

Hidden Voices:

Jane's Story



Growing up my mum and dad were always fighting. The fights were mostly verbal but would sometimes turn physical too. Memories from my childhood are a little fuzzy but I remember that my brother and I didn't like being home and would stay out and play or sleep over my friends' houses as much as possible not too be around the fighting.

When I was fifteen and my brother was fourteen, the fight between our parents got out of control and my mum after many years of abuse finally called the police. She told us to go to our rooms. That was the last time we saw my dad for a long time.

Every time I tried to talk to my mum about my dad, she would get very angry or upset, so I just stopped asking. My brother would also get very upset and being the older sister, I felt like I just had to pretend everything was okay. I remember my younger sister, who is eight years younger than me asking a lot of questions and not knowing what to say. Even though my dad and mum had made a lot of mistakes, we still loved them. It was a really painful time.

My friends in school didn't really know what was going on. I remember feeling very confused and felt like I couldn't talk to anyone. I have always kept things to myself because growing up I remember being told that family business stays in the family and that we should never talk about "home issues" to friends or anyone else.

I didn't know anyone else who had a parent in prison. I wish there were charities or organisations such as Children Heard and Seen when I was younger. I am now almost 32, so this was 17 years ago. I cannot recall teachers from my school ever talking to me or brother either. I'm not sure if they were even aware.

The effects of not having support or anyone to talk to almost destroyed me and my brother. Academically, I was always a high achiever. I got 13 A*-B GCSE's and was in the gifted and talented programme but then, all of a sudden, I started avoiding my friends and dropped out of sixth form. I remember my friends calling me non-stop for a while to try and find out what was wrong but after a while the calls stopped. I don't blame them as I was the one who completely shut them off to avoid the shame of telling them the truth.

After a while, I met some new friends whom I would smoke weed with. Shortly after, I moved onto harder drugs. Drugs took away the pain but it was only ever temporary fix. Drugs destroyed my life and I battled addiction for many years. It even led to me being arrested and getting a criminal record. I thought I was going to go the prison for four years but ended up getting a suspended sentence.

My brother, followed similar footsteps. He was also predicted to get high grades but didn't even turn up for his exams. I remember him being very angry all the time, I so was scared to talk to him about our dad. He started getting into a lot of fights and joined a gang. Soon after, he was also taking drugs and getting in trouble a lot with the police.

Now in our early 30's we are both drug free and have gone on to do some amazing things but it has been a real challenge to get out of the cycle of addiction. The pain we put our family through, especially our mum, I still feel guilty about today. One traumatic event can have a domino effect on outcomes in your future. It is clear to me as day and night that the reason for our bad choices is in direct correlation to the time of my dad's arrest. It makes me think- Had we had support early on, would we have spiralled out of control? I'm sure life would have been very different. We can't change the past, fortunately we are both quite happy at present but it makes me sick to think that children still have to go through parental imprisonment without any support or anyone to talk to.