children. Children with special education needs remain vulnerable to school exclusions and off-rolling due to unmet needs.

“

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.

Qaisar Sheikh, Head of Education Law, Chambers and partners top tier practitioner in education law (2019, 2020 and band 1 in 2021).



“

Coram's research with young people and parents into their views on school behaviour and exclusions has provided invaluable insights that have contributed significantly to the findings and recommendations of my review.

Edward Timpson CBE, led the Independent Review of School Exclusion





“

Coram Children's Legal Centre is an exceptional organisation, with an unwavering commitment to access to justice, and to achieving the very best outcomes for vulnerable clients.

Rachel Francis (she / her), Barrister, One Pump Court, Elm Court, Temple, London

## Rights of children affected by UK immigration control



Since 2006, 81,056 children claimed asylum in the UK on their own.

### 2011

The Refugee and Asylum Seeking Children's Project became the Migrant Children's Project reflecting the broader range of children needing immigration advice.

### 2012

Since 2012, we have offered accessible, free immigration outreach legal advice, with follow-up support, in over 2,600 cases with over 7,250 beneficiaries.

The immigration system affecting children is not a niche issue in 2021. In neighbourhoods, schools, nurseries and colleges up and down the country there are children affected by the immigration system either because they are not British (or do not know whether they are) or their family is not British.

The foreign national population of the UK is estimated by the Office for National Statistics (based on the Annual Population Survey) to be six million. There were thought to be 800,000 European national children living in the UK at the time of the UK's exit from the European Union.

Some have migrated from abroad, some have come to the UK as refugees, some were born in the UK to immigrant parents; all face potential threats to their rights when they are not seen first and foremost as children. Over decades we have worked on the principle that every child is a child first, migrant second.

### The history of our work in this area

Coram Children's Legal Centre has become known as a national centre of specialist expertise in the rights of children and young people affected by immigration control. What started with just one person employed to run a small project in Colchester in 2004 now has four advisers, 11 solicitors and two policy specialists reaching thousands of children each year, training and supporting hundreds of professionals, and centrally involved in policy developments and legal action.

Our case work includes representing children and young people in their asylum claims, family reunion applications and appeals, complex applications under the EU Settlement Scheme, requests for permanent status and citizenship applications.

We work with some very vulnerable babies, children and young people whose futures will be determined by their immigration status. This status is determinative of the rights of so many of the country's children.

We work at the heart of the network of migrant and refugee organisations, providing outreach and specialist advice and support.

“

Hackney Migrant Centre has been delighted to work with Coram Children's Legal Centre over the last few years. Their advisers provide sensitive and expert advice across a range of cases from refused young single asylum seekers to the children of undocumented families and ensure that longer term legal representation is in place to support their clients. They not only provide vital immigration advice, but support the rest of the work we do resolving issues around housing, health and poverty. This has enabled hundreds of families and young people to access justice, when otherwise the complexity of people's cases and the cost of securing private advice would have prevented them from establishing their rights in the UK.

Daf Viney, Director of Services, Hackney Migrant Centre

“

The research that Coram does is stunning and has been so important and useful in my work in the House of Lords, particularly in relation to promoting children's rights worldwide.

Lord Storey CBE, Liberal Democrat Education Spokesperson



Actors of the National Youth Theatre were joined by migrant young people for the production of *Wherever I Lay My Head*, specially commissioned from author Jamila Gavin as part of the programme marking the 350th anniversary of the birth of Thomas Coram.

### Wherever I Lay My Head

Commissioned by Coram and produced by the National Youth Theatre, *Wherever I Lay My Head* chronicled the impact on young unaccompanied asylum seekers of desperate journeys to the UK. Performed at City Hall in London in 2018, it was written by Jamila Gavin, award winning author of *Coram Boy*, based on the testimonies of unaccompanied teenagers who arrived in Kent from areas of conflict, and explored the disruptive impact of trauma on the young people's lives, particularly on their ability to sleep.

“

Watching the performance was like having my own story narrated to me. I was exposed to dangers you cannot imagine, but with the help of a kind person, my social worker and one foster family, I stand strong and hopeful for the future.

Ahmed Mohammed, Mayor's Young Londoners Outreach Worker, who entered the country age 14 as an unaccompanied asylum seeker.



Anita Hurrell, Head of the Migrant Children's Project

### 800k

There were thought to be 800,000 European national children living in the UK at the time of the UK's exit from the European Union.





A portrait from *Stranger Series*.

*Stranger Series* was exhibited at City Hall London.

# Amplifying the voice of young people

The Coram Group is dedicated to ensuring that children's voices are heard in decisions that matter to their lives and our youth projects place young people at the heart of the organisation, co-producing and delivering solutions to the issues they face.

## Young Citizens

The Young Citizens are young people aged 18-25 with lived experience of the immigration system who provide peer support and act as young ambassadors in policy and practice. Over the last five years, the Young Citizens have developed resources such as the *Belonging Toolkit* for schools, contributed to a performance of *Wherever I Lay My Head* by Jamila Gavin with the National Youth Theatre, participated in the Public Acts programme with the National Theatre and developed peer outreach support in young people's rights in immigration for local colleges. More details of the work of Young Citizens can be found at [www.coram.org.uk/youngcitizens](http://www.coram.org.uk/youngcitizens).



Sukurat (top) and Abdullahi.

“

I joined Young Citizens to be able to help people from the same backgrounds as me. People from refugee and care leaver backgrounds. It's very good because you're able to speak directly to people who have literally lived the experience the same as you. It's built my confidence more. I'm able to speak more in front of people. I've learnt a lot of things from being a care leaver personally – some of the process and some of my entitlements and some of my rights.

Sukurat, Young Citizens Trainer

“

Being part of the Young Citizen's Programme is life changing, because as an asylum seeker myself, I've seen how impactful it is to other asylum seekers. I've seen, as an asylum seeker that we tend to feel that we're rejected or that we don't belong or we are abandoned. With Coram and the Young Citizen's programme it's the total opposite of that. They will fight with you until the end, alongside you. This is something which is very rare for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to experience.

Abdullahi, Young Citizens Trainer

## Young people's policy impact

From 2017 onwards we began to connect the work of the young people working with and through Coram to other groups internationally. Through the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) 10 young people attended international events in Brussels, Paris, Dublin and Marrakesh to connect them to other young migrant campaigners from across the European Union, share campaigning skills and strategies, build confidence, and eventually also represent Coram Children's Legal Centre and PICUM in EU forums. In 2018 we began to work with our Youth Rights Trainers and young activists from other organisations in our influencing and policy work. Young people have represented us as ambassadors and championed issues including immigration status for children in the care system, the hostile environment and citizenship rights in media appearances in national outlets.

In 2019 this culminated in a joint investigation by *The Times* and *Channel 4 News* into the immigration system, as experienced by young people who have grown up in the UK, particularly the extortionately high fees they have to pay to

regularise their immigration status. The media coverage featured two of our Youth Rights Trainers.

Our young voices work is now integral to our policy advocacy, including responses to consultations on the care system and discrimination against young migrants in the care system and an in-depth response to the Law Commission's consultation on the Immigration Rules.

