

Mr Julian Wooster  
Director of Children's Services  
The Crescent, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 4DY

By email:   


Dear Julian,

**Always Heard – the new National Advocacy 'Safety Net' and Advice Service for children in and leaving care**

We are delighted to announce that Coram Voice has been commissioned by the Department for Education to provide the National Advocacy 'Safety Net' and Advice Service (England) for children and young people involved in the care system.

The *Always Heard* service has 4 main aspects:

1. Providing a national advocacy advice service and a gateway to local advocacy support
2. Supporting local authorities to meet the needs of children and young people who are seeking advocacy support
3. Providing 'safety net' advocacy to children and young people initially denied local advocacy support
4. Alert Directors of Children's Services, the Department for Education, Ofsted, and Office of the Children's Commissioner when children and young people are not able to access the advocacy support they are entitled to

1. Providing a national advocacy advice service and a gateway to local advocacy support

The Department for Education has commissioned this service to ensure that all looked after children and care leavers are able to access advice about their rights and gain the support of their local advocacy service. We will also be supporting children who are seeking to be taken into care and other young people whose care status is disputed, to access and receive the support of local advocacy services.

Children and young people (and adults involved in their lives) will be able to contact our advocates via our freephone helpline 0808 800 5792, by text, messaging and video apps, email and online (for full details please visit [www.coramvoice.org.uk/alwaysheard](http://www.coramvoice.org.uk/alwaysheard)).

*Always Heard* advocates will provide children and young people advice about their rights and support them to access their local advocacy service. In addition we will be building on our current range of online and digital self-advocacy and information resources to equip children and young people to speak out effectively for themselves.

2. Supporting local authorities to meet the needs of children and young people who are seeking advocacy support

We believe that this new service provides a fantastic opportunity to ensure that children and young people will be better able to access advice about their rights and how to reach

their local advocacy service. By providing this national service *Always Heard* will be supporting the efforts of children's services and local commissioned advocacy service to promote their local provision.

Where children and young people are denied access their local support the *Always Heard* team will also be contacting children's services to ensure that they are aware of the situation and can take steps to ensure that this support is put in place. In this way we hope that we can assist children's services in providing this important support to the children and young people in their care.

3. Providing 'safety net' advocacy to children and young people initially denied local advocacy support

Sadly on some occasions children and young people find it difficult to access, or are refused, the local advocacy support they are entitled to. This is why the Department for Education have commissioned *Always Heard* to ensure that there is a national advocacy 'safety net'. Our *Always Heard* team will provide emergency 'safety net' advocacy for young people with critical advocacy issues who are initially denied access to their local advocacy service. *Always Heard* is not a substitute for the services that local authorities should provide and once a local service is in place we will support children and young people to take up this support.


4. Alert Directors of Children's Services, the Department for Education, Office of the Children's Commissioner and Ofsted when children and young people are not able to access the advocacy support they are entitled to

A key part of the *Always Heard* service is to provide the Department for Education and Ofsted with evidence about the quality and coverage of local advocacy services, and any other significant service failures. The information that we provide will be derived from our direct work with children and young people. We will inform local authorities directly of any issues we become aware of. In addition the Department for Education and Ofsted will use this information to assist them to ensure that nationally all children and young people are able to access the advocacy support they are entitled to.

We are also working closely working with the Children's Commissioner for England and her Help at Hand service ([www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/help-at-hand](http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/help-at-hand)) and will also be sharing information about the quality and coverage of local advocacy services and seeking her support where children and young people are unable to access the local support they are entitled to.

We hope that you will support the *Always Heard* service by sharing this information with your service managers, staff and the young people in your care. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you wish to discuss any aspect of our new service.

Yours sincerely,



Brigid Robinson  
Managing Director  
Coram Voice

## About Coram Voice

Formerly known as Voice for the Child in Care (VCC), Coram Voice has championed the voice of children and young people involved in the care system since 1975. We joined the Coram group of charities in 2013. The Coram mission is mission is to develop, deliver and promote best practice in the support of vulnerable children and young people.

Coram Voice has provided a specialist freephone advocacy helpline for over 20 years and we are delighted that we can bring this experience to bear in delivering the new *Always Heard* service. Over the next 12 months we will be further developing our digital offer for children and young people to ensure that they have the best possible access to information about their rights, how to access help, and how to speak out effectively about what matters to them.

## Always Heard

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