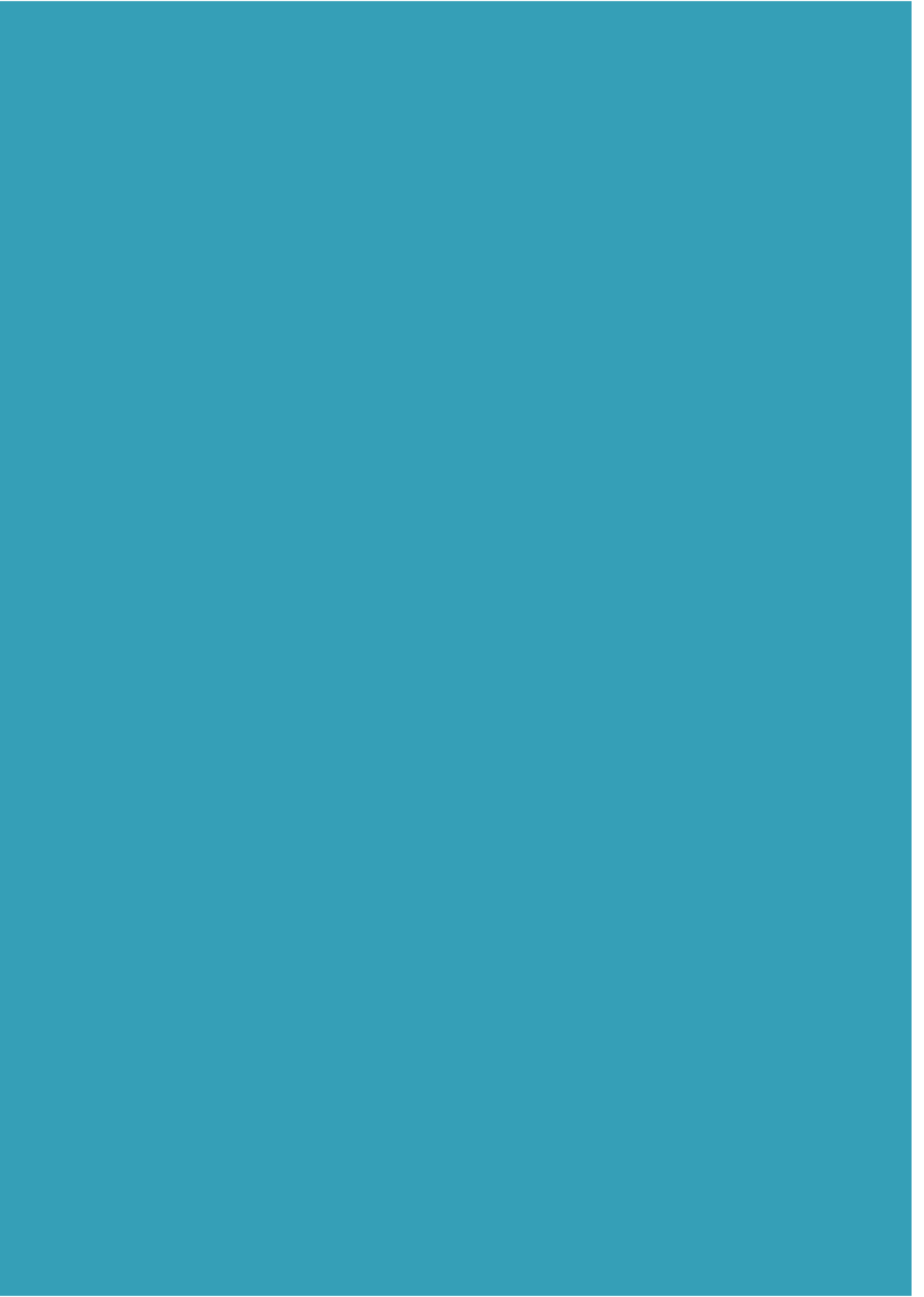


MY Story

YOUNG PEOPLE TALK ABOUT THE
TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE IN THEIR LIVES



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TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE IN THEIR LIVES

EDITED BY DR ROGER GRIMSHAW
WITH DR JOSEPH SCHWARTZ AND RACHEL WINGFIELD

phf Paul Hamlyn
Foundation



**CENTRE FOR CRIME
AND JUSTICE STUDIES**

The Bowlby Centre
Promoting Attachment and Inclusion

About the editors

Dr Roger Grimshaw is Research Director at the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies.