## Co-trainers

Grant funding from the Legal Education Foundation enabled 17 young people aged 18-25 with direct experience of the immigration or asylum systems to develop their skills as Youth Rights Trainers between 2016 and 2019.

Equipped with new skills in public speaking and elementary training in immigration law, a further 12 young people were employed as staff to co-design and co-deliver our training programme.

In 2020, as a result of the pandemic, we adapted this work to include video material co-produced by young people that could be incorporated into training delivered remotely working with our Young Citizens group to expand the programme to include peer workshops delivered by young people for other young people.



## Young People Helping Others

Coram's innovative HALO programme provides Help Advice and Legal Opportunity by enabling skilled 16-25 year olds to help other young people through paid, voluntary and training roles.

Students of law gain experience by volunteering with the Child Law Advice service with the opportunity to progress into paid roles. Advisers can then apply to become paralegals and progress into training.

Young people with lived experience of the Immigration System work as co-trainers to build the understanding and skills of professionals whilst others act as young ambassadors, producing films and resources for schools and providing workshops in local colleges. The Law Stuff website – produced by young people for young people – now has 200,000 unique users per annum.

Originally developed with the support of the Queens Trust, we have created more than 400 voluntary and paid roles for young people. These young people have created a HALO effect by making an impact on the lives of more than 24,000 beneficiaries.

229

During 2020-2021, 229 young people aged 16-25 years were employed, volunteered or were involved in activities across the Coram Group, reaching 14,000 beneficiaries.



In 2019/20, a study of the social return on investment showed that in the case of volunteers working on the Child Law Advice Line, £115 of social value is generated for every £1 spent.



The Queen's Trust





## Skills and Training

### Rights of migrant children

Legal education on children's rights has been an important pillar of Coram Children's Legal Centre's approach since we began our work promoting the rights of refugee children in 2004. In particular, we have sought to assist non-legal professionals who work with children and young people to understand their rights and contend with complex and ever-changing immigration law.

Since 2013, we have delivered training to over 8,124 professionals on the rights of migrant children. We have trained thousands of social workers from local authorities across England, independent reviewing officers, the NGO workforce, Ofsted inspectors and Frontline's trainee social workers. In 2021 we won a key contract to deliver training to local authorities at the pan-London level. Our training is co-delivered by employed Youth Rights Trainers with lived experience of the immigration system.

### Training worldwide

Coram International is often called upon to design and deliver training programmes on child rights throughout the world. These cover a range of thematic areas from child justice and child protection training for practitioners, to training law- and policy-makers on developing legislation in line with international child rights standards and good practices.

Our training and skills-development work has included projects in Bangladesh, Belize, Bulgaria, Ghana, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Libya, Lithuania, Nigeria, South Sudan, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Vietnam, Zambia and Zanzibar.

In all our training programmes we aim to bring professionals and practitioners together to share experiences and exchange best practices in order to achieve the best outcomes for children.

### The Unlocking Children's Rights project

The Unlocking Children's Rights project was coordinated and implemented in collaboration with 12 organisations across the EU. The project, which also involved experts from Coram Voice, resulted in the development of an innovative training package for professionals and practitioners working with children in immigration, detention and residential care settings. The training incorporated practical modules and tools on child-sensitive communication and listening to the voice of the child in practice, a fundamental right which is too often overlooked in these settings.

The EU Unlocking Children's Rights training was piloted with 920 professionals and practitioners in 10 EU countries (Bulgaria; the Czech Republic; Estonia; Greece; Hungary; Ireland; Italy; Slovakia; Poland; and the UK). An overwhelming majority of participants who were surveyed during the pilot gave the course maximum ratings, with 31.3% giving the course an overall score of 'very good' and 60.6% an overall score of 'excellent.'

The training is available in nine languages, free of charge, on Coram International's website in order to provide professionals across the EU and beyond with the opportunity to benefit from this critical area of skills development. The training also received accreditation in Hungary for three years.

We pride ourselves on ensuring that training and skills development initiatives are sustained for future cohorts of professionals and practitioners after the conclusion of our projects. Our team works closely with UNICEF, government ministries and training academies to train child rights 'champions' who will deliver the training in future, and to integrate the training in accredited training courses. In Bangladesh, our sector-specific training for social workers on the implementation of the country's Children Act 2013, which was developed as part of a project with UNICEF Bangladesh and the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, was integrated into training for social workers by the National Academy of Social Services. Our team also worked with UNICEF to mainstream child rights and gender into the training for security forces in Belize, including the Belize Police Department, Belize Defence Force and Belize Coast Guard. Our team is building on this work by developing a practice-oriented accredited training course for social workers for Belize's Ministry of Human Development.

### Djamila, Young Citizens Trainer

“

When I came I was scared, I was shy, I didn't want to talk about myself, I felt ashamed to talk about my experiences. Becoming a Young Citizens Trainer helped me open myself and want to be stronger than I am right now and be a new person who is capable of helping others. When you tell your story it helps them to see that they're not the first one to go through what they're going through. They're inspired when they look at us, they see that we have been in their situation and got out of it. It gives them encouragement to be strong. To see that we didn't give up – we continued to fight for our rights. When they see us sharing our experience with happiness they see hope.

1,011

Young people or parents who have attended a workshop about their rights since 2018.

2021

In 2021 we won a key contract to deliver training to local authorities across London on the rights and entitlements of migrant children in their care.





“

Even though I lost, I have made a stand. Many women out there will not speak up about what they actually want.

Shabina Begum, 2005



## Strategic Litigation

Strategic litigation can bring about significant changes in the law, practice or public awareness in order to protect children's rights. CCLC takes carefully selected cases to court or contribute to legal arguments through interventions or witness statements, drawing on our expertise and frontline evidence. Going forward, by bringing strategic litigation, we will drive significant changes in the law, practice or public awareness in order to protect children's rights.

The following landmark cases are amongst those brought by the Coram Children's Legal Centre.

**HC (A Child), R (on the application of) v Secretary of State for the Home Department & Anor [2013] EWHC 982 (Admin)**

Coram Children's Legal Centre intervened in this case, which challenged the position under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and its Codes of Practice of treating 17-year-olds as adults rather than children, denying them the right to contact their parents when arrested or to have an appropriate adult present when questioned by the police. The failure to treat 17-year-olds as children was held to be inconsistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**HH (Appellant) v Deputy Prosecutor of the Italian Republic, Genoa (Respondent); PH (Appellant) v Deputy Prosecutor of the Italian Republic, Genoa (Respondent); F-K (FC) (Appellant) v Polish Judicial Authority (Respondent) [2012] UKSC 25**  
Coram Children's Legal Centre intervened in five

appeals, heard together by the Supreme Court in March 2012, concerning the extradition of parents to face criminal trials and/or to complete sentences abroad, the consequences of which would be the enforced separation of the children of those families from their primary carers and possible placement in institutional care. Thirteen children aged between one and 17 were affected by the proceedings. The judgment built on the landmark judgment in ZH (Tanzania) and placed the consideration of children's rights on a firmer domestic legal footing. It established that children's rights are an important public interest as well as individual rights, with Lady Hale's judgment including the following mention of Coram Children's Legal Centre "As the Coram Children's Legal Centre point out, although the child has a right to her family life and to all that goes with it, there is also a strong public interest in ensuring that children are properly brought up."

