

LEARNING VISIT REPORT

Coram Voice 11665

1.1 Date of visit: 11/02/16	1.2 Name of visiting Grants Officer: Julia Mirkin	1.3 People met with: Kat Collis, Senior Philanthropy Manager; Brigid Robinson, Deputy Director and Sara Gomez, 16+ Care Leavers Specialist Advocate
1.4 Programme Area & Outcomes: Positive Transitions to Independent Living\ More care-leavers living independently & maintaining their accommodation.		
1.5 Purpose of the award: £81,300 over three years (£27,000; £27,000; £27,300) towards the full-time salary of a Specialist Advocate, the costs of training and support to London professionals, and for young people in London leaving care.		
MONITORING INFORMATION		
2.1 Project Outcome 1: <i>Delivery of a free phone helpline</i> Progress made: The grantee has succeeded in responding to a stretched care sector for 'looked after children'. As local authorities increase the thresholds of need - the point at which they offer support - there are more young care leavers who do not qualify and seek support from other sources, such as Coram Voice. Consequently, helpline enquiries are growing in their complexity and a higher proportion is referred for caseload support. Many helpline enquiries concern housing issues as after 16 years of age, young people are no longer considered in care unless they are in education. As a consequence, homelessness is increasing amongst care-leavers.		
2.2 Project Outcome 2: <i>Face to face advocacy (case load expected to be 10 – 15 young people at any given time)</i> Progress made: In the past year, a greater proportion of young care leavers have required face to face advocacy support to address increasingly complex issues. Casework is generally taking longer to reach resolution and advocates are requiring more training and supervision. As many cases are eventually resolved outside of court, there is a lack of case law, which makes advocacy work more difficult.		
2.3 Project Outcome 3: <i>Professional development for 540 Care System professionals through delivery of two training programmes per year.</i> Progress made: The training for professionals working in the care system complements the direct work being delivered with young care leavers. Training has been delivered as one-day courses. However, the grantee has adapted the training format as professionals have struggled to attend for this length of time. A new and shorter format has been introduced, which aims to provide an overview of the issues surrounding one theme at a time. Themes covered have included health, education and disability. In all these cases, there is legislation that is not always compatible with that pertaining specifically to looked-after children. The training aims to provide guidance about which legislation takes precedence in relation to young care leavers. The training is delivered in collaboration with solicitors, who provide their services for free. Professionals attending the training are consulted on the themes for future training sessions. Attendance of the shorter training sessions has increased.		

GRANT OFFICER COMMENTS

Coram Voice is currently investing in its database, which will allow it to gain an overview of how different interventions compare in terms of their impact. It is hoped that this information will eventually inform how resources are allocated across the organisation.

The database will also allow Coram Voice to track longer-term relationships with individuals, which it believes will allow it to provide a more accurate picture of its work and its impact.

One of the issues affecting Coram Voice is that a case is only considered successful when it is resolved and closed, which means the considerable work undertaken to resolve each case is not acknowledged or accounted for in this reductive measuring system. Furthermore, this quantitative data does not measure the outcome Coram Voice aims to achieve, which is to empower care leavers to negotiate the care and social systems independently and to secure the support to which they are entitled. Having a database that captures longer-term tracking of individuals might provide a more meaningful insight into the impact the organisation is having for individuals.

In response to the increasingly stretched care sector, Coram Voice has taken the strategic decision to try and maximise its impact by reaching and supporting as many individuals as possible. To this end, it is developing an online resource that will have tools to support care leavers to negotiate the 'system' independently. Building on this theme, Coram Voice is also considering how to provide online training for care professionals.

Coram Voice has systems in place for capturing feedback from its users, which allows it to refine its services and understand how users feel about the changes that are implemented. Through these systems, which include an annual snapshot carried out over a one-week period, Coram Voice will monitor how the proposed changes to its services are received and how they enable the organisation to meet its strategic aims.

Having become part of the Coram group of charities in 2013, Coram Voice reports that the operational set-up has offered the chance to make efficiency savings by sharing back-office functions. It also reports that there is great potential for knowledge sharing and for partnership working across the group.

This grant is going well and is providing the breathing space required by this charity to settle as part of the Coram group and to adjust to a changing social care landscape. Work delivered, particularly that which is funded by the Trust, appears to be of an extremely high standard.