Dr Joseph Schwartz is an attachment-based psychoanalytic psychotherapist, a training therapist and supervisor at The Bowlby Centre, London with long experience of research methods.

Rachel Wingfield is an attachment-based psychoanalytic psychotherapist specialising in work with trauma. She practices in a range of settings including secure settings.

Acknowledgements

No project of this kind can be undertaken without the support and efforts of a number of distinguished and knowledgeable people.

There were several who helped to engender the idea of storytelling as a method of demonstrating the impact of trauma on childhoods. In particular we wish to acknowledge the work of Dr Felicity de Zulueta whose deep understanding of violence and early childhood experiences played an inspirational role in the conception of the project. Professor Gwyneth Boswell, a pioneer researcher on the backgrounds of young people involved in grave crimes, has been generously supportive of our aims.

The project has benefited immeasurably from a partnership with The Bowlby Centre, which has done so much to uphold the long term value of attachment-based theory and practice.

The King's College London Research Ethics Committee examined the research proposal with great care, making several important points, including suggestions about copyright, which helped to clarify the basis for young people's participation. Jan Booth designed the copyright licence agreement under which the stories have been published. The National Research Committee of the National Offender Management Service has been responsible for establishing the essential bridge by which the project could seek access to young people in prison.

We are very appreciative of the goodwill and support of prison governors and staff which has made sure that working in prisons has been as productive as possible.

At a time when prison resources are under strain, the interest, understanding and assistance of prison staff have been particularly valuable.

Our experienced and immensely knowledgeable advisory group has been a thoughtful and wise source of counsel.

Of course, we are more than grateful for the generous and sustained financial support of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation which made this entire work possible; Rob Bell and Liz Cadogan have participated in the advisory group and been especially understanding of what has been a complex and protracted piece of work.

Finally it has been extremely rewarding to work with the young people who have allowed us to publish their personal stories; this publication would not exist without their salutary commitment and perseverance. Above all, we hope that readers will see just how much their stories contain and how enlightening they can be.

About the advisory group

Laurie Bell is Voice Manager at Victim Support. He coordinates and disseminates research on the experiences and views of victims and witnesses on a range of topics and issues. This research evidence informs Victim Support's work to strengthen the voice of victims and witnesses and ensure their needs are met by the criminal justice system. Laurie previously worked as a researcher for an organisation dedicated to promoting social inclusion in the labour market and has also done research work for the TUC and central government. He has a degree in English Literature and History and a Masters in Policy Studies.

Jamie Bennett has worked for 15 years as a prison manager and has held senior positions including Governor of HMP Morton Hall. He is also Editor of Prison Service Journal and has written widely on criminal justice matters including prison management, the media representation of prisons, and the relationship between crime and inequality. He has published three previous books: *Understanding Prison Staff* (with Ben Crewe and Azrini Wahidin, 2008), *Dictionary of Prisons and Punishment* (with Yvonne Jewkes, 2008) and *The Prisoner* (with Ben Crewe 2012).

Christine Blake took the lead role in developing the fundraising and development strategy for the Bowlby Centre to take the work forward with front line agencies and others, who support and share the values and mission of The Centre and its work. She is a Bowlby Centre graduate herself and currently manages the Referrals Service, which places clients with attachment based psychotherapists trained by the Centre and encompasses a range of dedicated projects, including Project 44 for people in the criminal justice system.

Carlene Firmin, MBE, is a social policy advisor specialising in preventing gang violence, violence against girls and the sexual exploitation of children and young people. From 2006 to 2011 Carlene researched the impact of criminal gangs on women and girls while working for the charity Race on the Agenda. In 2011 she took up the post of Assistant Director of Policy and Research at children's charity Barnardo's, during which time she supported this project. Carlene has authored a number of research reports and currently writes a monthly column in *The Guardian Society*. She also sits on a number of boards and advisory groups and has spoken at national and international conferences. In 2010 she founded The GAG Project to train young women to influence policy on gangs and serious youth violence. From August 2011 Carlene joined the Office of the Children's Commissioner as a principal policy advisor promoting and protecting children's rights in England.