**SM & Anor v Secretary of State for the Home Department [2013] EWHC 1144 (Admin)**

We acted as intervenor in an important case concerning the consideration of children's best interests when the Home Office decides the type and length of immigration leave to grant. The judgment held that the Home Office's then policy on discretionary leave to remain was unlawful as it failed to consider the welfare and best interests of the child before deciding the period of time for which leave to remain should be granted.

The High Court recognised that successive grants of short periods of leave to remain can leave children in limbo and may, therefore, be contrary to their welfare.

**Application no. 57373/ 08 by P. and S. v Poland, European Court of Human Rights [2013]**

We intervened in this case, which concerned a 14 year old girl (P) who became pregnant as a result of rape, and subsequently attempted to access an abortion. Although abortion is legal in Poland for victims of sexual violence, the teenager and her mother were repeatedly denied information and services, harassed by medical staff, journalists and members of the public and criminalised. In powerful condemnation of the treatment of both the teenager and her mother, the European Court of Human Rights found that the applicants had experienced multiple violations of their human rights under the European Convention (ECHR) and that a child victim of rape in Poland should have been provided unhindered access to abortion.

**R (on the application of Public Law Project) v Secretary of State for Justice [2014] EWHC 2365 (Admin)**

We provided two witness statements in the successful challenge brought by the Public Law Project against Government proposals to introduce a 'residence test' for civil legal aid. This test would have prevented anyone who could not prove 12 months' lawful residence in the UK from accessing legal aid and was described by a number of senior government lawyers as 'unconscionable'. The challenge prevented the policy coming in as planned on 4 August 2014 and the idea was abandoned.

**R (on the application of) PO and others v London Borough of Newham [2014] EWHC 2561 (Admin).**

We brought a claim to the High Court against Newham council on behalf of three sibling children regarding the level of financial assistance they received under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. The children lived with their mother who had no recourse to public funds while an application for further leave to remain was pending with the Home Office. The family were provided with accommodation and £50 per week to meet all their basic needs but the level of financial support provided was insufficient and the family suffered significant hardship. The judge ruled that the council's policy on supporting families with no access to public funds was unlawful. The Judge directed the council to reconsider their policy and provide backdated payments to the family.

**R (on the application of Beaurish Tigere) v Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills [2015] UKSC 57**

Drawing on our experience through the Migrant Children's Project advice line, training provision and policy work, we provided a witness statement in this successful case on access to

higher education for young people with time-limited forms of leave to remain. When it was heard in the High Court in July 2014, our evidence was cited favourably, with Mr Justice Hayden commenting the 'the force of this analysis is irresistible'. Just for Kids Law acted as an intervener in the case and we provided a witness statement for their intervention. The Supreme Court found that the requirement for young people to have 'settled status' (indefinite leave to remain) was discriminatory.

**C, T, M and U, R v London Borough of Southwark [2016] EWCA Civ 707)**

We intervened in this case in order to bring deeper consideration of children's best interests in a judgment from the Court of Appeal on the level of support provided to destitute families who cannot access mainstream support due to their immigration status.

The judgment held that 'a level of support considered adequate simply to avoid destitution in the case of a failed asylum seeker is unlikely to be sufficient to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child in need and by extension the essential needs of the parent on whom the child depends for care. Ultimately what matters is whether the assessment when completed adequately recognises the needs of the particular child'.

### Shabina's story

In 2004, we represented Shabina in a claim for judicial review arguing that the decision to prevent her from wearing the jilbab and to exclude her until she was prepared to dress in accordance with the school's uniform policy were contrary to her human rights under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights to manifest her religion or beliefs and violated her right not to be denied education under Article 2 of the First Protocol to the Convention. Bennett J rejected all these contentions.

Led by our patron Cherie Blair QC, we appealed this judgement to the Court of Appeal which, in 2005, was unanimous in allowing Shabina's appeal. It held that Shabina had been excluded from the school because she was not willing to comply with the school's uniform policy and that the policy had infringed her freedom to manifest her religion under Article 9. The dispute received huge national and international press coverage, but on Wednesday 22nd March 2006, in a remarkable U-turn, the House of Lords, by a majority, overturned the Court of Appeal's decision. Despite the loss, the case raised awareness and discussion about school exclusions and the right to respect for religious beliefs. Shabina noted that: "Even though I lost, I have made a stand. Many women out there will not speak up about what they actually want".

17

The failure to treat 17-year-olds when they are arrested as children was held to be inconsistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

2006

We took our first Supreme Court cases - Ali v Lord Grey School and Begum v Denbigh High School on the right to education and the right to manifest religious beliefs respectively.

2011

The first joint intervention with Islington Law Centre in the European Court of Human Rights, was made in the case of Malla v UK, arguing the rights of children not to be separated from their parent(s) in order to facilitate the removal of a parent.





Youth Rights Trainers.

## Legal Innovation

When the Children's Legal Centre was founded, the Children Act was not passed and there was no international human rights treaty protecting the rights of children.

The idea for the Centre arose from the dissatisfaction with the state of children's law felt by lawyers and professionals working with children. In 1981, we registered as an independent charity, focusing on and uniquely combining three areas of work: advice and information; training courses for lawyers and professionals; and taking up selected issues of particular importance for research and advocacy.

40 years later, we continue to find innovative ways to promote and protect the rights of children in the UK and internationally; to provide legal advice and representation, to produce research and evidence to inform law, policy, practice and system reform, to train and advise professionals and practitioners and challenge laws and policies that negatively impact on children and their rights.

### Local authority partnerships

In 2021, we began two new innovative partnerships with the London Boroughs of Ealing and Barnet to resolve the immigration and nationality needs of looked-after children and care leavers, which has long been a focus of our work. Our dedicated immigration advisors are working with social work teams to ensure that the immigration and citizenship rights of all children and young people are identified and promoted. Learning from the project will inform best practice models for working collaboratively with local authorities.

### Tackling education exclusion

In 2020 and 2021, a pilot project with Grenfell United combined therapeutic support in relation to children's needs with legal advice to parents and carers of children at risk of or experiencing school exclusion in the local community. The aim was early intervention to reduce the damaging impact of permanent exclusions and to achieve reintegration. This model exemplifies the unique blend of services we can deliver by combining expertise from across the Coram Group and serves as a template for future projects.

“

Skadden is proud to support Coram Children's Legal Centre in its critical work securing children's rights to citizenship. For the last two years, we have been collaborating with Coram to prepare British citizenship applications for children living in the UK. Since undocumented children often struggle to access free legal advice, it is heartening that they can go to Coram for assistance with formalising their immigration status. Congratulations to the team at Coram for 40 years of impactful work!

Olivia Bushell, Senior Pro Bono coordinator.

