

A Parent's Story 7:

Jessica's Story



It was the evening of my youngest's 4th birthday when his father was arrested. He was already on remand for criminal damage, and was arrested when he returned to the scene. Hours after he had been giving presents to my son, he was in prison.

I had no idea how to explain his sudden absence and the social worker didn't really know what to say either. The childcare arrangements were moved from a 'child in need' plan, to a child protection plan, which meant they couldn't have contact with their dad until they'd carried out a safeguarding assessment. It all felt so alien, not only to us, but to everyone who dealt with us. It felt as though all the plans that were made were stretched to fit our situation, because social work didn't know what was appropriate for children with a parent in prison.

At the time I didn't know anyone who was in the same situation and I didn't want to talk to people about it either. I didn't want it to get around and affect the children. It was three months before I found CHAS and I remember that being a very difficult time. My eldest would constantly ask about his dad and I just didn't know what to say. Should I tell him? What if he tells other people? At one point I had to reassure him that his dad wasn't dead. We had lost my grandmother that day and it was so difficult to explain that one loved one was gone, but one was coming back.

I was so concerned with other people finding out. I was worried what would happen if my son told other people, but I also didn't want him to be ashamed; I just couldn't guarantee how people would react. I remember on Father's Day all the children were making cards for their dad. I had told the school that their dad was in prison, and the school told my children to just make one for their Grandad instead. This was typical of the ignorance that surrounded our experience; the kids still had a dad, could still make cards for him, it was just easier for the school and everyone else to pretend he didn't exist.

I would have liked to have found Children Heard and Seen at the start. They helped me to realise that there are so many other people in the same situation. It was so nice to be able to relate to people. The groups and the residential were invaluable.

I still worry about the effects of their father's crime. There was a history of domestic abuse, and I can see my eldest mimicking behaviours he saw from his

dad. I was so worried about the offending rate for sons of an imprisoned parent, but I'm so grateful for the support I've been given personally, that I can pass on to my children. I've been given a mentor and I'm so grateful to her and hope I can pass on her knowledge and support to my children.

Children Heard and Seen have been the only institution to help me plan for my ex-partner's release. I've heard stories of probation and social services not stepping in till the day of release; I just can't allow that to happen. Nobody else has helped me plan and I'm glad there's at least someone who understands.