Jim Rose has worked in various social care settings with children, young people and their families since 1975 holding senior appointments in the local authority, voluntary and independent sectors. From 1998 - 2001 Jim was Professional Adviser to HM Prison Service on the placement and management of young people sentenced to long-term custody for serious offences and also advised on the development of facilities for juveniles in the prison estate. From January 2004 - December 2008 Jim was employed as Executive Director by The Nurture Group Network, leading the organisation through a period of considerable change and growth, pursuing its aims of promoting and supporting nurture groups in schools across the UK and overseas. He currently chairs three Fostering Panels for an independent fostering agency and has an interest in the training and support of foster carers.

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Centre for Crime and Justice Studies
2 Langley Lane, Vauxhall, London, SW8 1GB
info@crimeandjustice.org.uk
www.crimeandjustice.org.uk

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Editorial introduction

Stories of trauma and violence in childhood

The *My Story* project assists adults convicted of grave crimes as children to tell the stories of their childhood with a view to publishing the stories as a resource for public education and policy consideration.

The project has sought to enable participants to express their life experiences, to give them coherence, and to have them witnessed by others. The life experiences recounted here are traumatic and include bereavement, interruption of care, abuse, and domestic violence, all of which seriously affected the participants' childhood attachment relationships.

Working closely with a pair of therapeutic advisers the researcher has interviewed the story tellers at length. He has agreed with them the edited texts based very closely on those recorded interviews. The participants are the authors, having each agreed a non-exclusive copyright licence with the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies.

Why these stories?

Coming to terms with serious offences for which children are found responsible is always painful: such events, though infrequent, do more than disappoint normal expectations and hopes; these can seem to be violated. Making sense of serious offences is extremely difficult when it is overshadowed by a feeling of dismay that may turn to despair or revulsion. There is no lack of public narratives about such young people. Serious offences by children, especially against vulnerable victims, attract enormous attention in the media because the spectacle of criminal justice makes them appear remarkable and exceptional, including as they do, detailed coverage of the gravity of the crimes.

At this point the story normally concludes, with the child disappearing into the machinery of criminal justice. The *My Story* project does the opposite by allowing young people convicted of grave crimes as children to tell their stories— not about the offences but about their childhoods. Telling the stories illuminates the key relationships and key events that have shaped their lives.

There are many stories around every offence: those of victims and their families; the friends and relatives of the convicted; the professionals who deal with the aftermath. However, the stories featured here are of people who normally do not have a voice. The important challenge for the reader is to listen to the voices from the individual lives that have preceded and influenced the events in question.

As well as offering a channel for unheard voices the *My Story* project seeks to illuminate what has gone disastrously wrong in these young people's lives in order to see a way forward to investment in effective prevention and treatment.

There is overwhelming evidence that most young people who have committed

grave offences have histories of abuse or personal loss (Boswell, 1995, 2007; Falshaw and Browne, 1997; Wikstrom and Butterworth, 2006). However statistical analysis cannot reveal qualities of experience. Stories are much more able to demonstrate lived realities in terms that can be understood simply and directly.

To shed light on how key events in a life can lead up to a frightening episode of violence is not to condone or excuse what was done to injure other people. By clearing up confusions and doubts, indeed obfuscation, the illumination that we aim for can bring forward the serious consideration of effective preventive action- not something that criminal justice is well-equipped to do.

If we are serious about preventing harmful actions, it is imperative that a debate about preventive action is both informed and purposeful, focused squarely on reducing the harms inflicted on these children as a means of protecting the public.

How the stories were produced

Preparation

Recounting a personal story about childhood trauma and violence can be daunting. It was felt that the process of storytelling was likely to be positive and could be of benefit, if it was to be coordinated with psychotherapeutic oversight. The important place of narrative and language in working with young people is acknowledged in forms of therapy (Rose, 2010) and the building of a personal narrative may help to deal with pain constructively (Holmes, 2000).

The participants were approached in prisons and, after being provided with information and offered the opportunity to pose questions, their informed consent to take part was then requested. In each case the storyteller agreed for the researcher to read files held in the prison, so as to identify any health problem or other reason that might mean the individual would find it very difficult to complete the story effectively. They were offered a range of individual support and assistance which could be accessed after participation.