### Pro Bono Initiatives

In 2015, Coram Children's Legal Centre pioneered joint work with partner law firms DLA Piper and Allen & Overy to increase capacity to support young people with applications to secure their immigration status, particularly citizenship in the UK. The first of its kind in the UK, this led to a prestigious Law Works award for the most effective pro bono partnership. This work is now part of the national pro bono network Kids in Need of Defense UK. We are a core member of the network, which supports children with immigration and nationality law. In 2019 we were able to extend the programme further, by partnering with Baker McKenzie and Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom. To date we have secured citizenship for 190 children.

Coram Children's Legal Centre also partnered with Linklaters over the course of 2020-2021 on a pro bono project registering vulnerable babies, children and young people under the EU Settlement Scheme. Under the project, Linklaters lawyers, together with a supervising solicitor at CCLC, assisted applicants from the point of triage until submission.

Our partnership with Linklaters has been shortlisted by LawWorks for their 2021 Annual LawWorks Pro Bono Awards in the Best New Pro Bono Activity category.

“

Our collaboration with Coram has been an incredibly rewarding project for the team at Linklaters. Improving access to justice for the most vulnerable members of our society is a key pillar of our pro bono practice, and being able to work with an organisation like Coram to achieve justice for children in care and care leavers is an incredibly special opportunity. We are proud to work with Coram and to be able to contribute to the work they do with vulnerable children, young people and their families.

Olivia Loxley, Associate (Pro Bono), Linklaters

### Children in conflict with the law

#### Police Complaints

In 2006 Coram Children's Legal Centre, together with the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) researched how well the police handled children's complaints. The outcome of the research was the introduction of 'Easy Read' Guides and leaflets for children and those advocating for them on how to make a complaint. We also recommended that the IPCC modify the way their collected statistics which was implemented. The report resulted in the police changing their working methods.

#### Community-based services

Coram International has spearheaded the development of innovative models for delivering community-based services for children in conflict with the law in eight countries in Central Asia, the Caucasus and East and West Africa. Our programmes have included diversion and mediation programmes, which avoid the stigma and other lasting negative consequences that children in conflict with the law often face during criminal proceedings. We have introduced alternative sentencing programmes, which provide community-based alternatives to placing children in prison.

We base the development of these programmes on robust research findings within the country-context, which often indicate that the main drivers of offending stem from the child's social situation and dynamics. The models are 'family focused': social workers work with both the child and his or her family to assess their needs and factors that have contributed to the child's behaviour. The evaluation showed the value placed on these models, not just by the children and their parents, but also by criminal justice stakeholders, and particularly the police, who were, in nearly all the countries, initially sceptical. The programmes significantly reduced both detention and reoffending, with rates of reoffending being well under five per cent for all the models and the successful outcomes have led to governments taking on and further replicating the programmes country-wide.

**Baker  
McKenzie.**

**Skadden**

**Linklaters**

**KIND**  
KIDS IN NEED OF DEFENSE UNITED KINGDOM



# Promoting Law Reform

Coram Children's Legal Centre successfully contributed to policy reform in the UK in a number of key areas: for example the inclusion of the section 55 duty to safeguard and protect the welfare of children in the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009; the government's move towards ending the detention of children for immigration purposes and ensuring children's best interests remained the paramount consideration in the Government's Bill to introduce shared parenting.

## Shared Parenting Consortium

In 2014, a consortium of children's charities, led by Coram Children's Legal Centre successfully campaigned against the presumption in the Children and Families Bill 2014, that the child would spend a substantial and significant amount of time with both parents, interpreted as 50 per cent of the child's time by those lobbying for this change.

The concern of the consortium was that adding this presumption to the Law would override or conflict with the presumption in the Children Act that the child's best interests are to be the paramount consideration. Our intense lobbying of Parliament was successful and the shared parenting presumption was removed from the Bill.

## Simplifying the Immigration Rules

In 2017, we worked with young people subject to the immigration system to submit detailed evidence to the Law Commission's review of the Immigration Rules. We focused on young people's experience of using the rules when they do not have a lawyer.

The joint evidence was cited in the Law Commission's report published in January 2020, we were invited by the Home Office to sit amongst a small group of organisations on the Simplification of the Immigration Rules Taskforce review committee. In this role, we contributed to the redrafting of general rules on children and on such areas as long residence rules for children and young people who have grown up in the UK.

## International impact in law reform

The promotion of law reform is a core area of Coram International's work. Over the last 20 years, we have worked to promote child rights-related legal reforms in over 90 countries around the world. Using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as the cornerstone, our team of lawyers undertake comparative reviews of national laws against international standards and best practices, participate in consultations and provide drafting and strategic advice to ensure that children's rights are upheld in consultation processes and resulting laws.

Our first major project in this area took place between 2000 and 2003 in Bulgaria. Our team worked with UNICEF and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of Bulgaria to review and develop Bulgaria's Family Code, Adoption Laws and legislation to establish a fostering service. Our work to promote legal reform continued in 2002 when Professor Dame Carolyn Hamilton was appointed by the Council of Europe as a legal expert to provide advice on the development of Moldova's draft Law on Child Rights.

Since then, our team has undertaken similar work in Albania, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belize, Cambodia, Georgia, Greece, Honduras, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Lao PDR, Libya, Moldova, Montenegro, Nepal, Nigeria, Palestine, Papua New Guinea, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam, to name a few! Our work has grown from promoting law reform in the areas of child justice and child protection to covering access to justice more broadly, family law, youth participation, migrant children, children associated with armed groups, terrorism and violent extremism, gender-based violence and domestic violence.

Our work has expanded from promoting legislative reform to developing regulatory and operational guidance to support professionals and practitioners working with children. Our large-scale projects with UNICEF in Tanzania and Zanzibar involved the development of Juvenile Court Rules and Child Protection Regulations in Tanzania, and the Children's Court Rules, Child Protection Regulations, Children's Homes Regulations, Foster Care Regulations and the Adoption of Children Regulations in Zanzibar. In addition, we worked closely with justice stakeholders to develop statements of practice for the newly-established Gender and Children's Desks in the Zanzibar police service, and working protocols for police officers, social workers, healthcare and education professionals in Zanzibar on how

to work together to protect children from harm. Our work with UNICEF and government partners in Lagos and Cross River States, Nigeria, led to similar successes, including the adoption of Family Court Rules in both of these States.

Coram International was honoured to be selected by UNICEF to develop a global guide on legislative reforms on children's rights in the juvenile justice system. Our team gathered evidence of best practices of juvenile justice legislation from around the world, in order to develop a comprehensive, practical guide for lawmakers and campaigners on developing juvenile justice laws that respect and protect children's rights. The guide continues to be a valuable resource for child justice legal reforms today.

Coram International remains at the cutting edge of law reform, providing legal consultancy services in new and emerging areas. Our team is currently undertaking a consultancy for UNICEF HQ to develop a global guide on legislative reforms to protect children from online child sexual exploitation and abuse. The guide is intended to help development organisations, governments, civil society, community groups and children's groups to advocate for legal reforms in line with international standards and best practices, drawing upon practical case studies and emerging best practices. The guide is expected to be published by UNICEF in 2022.

