

# UK's oldest children's charity to tell the story of care

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Coram has received a £1.26million National Lottery grant to digitise part of its archive, which dates back nearly three centuries.

## The archive

The archive, held at the London Metropolitan Archives, originates from before 1739 when the charity was established as the Foundling Hospital, the first home for London's abandoned babies. It holds records from its beginning to the present day.

The collection includes petition letters from mothers seeking entry for their children, billet books containing fabric tokens they left behind and the details of the lives of children in the charity's care since the 18th century.

## Saved for future generations

The archive is at risk however. Partly due to its popularity, it is fragile and deteriorating. The National Lottery funding will digitise 112,000 images dating from the beginning of the charity to

1900. Safeguarded for future generations, people will be able to view the archive online for the first time.

Dr Carol Homden, CEO of Coram, said: "Coram's Foundling Hospital archive represents not just an unbroken institutional narrative, but individual human lives, and it is our duty to ensure its long-term sustainability for future generations."

## **Involving young people directly**

Young people in and leaving care today will be at the heart of the project.

Through creative projects and using the archive material to illuminate the past, they will gain new skills and help to build public understanding of the issues of separation and care which continue today.

More than 100 young people will be directly involved, working with creative partners through writing, theatre, film and displays, connecting the stories from the past with their experiences of the present.

"Coram's archive is a fantastic example of how heritage can be so relevant to people and society today."

- Stuart Hopley, The National Lottery Heritage Fund Director, England, London & South

Dr Homden added: "The lives of children in care still remain largely misunderstood by the wider public, and children in care are often underrepresented in access to heritage.

"This project will give care-experienced young people opportunities to engage directly with the archive enriching the story of care by adding their own voices, while increasing understanding about their lives and experiences."

Stuart Hopley, The National Lottery Heritage Fund Director, England, London & South, said: "Coram's archive is a fantastic example of how heritage can be so relevant to people and society today.

"Thanks to National Lottery players, this project will put care-experienced young people at the heart of exploring the history of the care system and give them the opportunity to add their own voices to this incredibly important archive of the UK's first children's charity."

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In her 22 years, Jade has experienced more hardship than most people encounter in a lifetime. Born to a heroin addict mother, Jade spent most of her childhood in the care system. Asked about the happy times in her childhood, Jade is unequivocal: the years living with her grandma in Trimdon village.

Katie Lee hands out imitation medicine as part of the performance of life in Ely Hospital

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The performance is part of the Cardiff People First exhibition sharing the memories of residents and people associated with the former NHS hospital which was used as an institutional base until 1997. Funded by a £25,400 Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant, the exhibition captures the social history of

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