

A different kind of loss: Max's story

The impact on a child of a parent going to prison can be distressing and long-lasting. Pact works with schools to identify and support young people in navigating the "hidden sentence" they often serve alongside their loved ones in custody. We are grateful to Max for sharing his story with us.

Please tell us a bit about your story:

I am 13 years old now. When Dad was sentenced, I lived with my mum, and Dad lived with his partner. We had a good relationship, and I got on well with his partner. I was happy and doing well.

I found out Dad was in trouble just before Christmas. Dad didn't want us to know he was going to court, but I found out through my mum and my teacher. When he finally got to court, he got eight years.

How did it make you feel?

I was overwhelmed at first, feeling all different emotions; sad, angry, confused. It still isn't easy. I remember our first visit on Christmas Eve. We didn't know what to expect, but Bev from Pact had been in touch with the prison, and

she explained it all to us. It made it a bit better. It was horrible in one way because we weren't at home with him like a normal Christmas, but at least we got to see him.

I have had family members die before, but this is a different kind of loss. It's like he's gone, but I know he's still there. I want to see him and tell him things when they happen, but I just can't. I miss him a lot.

How did Pact help and support you?

When someone at school found out, they started picking on me, calling me names and spreading gossip about me. I started getting into trouble. Eventually, I told a teacher about what was happening. She told me about the group that she was running with Bev from Pact, and about how it could help me.

I wanted to just sit and listen, but eventually I decided to tell my story. I was sitting opposite the person who'd been bullying me, and I faced them and told the whole group what had happened - what it was like having a dad in prison and how my life had changed because of it. I was relieved to have said it. Afterwards, another student tapped my shoulder and told me they had someone in

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prison as well and asked if they could talk to me. Even the person who was picking on me has been okay since then. It helped a lot. I was surprised that there are others in school who have family or friends in prison. I thought it was only me.

Pact was able to answer a lot of my questions, and they understand how I feel. Bev came in to school to see me and helped with arranging visits. She gave us books and showed me the Pact website, which has a lot of videos and information. That's been great for my family and my dad's girlfriend as well.

I want to start a group at school and help other pupils who are in the same situation. I also want to help people leaving prison. Being involved with Pact has been good for me with Scouts and my gold award as I collected toys in school and took them to the visits centre in the summer holidays as I know they are always looking for toys and games. I feel a lot more positive.

I have just been offered a course in engineering school for next year and it would have been great to tell Dad in person. He called and he told me how proud of me he is. That made me feel really happy.

What would you say to other young people experiencing what you and your family are experiencing?

I would just say to them to speak to someone like Bev or a teacher. Don't be embarrassed. I haven't done anything wrong, but some people think because my dad is in prison, I have. It's not just Dad not being here, it's all the changes at home that affect you. I would say don't bottle stuff up because that just gets you angry and into trouble. I sometimes forget that!

Do you have a message for Pact's supporters?

Pact are a massive help in loads of ways, and I know Bev and Pact will be there for as long as I need them. Without the help, I probably would have been excluded from school. That's why I want to do something for them and be a Pact ambassador at school. I'd say please support Pact so that they can keep helping other families like they've helped mine.

You can find out more about our work supporting children and young people with loved ones in prison at www.prisonadvice.org.uk/children-affected-by-imprisonment



Waterstones Children's Laureate brings joy of reading to children with dads in prison

The Waterstones Children's Laureate – and great friend of Pact – Frank Cottrell-Boyce joined families at HMP Featherstone to read to children visiting their dads in prison.

The event formed part of our pioneering Family Literacy in Prisons (FLiP) course, an initiative that aims to strengthen family bonds and empower parents in prison to actively support their children's literacy development. Parents participate in a one-day workshop followed by a child-friendly visit where they can gift a book and read with their children, spending loving, quality time together.

Children visiting their dads at the Staffordshire prison were delighted to hear Frank read *The Gruffalo* and perform magic tricks as part of their special day.

Frank said: "Sharing the day with families at HMP Featherstone has brought home to me the importance of connection - as a motivation for being better, for people in prison, but also in the way that fun builds trust and trust builds family. And there is nothing more empowering than a family. These are families that have been damaged, and it's astonishing the power of story, the power of shared reading, and the power of shared fun in rebuilding and fixing that damage."

Find out more about FLiP and how it helps families: <https://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/flip>



HRH The Princess Royal praises Pact volunteers at 125th anniversary awards

Pact's annual celebration of volunteering and citizenship took place at St John's Church, Waterloo, in October last year. We were honoured to be joined by Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal. The event marked 125 years of supporting people affected by imprisonment and recognised the contribution of volunteers, students on placement, and peer workers from across England and

Wales. The event saw 14 awards presented, including the prestigious Volunteer of the Year, awarded to Prisoners' Families Helpline and National Befriending Volunteer Amy Atherton. In her roles, Amy provides practical and emotional support for people with loved ones in prison who are struggling to cope. Well done to Amy and all of our award winners!



Amy Atherton, Pact's Volunteer of the Year, pictured with HRH Princess Anne and Sarah Mann, a long-serving Trustee who recently stepped down from the Board

A massive thank you!

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who supported Prisoners' Sunday in 2024. This vital campaign is crucial for our work, raising both funds and awareness of the challenges faced by families affected by imprisonment.

A huge thank you, also, to everyone who contributed to our Big Give campaign. We received **£25,000** in donations, which was doubled to a grand total of **£50,000** by our match-funders. We are, as ever, humbled by the generosity of our supporters. Thank you one and all.

Don't forget to add the date for this year's Prisoners' Sunday, 12th October to your calendar.



Remember me

Pact is hugely encouraged by the Catholic Bishop's Conference's recent publication, **Remember Me: A Catholic Approach to Criminal Justice**. This insightful exploration of the current criminal justice landscape through the lens of Catholic social teaching aligns perfectly with the values that inspire and drive our work.

We wholeheartedly support the documents' calls to action and Bishop Richard Moth's foreword, which reminds us of "the need to remember and accompany all those affected by crime, from the victims and perpetrators of crime to their families and the wider community, and to address the acute and chronic problems undermining our criminal justice system."

You can read Remember Me at: www.cbcew.org.uk/remember-me

Our Impact

Last year, we supported more than

485,000 prison visits,
including nearly **98,000** for children.

“ Each year, almost **200,000** children in England and Wales have a parent in prison. ”



Pact is the national Catholic charity supporting prisoners, people with convictions and their children and families.

We provide caring and life-changing services at every stage of the criminal justice process: in court, in prison, on release, and in the community.

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Congratulations to Andy

Pact's CEO, Andy Keen-Downs, who has led the charity since 2004, was recently awarded a CBE in the New Year's honours list!



I am delighted to accept it on behalf of everyone who has contributed to the work of Pact over the past 20 years. It is an endorsement of our mission, vision and values. It says that prisoners' children and families matter, and are worthy of our care, consideration and support. It says that humanity, dignity, hope, and relationship, should be at the heart of our justice system. I see this honour as being for everyone involved in the work. Thank you, all.



Staying in touch

We always respect our supporters' wishes and would like to know if you're happy to keep receiving Fresh Start. If you are, then you don't need to do anything.

If you'd like us to stop sending Fresh Start or if your contact details have changed, you can get in touch by:

Telephone: 07710 170 942

Email: fresh.start@prisonadvice.org.uk

Post: Pact, 29 Peckham Road, London, SE5 8UA

Website: www.prisonadvice.org.uk

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