## Mongolia

Coram International was commissioned by UNICEF Mongolia to conduct an evaluation of the implementation of the law on child protection in Mongolia. We made a series of recommendations following research with relevant stakeholders including policy makers, police and children and young people. These recommendations included legal changes to clarify which state body was responsible for state protection, and the need for social workers to be employed by one body, to improve leadership, accountability and to strengthen data monitoring practices.

As a result of our report, on the 8th of March 2021, to mark International Women's Day, a coalition of female parliamentarians in Mongolia submitted draft legislation to amend the law on child protection to the national parliament. The Government of Mongolia has agreed with the need for major reform to the law and a concept note on the bill has been approved by both the Minister for Justice and the Minister for Social Protection in Mongolia, paving the way for smooth passage of the amended law. If passed, the amended Child Protection Law would strengthen the child protection system in Mongolia and ensure that every child at risk of abuse, neglect and exploitation can be appropriately supported.

“

Decision-making should rightly focus on determining the needs and best interests of each individual child, rather than focusing on the expectations of parents.

CCLC's Director of International Programmes and Research, Professor Dame Carolyn Hamilton





“

Coram's substantial briefings inform our debates and enable us to hold government departments to account very effectively. They are highly regarded and respected by colleagues on all sides of the House and are widely used. Coram's history and its current range of activities give it a voice which carries real weight and moral authority.

Lord Russell of Liverpool

## Informing policy in the UK and globally

Over the last 40 years, we have contributed to fundamental changes in policies in order to protect the rights of children in the UK and internationally.

### Convening and collaborating

Coram Children's Legal Centre plays a convening role with a distinctively collaborative approach to winning change for migrant children. We co-chair the Refugee and Migrant Children's Consortium, a forum with over 60 member organisations coordinating on policy work.

Key wins for refugee and migrant children that we have supported include:

- The removal in 2009 of the UK's reservation to Article 22 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the effect of which was to entitle all children equally to the protections afforded by the Convention regardless of their immigration status.
- The related introduction of a welfare duty in respect of immigration functions in the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009.
- The reiteration of the children's welfare duty at section 71 of the Immigration Act 2014.
- The defeat of the proposed legal aid residence test in 2014, which would have barred newly arrived and undocumented children from all civil legal aid.

- Securing refugee status for resettled Syrians in 2015 instead of humanitarian protection, which would have cut them off from going to university.
- Ensuring that resolving children and young people's nationality and immigration status was a key plank of the Mayor of London's social integration strategy published in 2018.
- The reintroduction of immigration legal aid for separated children from October 2019, reversing the 2013 legal aid cuts for children in care with immigration needs.
- Ensuring the needs of children were considered in the design and implementation of the EU Settlement Scheme from its first pilot in 2018 to the present, including the introduction of an application route for children without ID.
- In October 2021, the Home Office shortened the costly, punitive route to permanent status for some young people who have grown up in the UK from ten years to five years.

### Informing policy globally

Coram International has assisted governments around the world with the development of policies, strategies and action plans that set out the pathway for child rights reforms. Starting in the areas of child justice and child protection, our work has expanded to include policy reforms on the elimination of violence against children, the deinstitutionalisation of children in alternative care, child rights monitoring, the rights of adolescents and youth empowerment.

Using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Sustainable Development Goals and other international standards and targets to guide our approach, our team supports national stakeholders to meet their international legal obligations and targets. Our team provides technical advice to design and draft policy reforms and to facilitate consultations with Governments, civil society, community groups and, most importantly, children.

Our work has included the development of the framework for Cambodia's National Action Plan to prevent and Respond to Violence against Children; Fiji's National Youth Policy and Action Plan; a national policy for tackling gender-based violence in Rwanda; and a Communication and Advocacy Strategy and Tools for Behavioural Change to support the use of diversion in Zambia.

### Tanzania and Zanzibar

Between 2011 and 2016, our team worked closely with UNICEF, the Government, courts and other justice stakeholders in Tanzania and Zanzibar to design and implement wholesale reforms to its child justice and child protection systems. After implementing two comprehensive research studies involving children, *Analysis of the Situation of Children in Conflict with the Law* and an *(Assessment of the Access to Justice System for under 18s)*, our team worked with stakeholders to draft and consult upon the development of two Five-Year Strategies for Child Justice Reform, which were formally adopted by the respective governments. The strategies have been critical in implementing reforms in Tanzania and Zanzibar in order to rehabilitate children in conflict with the law, prevent the detention of children and ensure that children's rights to a fair trial are upheld in practice.

### Sarah's Story

In 2017, we represented 16 year old, Sarah, who was homeless at the time, in a successful judicial review challenge brought against Essex County Council (CC).

The court challenge related to the Essex Young People's Partnership (EYPP), a housing gateway through which 16 and 17 year olds, at risk of homelessness, could be accommodated whilst accessing support in a supported living arrangement. However, Essex CC was using the EYPP gateway to avoid assuming duties of care to homeless young people, diverting them away from the significant protections and benefits of long-term social care support at a crucial time in their transition to adulthood. Sarah had no budgeting experience and did not know how to manage her benefits, daily living needs and her vocational and education training without the support of social care. For nearly two years Sarah frequently experienced rent and service charge arrears which took a significant toll on her. We reached a settlement agreement with Essex CC which provided Sarah with important protections and support as she turned 18.

The work of CCLC helped to ensure that other 16 and 17 year old homeless young people would not face the same obstacles as Sarah moving forward. Since the judgment we have continued to engage with local MPs and government officials on the implementation of the terms of the settlement and to influence changes to local policy and practice.





## Monitoring Children's Rights

National human rights institutions, commonly known as 'ombudspersons' or 'commissioners,' play a crucial role in protecting and promoting children's rights.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has dedicated an entire general comment (No. 2 of 2002) highlighting the importance of establishing independent national human rights institutions to promote and ensure the universal realisation of children's rights. The Committee leaves no doubt that that the establishment of these institutions falls squarely within the scope of a State's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### Informing the vulnerability index in England

Coram International supports national human rights institutions to fulfil their mandates to protect and promote children's rights.

In 2017, Coram International was contracted by the Office of the Children's Commissioner to undertake qualitative research on the subjective wellbeing of vulnerable children in England.

We will publish research on the Administrative Detention of Children in Mental Health Facilities and will be submitting it to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for the forthcoming review of the UK's implementation of the CRC.

### Permanent change in Montenegro

Between 2019 and 2020, Coram International worked with UNICEF Montenegro to develop the Office of the Ombudsperson's five-year strategy and work plan for the protection and promotion of children's rights. The strategy focused on children who have been particularly marginalised, including children in residential care, children with disabilities and Roma children. At the same time we worked with the Ombudsperson to develop working protocols and train staff on how to handle individual complaints concerning violations of children's rights in a child-friendly manner, ensuring access to justice and meaningful participation of the child in the process.