Interviewing

Producing a coherent story of a life that contains painful episodes is deeply challenging, and without close interest, support and assistance the result is likely to be confusing or incomplete.

Interviewing was adopted as a method of stimulating the storyteller's narratives and reflections as well as providing opportunities to monitor their emotional well-being. It became clear in interviews that episodes did have emotional resonances which called for a positive listening response from the interviewer at the time. Afterwards, the psychotherapeutic team were able to review the material and to identify its implications.

Given the personal and sensitive topics due to be explored it was crucial to adopt a method of interviewing that encouraged the storytellers to formulate and recount their own stories in a natural manner. A Biographical Narrative

Interview Method was used in order to ensure that as much narrative as possible was generated in as spontaneous and undirected manner as possible. The key questions are therefore requests for a story about a phase of life or an experience (Wengraf, 2001).

When memories failed to produce clarity it was important for the interviewer to avoid hints or suggestions that could lead to the material conforming to a preconceived model. Hence, as far as possible, the follow up questions were limited to clarifications of fact, or asking open questions about thoughts and feelings.

Editing

The interview material for each individual varied from 10,000 to 57,000 words. These differences were related to the ability of the storytellers, on a series of particular occasions, to recount incidents in as much detail and variety as they could individually muster. Hence there were differences in the number of incidents described, reflecting not only the clarity of their memories and the sensitivity of the material but also the self-confidence and articulacy of the young people.

As a consequence it was seen as important to edit these raw stories into a shape that could help the reader to identify common topics, while doing justice to the different contents. Especially where the material was extensive, interviews were edited in order to highlight key incidents and narratives that would help to display the formative experiences of the individuals.

The editing reflects a focus on experiences of family life and a concern with the development of needs and behaviour patterns.

Because the details of the offences for which the young people had been imprisoned are a matter of public record, their personal accounts of the offences have been removed in order to protect both their anonymity and that of victims. Instead very brief profiles of offence and sentence are given at the beginning of each story.

As the lengths of the interview transcriptions differed by many thousands of words the end results inevitably reflect to a greater or lesser extent the amount of material generated. However the quantity of original material can also be seen as a firm foundation for the selection of informative and representative episodes.

As the interviews were long and variable in grammatical sense and clarity, it was crucial for the editorial role to help deliver as much readability as possible but equally to respect the voices of the young people.

Editing principles were applied to the textual details, taking account of key guidance for oral history (Minnesota Historical Society, 2001; Miller Center, 2011). Names were removed for the purpose of maintaining anonymity and replaced by descriptions in brackets [].

Because the interviewer's questions and responses were very largely concerned to clarify or move the story forward, it was decided to omit them. In order to represent the flow of responses a new line was normally started where a question had been posed but removed in the editing.

Because statements were made in response to questions that have been omitted, phrases have been sometimes inserted to make better grammatical sense of the response. This means that some of the sentences combine words spoken in interview with words and phrases inserted later by the editor and marked with brackets [].

When aspects of key events were recounted out of historical sequence there has been some reordering of statements to reflect the actual flow of events.

Above all the editing aimed to ensure that the words in the text were spoken in interview and the headings reflect words in the interview unless greater clarity is required.

It was reasonable to follow the phrasing of the original but phrases that were incomplete, repetitive, or superfluous were liable to be removed. Some grammatical errors were removed where otherwise the sense might be affected.

Edited draft text was discussed and finally agreed with the storyteller. After agreement, there was an interval before the copyright licence was again discussed and presented for signature.

Making sense of the stories

Roots of childhood violence

Understanding how violence can be traced to problems in fundamental emotional development requires familiarity with the main principles of attachment theory- an approach which focuses on how relationships with parents and other carers influence a human being's capacities to engage in healthy relationships (Bowlby, 1969; 1973; 1980).

What follows is no more than a brief account of the significance of attachment and trauma in childhood in relation to violence. It does not purport to be an analysis of the stories, which contain a richness of detail that deserves to be carefully read in its own right. However, as expected, similar themes emerge in the narratives which touch closely on the meaning of relationships with parent figures. For further explanation the reader is urged to consult studies such as Bowlby (1944) and de Zulueta (2006; 2009).

