

A Parent's Story 6: Charmaine's story



My son referred himself to Children Heard and Seen. It was very lucky really, one of the support workers at school had referred someone to CHAS before, otherwise we wouldn't have known where to turn. My son was struggling to understand his emotions and didn't feel comfortable talking to just anyone about his Dad's imprisonment.

At this point, his dad had 52 spent convictions and was being held on remand in Scotland. When Rory¹ got in touch with CHAS, his dad had been in this particular prison a year, though he had been in and out of prison for most of his life; occasionally he'd go missing and then his address would be a prison. Scotland was one of his more extended stays, and he ended up there for three years in total.

It sounds strange, but Rory's relationship with his Dad flourished through prison walls. During this time, there were regular calls every two weeks, meaningful conversation, and honesty, because for his Dad, there was nowhere to hide. Even though Rory didn't see Dad, he knew where he was; that he was safe and he wasn't getting into trouble. Because his dad didn't have the distractions of the life he'd lived on the outside, he was able to take an interest in Rory and his hobbies.

It was heart breaking to witness what happened when Rory's dad was finally released. His Dad took Rory out for a meal, along with all of his other children, and then became uncontactable. It's a kick in the guts for Rory. He's even more confused, betrayed and hurt. His dad choosing not to see him when he's allowed to, is harder to bear than his dad not being allowed to at all.

The situation has now become really difficult for me to manage. His dad might sometimes turn up, late at night or at an inappropriate time and demand contact. Whenever he sees Rory, it's always on his terms, and sometimes his dad will just go off the radar for months at a time. I can see the negative impact it's having on Rory, but if I shut the door to his dad, Rory is upset that I've deprived him of the little contact he's getting. His dad keeps stringing him along, keeping the glimmer of hope of a relationship alive.

As his dad has been incarcerated most of Rory's life, and last saw him when he was little, he doesn't really understand how emotionally developed Rory's become. Rory can now vocalise that he finds it strange that his dad will turn up randomly, or that if he does take Rory out, it will be with some random woman Rory doesn't know. Rory

¹ Name changed for purposes of confidentiality

can now connect the dots when his dad is fine to travel down the motorway for 'business' but unable to see Rory for weeks at a time.

The process of release has been almost like a second grieving process for Rory. He's had to lose his dad all over again, whilst having all of his hopes crushed that were built up during his dad's jail time. Thankfully Children Heard and Seen have been excellent; there has always been a member of staff available to talk to and they've helped me make more informed decisions. They really rescued us in lockdown, they had so many groups running and it's helped Rory to see that he's not alone at a really confusing time in his life.