Building on this work Coram International was asked to assess the international and national child rights monitoring mechanisms in Montenegro, including the process of periodic reporting to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The recommendations in our report have led to concrete reforms including the upgrading of data collection information systems for education, social welfare and justice; the establishment of a permanent Secretariat for the country's national child right's committee to enable it to implement its work and the development of a national five-year strategy on children's rights to implement recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Recommendations on strengthening the culture of accountability in Parliament for children's rights were also formally included in action plans for the country's Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Freedoms in 2018 and 2019. Our team undertook a similar evaluation of UNICEF's child rights monitoring programme in Uzbekistan, which was ranked by UNICEF as one of the best evaluations in 2018: [www.unicef.org/evaluation/best-evaluations](http://www.unicef.org/evaluation/best-evaluations).



### Professor Dame Carolyn Hamilton

Carolyn Hamilton was the senior legal adviser for the first Commissioner for Children, Sir Al Aynsely Green. She stayed with the Commissioner for five years as the Office was established and grew, focusing on issues of administrative detention of child migrants, the care system, bullying and the use of force in the juvenile detention facilities.

“

It was an exciting time to participate in the first human rights institution for children in this country, and I feel the Commissioner succeeded in raising the profile of children's rights’.



Children as young as five were interviewed as part of work in Myanmar addressing the high numbers of children living in institutional settings.



# International research

Coram International provides research and evaluation consultancy services for UN agencies, (I)NGOs, government bodies and other voluntary and public sector actors, on a broad range of human rights and social issues, with a particular focus on children. We have a track record of producing high quality and accessible research publications for policy, practitioner and academic audiences.

Our research covers a range of diverse topics relating to children's rights, including violence against women and children; child trafficking and labour exploitation; child marriage; sexual and reproductive health; child protection systems and services; children's access to justice; and social

protection. Over the course of its history, Coram International has conducted over 75 primary research projects in countries around the globe.

## Mixed-methods social research

The majority of our research projects draw on a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods to produce evidence that is robust, measurable, comparable and generalisable, as well as rich, in-depth and explanatory. Clients recognise and appreciate our ability to integrate qualitative and quantitative data in complementary and meaningful ways.

In 2019, Coram International completed a two year study on child trafficking and labour exploitation in Vietnam. The research, supported by the UK Home Office's Child Trafficking and Protection Fund, explores patterns and dynamics in child trafficking and labour exploitation, identifies the risk factors that increase children's vulnerability to trafficking and examines survivors' experiences of reintegration and access to support services. The research included the distribution of a nationally representative household survey to 3,885 young people and 769 household heads.

Research findings were ground-breaking, suggesting that as many as 5.6% of children in Vietnam are likely to have experiences indicative of or consistent with child trafficking, a figure which is considerably higher than official estimates.

Coram International has particular expertise in conducting nationally representative, mixed-methods research studies on violence against children (VAC). These studies cover different forms of violence (physical, emotional and sexual violence, child marriage, child labour) across home, school and community settings. We have completed VAC studies in Bulgaria, Cambodia, Indonesia, Libya, Thailand and Zambia. In addition to estimating the prevalence of VAC, and determining its underlying drivers, these studies include concrete evidence-based recommendations that are used by UNICEF and government partners to guide policy and programming.

## Global research

Coram International has completed a number of high profile multi-country studies, which draw on evidence from different country contexts to produce analytical conclusions that can effect global change. A sample of our projects includes:

- Global research on children, terrorism, and violent extremism;
- A multi-country study on child marriage in South Asia;
- A global study on the relationship between birth registration and children's rights;
- Global research on legal barriers to young people's access to sexual and reproductive health services for the International Planned Parenthood Federation; and currently;
- A global review to improve legislative frameworks to protect children from online sexual exploitation and abuse.

One of Coram International's most significant global research projects was a ground-breaking study on the administrative detention of children. The research involved an extensive desk review of documents, including reports from the treaty monitoring bodies, qualitative research with UN bodies and NGO offices across the world, and in-country field research in selected case study countries, including: Bahrain (focusing on detention of girls for social rehabilitation), Burundi (focusing on the detention of children in the juvenile justice system), Guatemala (focusing on the detention of children living and working on the streets) and India (focusing on the detention of children for welfare purposes). The report itself focused on a number of key issues: administrative detention of children in need of care and

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The research captures the reality of child trafficking in Vietnam – it will allow us to understand the scope of the problem, the underlying causes and who is at risk. Coram's approach helped us to expand the way we think about trafficking and it will help us come up with better solutions.

Institute of Labour Science and Social Affairs, Vietnam

protection, administrative detention for security purposes, administrative detention for immigration reasons, administrative detention within the juvenile justice system, and administrative detention of children for health purposes. Other case studies were also developed through desk-based research, including Guantanamo Bay, immigration detention in the UK, administrative detention of girls in the MENA region, and administrative detention of children in Tajikistan.

Coram International also specialise in participatory research with children. We undertook a large study in Myanmar, interviewing almost 2,000 children in residential care, some as young as three years old, about their experience of care, and particularly their exposure to violence and their well-being. Further studies in Cambodia and Belize focused on the experience and outcomes for children transitioning from care to independent living.

## Situation analyses

Coram International has a particular specialism in conducting Situation Analyses for UNICEF and other children's rights organisations. Situation Analyses provide a comprehensive and up to date analysis of evidence on children's rights in a specific country across relevant thematic areas including: health; nutrition; water, sanitation and hygiene; education; child protection; and child poverty and social inclusion, identifying progress, challenges and opportunities for change. Coram International has conducted Situation Analyses for UNICEF in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Kosovo, Liberia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Maldives, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam and the 14 Pacific Island Countries, and for Save the Children in South Sudan.

4,270

children took part in Coram International's research interviews last year.

29

Coram International conducted research in 29 countries in 2020-21.





# Reports and Publications

The Coram Group focuses its work on practice-based research. Coram Children’s Legal Centre produces key reports to inform and support the realisation of change for children, in systems and in laws.



**Locked up in care** (1982)  
Our first published report which analysed the use of secure accommodation in the care system.



**Childright** (1983-2009)  
Monthly journal established to address law and policy affecting children and young people from with copies held today in The British Library.



**At What Age Can I?** (1984)  
A comprehensive guide to age-based legislation affecting children and young people has had a number of revisions and is today accessed via our *LawStuff* website.



**Working with Young People – Legal Responsibility and Liability** (1984)  
A guide to assist professionals who work with children and young people.



**CLC Manifesto for Children** (1987)  
We published our ‘Manifesto for Children’ which aimed to give children and young people greater rights to participate in society and to protect services that they require.



**The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children in Kosovo** (1998)  
The first report for the Department for International Development reviewed the extent to which UN agencies and NGOs were able to implement children’s rights during the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo.



**Mapping the Provision of Education and Social Services for Refugee and Asylum Seeker Children: lessons from the Eastern Region** (2002)  
A report which highlighted the many refugee and asylum seeking children and their families who had been denied or faced difficulties in accessing basic statutory services to which they were entitled, led to us establishing our Refugee and Asylum Seeker Children’s Project.