Attachment and trauma

From his observational research, the psychoanalyst John Bowlby developed the concept of infant attachment describing a close relationship with a primary caregiver that can sustain feelings of security in a child. The infant will protest when separated from the caregiver, but with a secure attachment in place, the child feels safe, and the wider world can be negotiated with greater confidence.

If a child experiences rejection or neglect, insecurity emerges within the attachment, which is manifested in both avoidance and anger. Hence while secure attachment is associated with warm and positive feelings, negative emotions are reinforced by problematic separations.

While contact is perceived as pleasurable, separation is associated with distress

as well as irritability and aggression.

The child who is avoidant is more likely to show aggression to others. There is evidence that children who show detached or avoidant behaviour after separations also show aggression (Troy and Sroufe, 1987).

Infants who have been abused or neglected by a frightening or frightened parent figure tend to suffer from a disorganised attachment pattern. Parents who have experienced violence themselves will tend to experience difficulties in responding adequately to their children, and their responses can be unpredictable and inconsistent. Their infants are not able to organise their attachment behaviour according to any unitary or coherent pattern (Liotti, 2004:2). Some of these children express deeply divided states of mind concerning attachment.

A traumatic state is induced in the affected children; a bizarre mixture of anxiety and avoidance appears. When fearful the child feels a surge of panic, not only because of the threat, but also because of the loss of comfort and protection.

The traumatic result in the child's mind is a split perception in which an idealised relationship cohabits with the strong sense of a dysfunctional one. We see this split perception of the frightening/ frightened and idealised parent in the narratives of all three interviewees. In these children there is a prospect of long term risk to the system of self-regulation, with any terrifying stimulus leading to the possibility of re-traumatisation or defensive violence. There is a risk that they will identify with their aggressor and go on to violate others.

Loss

It is not then surprising if loss of a primary care-giver, through separation, being placed in care, or bereavement, is experienced as acutely painful and traumatic. As one review clearly puts it,

'Loss is common among children and adolescents with poor conduct, in part because behaviors that get kids into trouble—such as anger, fighting, irritability, and poor concentration— are all natural psychological responses to childhood grief.'
(Viboch, 2005:2)

An attachment- based interpretation of childhood violence therefore suggests that children's development suffers markedly when an early nurturing of social relationships goes badly awry. If this damaging type of insecurity persists, the child's model of the external world is affected, opening up the potential for violence as a response to later frustrations.

Grave crimes

The importance of abuse and loss is confirmed by evidence about the backgrounds of young people convicted of grave crimes (for current legal information on 'grave crimes', see section 90 – 92 of the *Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000*). Boswell (1995) found in a study of 200 young people convicted of grave crimes that high proportions had experienced abuse or loss of a person to whom they were emotionally attached. She pointed out

that violence can be linked to unresolved fear or grief (Boswell, 1995:30). In response to chronic inconsistency or rejection by parental figures, anger and insecurity become central to children's model of relationships, leading to an elevated risk of aggression in later childhood (Bailey, 2000:116). Heide and Solomon (2009) have identified a pattern of insecure attachment and abuse, leading to chronic post-traumatic stress disorder in female juvenile murderers.

Evidence and theory about childhood therefore suggest that the narratives of young people convicted of grave crimes should help to shed light on experiences of trauma that have had a major influence on their conduct, illuminating the circumstances that have led to their long-term involvement with the criminal justice system.

Dissociation and trauma

In order to ward off the effects of intolerable pain, the individual resorts to dissociative behaviours that represent distractions, or attempts to reassert control instead of feeling helpless. Self-destructive behaviours are therefore common among victims of abuse. Examples of dissociation include losing memories of traumatic incidents.

Recall of trauma can be both difficult and uncomfortable. There are psychological reasons for resisting the incursion of painful memories about people to whom we are closely attached. Psychiatrists use the term 'dissociation' to explain how memories are kept away from consciousness. There are examples where storytellers here struggle with their memories of painful events.

We should be careful to emphasise the negative impact of trauma on narrative coherence. There is evidence that, when young adults talk about themselves, an experience of secure attachment in childhood gives their narratives greater coherence.

'...children who are securely attached in infancy are more likely to have a coherent and "free-autonomous" narrative style when talking about themselves in early adulthood, as compared with insecurely attached children whose narratives tend either to be over-elaborated and confused (linked with ambivalent attachments) or sparsely dismissive (linked with the avoidant attachment pattern).'