**Report on the Independent Police Complaints Commission** (2006)  
Our report investigated how the police handled children’s complaints. This resulted in the police changing their working methods including the introduction of ‘Easy Read’ Guides and Leaflets on how to make a complaint, and modifying the way their collected statistics.



**At the Police Station: What are children’s rights?** (2009)  
A short book which explains the rights of children if they have to attend the Police station.



**Guidance for Legislative Reform on Juvenile Justice** (2011)  
A document intended as a guide for parliamentarians and governmental authorities involved in drafting or reviewing juvenile justice laws.



**Seeking support – a guide to the rights and entitlements of separated children** (2012)  
Provides comprehensive, practical advice to professionals on how to work with unaccompanied or separated children and young people.



**Unfair Results: pupil and parent views on school exclusion** (2018)  
Our report on social exclusion which, alongside the government review, uncovered a worrying lack of support for excluded children and their families.



**Rights without Remedies** (2018)  
Report which focused on the impact of 2013 legal aid cuts on children’s access to justice.



**This is my home: securing permanent status for long-term resident children and young people in the UK** (2017)  
In 2012, the University of Oxford estimated that there were 120,000 children in the UK, 65,000 of whom were born here, who were ‘undocumented’ – living here without a regular immigration status. This report examines what is happening to this group of children.



**Uncertain Futures** (2019)  
A report which set out the risk facing EU national children of becoming a ‘2nd Windrush generation’, unable to access basic services in future years as a consequence of government policy.



**Children in ASEAN: 30 Years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child** (2019)  
Coram International’s report examined the achievement across the ASEAN member States since the adoption of the Convention and looked at future challenges and emerging Issues.



**Casting Light in the Shadows: Child and youth migration, exploitation and trafficking in Vietnam** (2019)  
Coram International’s report developed in partnership with UNICEF UK and UNICEF Vietnam, funded by the Home Office’s Child Trafficking Protection Fund.



**Call for Change** (2019)  
We presented our manifesto for policy makers and sector professionals, setting out the changes that needed to happen to make children’s rights and welfare a reMorality and to mark the 30th anniversary of the signing the UNCRC of the Child by the UK.



# System Support



Edward Timpson ran the Marathon for First4Adoption (above).

Coram Children's Legal Centre supports adoption and fostering agencies in the UK with independent enquiry and resource measures on behalf of the Department for Education.

## National gateway for adoption

Established in 2013 in partnership with Adoption UK, the national gateway for adoption was created by CCLC as part of the adoption reform programme to support the enquiry and preparation of prospective adopters. First4Adoption developed the first all-through web-based service for enquiry, agency finding, e-learning, and professional support in customer service with an 0300 helpline supporting prospective adopters to navigate the system.

During five years of support from the Department for Education, the service supported 17,000 clients directly and the website had over One million unique users with an exceptional conversion rate of up to 16% to agency finding. *The First Steps e-learning* resource was recognised as the Public Sector Digital Project of the Year in 2015 and continues to be used by the majority of adopters in the

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First4Adoption provides adopters with all the advice, guidance and support that they need.

Edward Timpson, former Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families

assessment process with regional adoption agencies and voluntary adoption agencies. The resources are now supported by Coram-I as part of the *Be My Family* service which also provides Exchange Days, Adoption Activity Days and services for fostering.

## National Adoption Week

The service organised National Adoption Week over four years, achieving a major media partnership with The Mirror Group and extensive television and radio coverage. Agencies consistently reported a 46% increase in enquiries as a result of the campaigns.

To raise awareness of the profile of children waiting for adoptive families, Too Old at Four featured an image by Mary McCartney projected onto London's City Hall, Blackpool Tower and venues in Bristol, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Leicester and Bolton. The programme also featured the National Adoption Awards, recognising Excellence in Practice, Social Worker of the Year, Lifetime Achievement, and Adopter Champion of the Year. The events, hosted by Coram at the Foundling Museum, were attended on each occasion by the Minister for Children and Families and co-presented by well known adopters and The Adoptables group.



Picture by Mary McCartney projected onto the London's City Hall by First4Adoption.



## Independent Review Mechanism for England

In 2015, Coram Children's Legal Centre assumed management of the Independent Review Mechanism for England (IRM). We provide independent review panels for anyone who has received a qualifying determination letter and wants to challenge a decision made by an adoption agency or a fostering service provider about:

- suitability to adopt or foster
- accessing protected information about adoptees' birth records
- foster parent terms of approval (for applications which are submitted within the right timescales).

Operated from its base in Leeds, the IRM has received 824 applications since CCLC became responsible for managing the IRM (767 fostering and 67 adoption) with a significant increase in the last year. The service has moved from being paper based in 2015 to entirely digital and offering virtual panels making it truly nationally accessible in 2021.



## Chelsea's story

"I suffered really badly with mental health in the environment I was in before. I grew up in a very abusive home, and Coram helped me into a foster home so I could get my A-Levels in a safer environment.

I'd like to help people who are like me, who at 17 and 16 didn't know what was going to happen to them, and are very lost. Sometimes it was difficult being in a place and not everyone was as clean or respectful as you, but I was in college and I needed to stay in finish my work. It was OK, and after 11 months of being there I moved into a move-on space and that was a lot better.

It was such an amazing feeling to have someone actually listen to me and actually reassure me that what I went through was horrible, and nobody should have gone through that. It felt amazing to have someone listen to me and help me—I'd had friends who I talked about it with but nobody could help me until then.

You know when you've had a breakup, and at first you're all happy but then in a few months it rushes back and hits you? That was what it was like when I first went into care. For a while it felt like people were pitying me a bit, and I don't like to be pitied.

I want to move on and be able to help people like me who felt like they weren't being listened to."





# Respected and Protected Exhibition and events

## The story of children's rights

In 2017, the Coram group partnered with London's Central Family Court to present a special exhibition on the history and development of children's rights from Thomas Coram's campaign in the 1720s to the present day.

The first of its kind, the exhibition provided a powerful and moving visual context for the work of the Central Family Court, illuminating the child-centred nature of the proceedings which are held there.

Highlighting the importance of children's rights and their slow but steady historical evolution, the exhibition examined four key strands of children's rights – identity, education, work and military service.

The exhibition illustrated children's experiences from tying threads in a mill to firing guns on a battleship and the work of the progressive activists that brought them into the comparative safety of the Victorian school room and then the era of human rights. It featured extensive loans including from the Coram archive and the Geneva Declaration of Children's Rights of 1924.

The exhibition coincided with the launch by CCLC of lawstuff.org.uk providing information to young people on their rights in practice.



Coram's historic and contemporary role in the advancement of children's rights was recognised in the *Respected and Protected* exhibition at London's Central Family Court in 2017, which coincided with the launch of the new LawStuff website.

“

Humanity owes the child the best it has to give.

Eglantyne Jebb, founder of Save The Children



(Left) The Rt Hon David Lammy MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Justice and Shadow Lord Chancellor.

(Below) Anne Longfield (Children's Commissioner), Rt. Hon. Harriet Harman MP (Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights), and Tim Loughton MP (former Minister for Children and Families) show their support.

## Championing progress

In January 2018, Coram marked the start of the anniversary for the 350th anniversary of the birth of Thomas Coram with publication of our manifesto, *Respected and Protected*.

Distinguished leaders in human rights attended the reception in the Speakers' Apartments in the Palace of Westminster and joined public supporters in making the case for the advancement of children's rights in our own era and pledging their support.

This special venue commemorated the fact that it was in 1736 that Speaker Onslow presented Thomas Coram with his Bible, one of the most important artefacts in Coram's archive. He was one of successive parliamentarians to support the creation of the charity as the first dedicated to children.

## Looking to the future

BBC Radio 4's *Broadcasting House* discussed the challenges children face in the modern era and the principles at the heart of ensuring that all children are respected and protected:

- The voices of children are always heard
- Secure loving families are provided for those who need them

- Access to justice is realisable for all children
- Routes to permanent status are fair and accessible
- There is timely and sufficient personal, social and health education and access to therapeutic support
- Education exclusion is tackled
- Capacity and consistent quality in children's services.







## Home for **Children's Rights**

In 2018-19, we celebrated the 350th anniversary of the birth of Thomas Coram with three key events advancing debate and discussion on the past, present and future of children's rights. The Queen Elizabeth II Centre was opened as the new home of Coram Children's Legal Centre.



### **Future Challenges in Upholding Children's Rights**

The Rt. Honourable Sir Andrew McFarlane, President of the Family Division of the High Court of England and Wales marked Universal Children's Day on 20th November by leading a discussion with Anne Longfield, then Children's Commissioner for England, Guardian columnist Polly Toynbee and then Head of Coram's Migrant Children Project, Kamena Dorling.

Sir Andrew noted the importance of problem-solving courts such as FDAC, which was piloted by the Tavistock Clinic and Coram in conjunction with the Central Family Court.

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The number of cases coming to the court has gone up, in particular neglect cases where families aren't coping. Often families are experiencing a cocktail of difficulties and if you are a child in the middle of that, one questions what voice they have and who is speaking up for them.

“

Every day Coram sees the gaps between what children's rights are on paper, and how they are upheld, or not, in reality. We want to see genuine systemic change so that all children's rights are upheld in *all* decisions made about them.

Polly Toynbee discussed how families are being 'tipped over the edge' in the face of poverty, welfare changes and cuts to legal aid saying:

"We seemed to have reached a point where children come last in all priority areas" and Anne Longfield identified that "children are so often an 'add-on' in policy with only 7% of the mental health budget, despite being 20% of the population and some 10,000 temporary educational exclusions across the UK every week.

### **Rights without Remedies**

The move of Coram Children's Legal Centre to its new home was marked with a lecture, Rights without Remedies, by Sir Keir Starmer QC, Member of Parliament for Holborn and St Pancras where the Coram Campus is situated. He traced the evolution of children's rights since the end of the Second World War, noting in particular the choice made in the course of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act not to transpose the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights into domestic law.

He was joined in the discussion by Kamena Dorling, then Coram's Head of Policy, Professor Helen Stalford, Professor of Law at University of Liverpool, and Alexandra Conroy Harris, legal consultant in family law, for CoramBAAF and concluded that "We owe it to the next generation to continue to champion internationalism and the radical power of human rights and to continually push further as we face different challenges."



### **Royal opening**

On 6th December, Her Majesty The Queen opened the new building at Coram's London campus named in her honour, dedicated to the promotion of children's rights and best practice in children's services. The Queen Elizabeth II Centre provides the Rangoonwala Conference and Learning Centre in addition to the offices and facilities for Coram Children's Legal Centre and colleagues in Coram Voice.

The Queen was welcomed on behalf of Coram children by an eight year old adopted child who had created a picture of the meaning of family. More than 100 children, families, staff and friends were then presented as part of the visit, including CCLC's Young Citizens group, who explained their journeys and experiences and hopes for the future.

Coram's Young Citizens were presented to Her Majesty The Queen as part of the opening of the new building named for her.



CCLC was awarded Centre of Excellence status by the London Legal Support Trust in 2019.

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We owe it to the next generation to continue to champion internationalism and the radical power of human rights and to continually push further as we face different challenges. I hold Coram in high esteem for the fundamental values and beliefs we share – that legally enforceable rights are often the key to allowing children to flourish.

Sir Keir Starmer MP



# A better future for our children

With the milestone legislation of the 1989 Children Act, the UK redefined and strengthened its legal framework for children, committing to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991.

During successive decades, the Coram Children's Legal Centre has played a critical part in championing progressive change. Whilst we celebrate the advancements made, there are still children and young people whose rights are not being recognised, with devastating effects for their future security and life opportunities.

For as long as it takes, we will provide legal information, advice and representation in the UK and promote the incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into UK law. We will work to realise the commitments of the UNCRC for children across the world through international research, and the provision of technical expertise and model programmes.

“

At a time when civil society is under financial stress, and the world around us feels increasingly fractured, we feel the need to act, to show our backing for some key organisations, ones that we see as critical to and influential in the sectors we support, and it is for this reason that we have decided to endow Coram.

Moirá Sinclair, Chief Executive of Paul Hamlyn Foundation

In the coming years, Coram Children's Legal Centre will strive to achieve impact for children by:

## Promoting access to justice every day

- Campaigning to expand the provision of legal aid for children in the UK
- Increasing children's access to legal information through the further development of digital resources, and increasing the capacity of the sector through professional training;
- Expanding our legal services across education, immigration law and our other areas of practice;
- Ensuring children's best interests are upheld and their voices heard in public law care proceedings and private law family proceedings through advice and representation;
- Engaging with local authorities to ensure they uphold their duties to children and young people in and leaving care, providing expert advice and representation when needed
- Undertaking research and supporting governments through the process of legal reform to ensure systems that provide child friendly justice.

## Strengthening the Legal Framework for the future

- Providing high quality research and empirical evidence to raise public awareness, influence policy and support law reform to ensure full implementation of rights for migrant children;
- Engaging with UK government and partners to advance shorter, affordable routes to permanent status and seek removal of obstacles to children realising their citizenship rights;
- Working with our Young Citizens and through research to ensure the voices of children are heard in policy, and in decisions affecting them before the court
- Taking part in strategic litigation cases that have the potential to drive significant changes in law, and practice and raise public awareness;
- Expanding the work of Coram International, especially by working with governments on legislative, policy and practice reform.

In achieving this vision, Coram Children's Legal Centre will continue to deliver our services through contracts with the Legal Aid Agency and the Department for Education and in partnership with UNICEF and grant-making organisations, including the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

“

Knowledge of one's rights and the means to access them are essential components of the Rule of Law, without which the possession of those rights are meaningless.

The Rt Hon Sir Andrew McFarlane, President of the Family Division of the High Court of England and Wales



Coram is a progressive group  
of organisations championing  
the rights and welfare of children.

**coram** **clc**  
**Children's Legal Centre**

**coram**   
**international**



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