(Holmes, 2000:95)

Hence the process of accessing and organising childhood memories is likely to be challenging for those suffering from early attachment difficulties and the impact of traumatic experiences (Hesse, 1999).

The work of the story tellers in accessing accounts of their trauma is not therefore necessarily typical and we should not suppose that it is simply being ignored or overlooked by professionals. Our point is that unless there is an adequate mental health services framework for this group of young people the extent and characteristics of their traumas will not be brought to the surface.

The narrative style linked with disorganised attachment tends to be characterised by levels of incoherence (e.g. lapses and discrepancies between thinking and feeling while reporting memories of past attachment relationships)

and leads to a classification called 'unresolved'. Unresolved interviews are characterised by episodic memories or 'attachment-related traumas or losses that are not well integrated' (Liotti, 2004:3). Attachment researchers have demonstrated that these children may be over-general at points in their narrative, have peculiar lapses in narrative, with unusual syntax, sequencing and use of pronouns. They may recount horrible events in a depersonalised manner, without any affect (Van der Hart et al., 2006:40).

Transcripts that are classified 'unresolved as to traumas' and infant disorganised attachment behaviour, bear close resemblance to clinical phenomena usually regarded as indicative of dissociation (Hesse and Main, 2000:4).

For all these reasons the general nature of an individual's memories requires careful assessment. Interviews took place with one person who despite having experienced behaviour problems presented a very normal version of childhood and, given some inconsistencies in the story, it was decided not to proceed any further, rather than allow a published account to be subject to doubts and further questioning.

Story themes

In the light of the theoretical framework it is worthwhile reflecting on a number of themes and motifs that appear in the stories.

The inaccessible parent

If a parent is unpredictably available to meet the child's emotional needs this tends to instil anger towards the parent who appears to be a cause of the unavailability. If unresolved the anger is expressed in other situations.

Parental jealousy

Children who are fought over by warring parents experience confusion about their loyalties and may feel a sense of guilt for appearing to be the cause of conflict.

Impulsive courting of danger

A striking symptom of unresolved emotional relationship problems is the appearance of habitual or compulsive episodes of conflict with carers and figures of authority. This 'breaking free' from normal boundaries involves seeking attention through courting danger, which then evokes a flurry of concern; it is the flurry of concern that for the moment satisfies the deep-seated needs that have been neglected. Young children who wander out of their houses are mimicking the careless way in which they have been neglected, while seeking the attention they hope for when they are discovered. Similarly, running away from home or school, or climbing onto roofs, are examples of attention-seeking behaviour.

The roots of sexual assault

In a home environment where unpredictable and fearsome control is exercised over the child, and sexuality is witnessed by the child as an unrestrained male privilege, controlling another individual sexually can become a child's way of seeking power, in effect demanding untrammelled access to warmth and comfort that has been denied.

Bereavement

Bereavement in childhood can bring out feelings that are unresolved; this is

especially true when a parent is lost, causing a burden of grief in the child. If these feelings are not assuaged they can be expressed through other outlets.

Normalisation

Surviving continuous and intrusive trauma means finding ways to normalise it. There are several examples within the stories, as when the individuals refer to 'getting on' with life, etc. despite the problems that have been experienced.

A child watches adults constantly; if a child observes interpersonal violence routinely or witnesses an adult version of sexuality these practices can readily become seen as norms of behaviour which form a repertoire for use in everyday life. Similarly if alcohol and other drug misuse are routinely witnessed they may be normalised. In a family network where it appears that the same behaviours are routine, the chances of observing a different lifestyle are reduced, and what might to an outsider seem exceptional then becomes the norm for the child.

Multigenerational abuse

The stories show examples of past abuse and damage typically inflicted by a grandparent on the parents of the child telling the story. This abuse has a profoundly toxic effect on the relationship between an abused parent and a child.

Failures of intervention prior to imprisonment

Children in trouble do attract attention from schools and youth offending teams. However there are instances in the stories where the intervention seems to have failed, or has not been reinforced by effective multidisciplinary coordination. Assaults on teachers, persistent non-attendance at school, and lack of educational progress are all warning signs. Equally, chronic domestic violence seems to have gone on unchecked, until a crisis has occurred requiring police attention. Attempts to make a child safe from domestic abuse have not been followed up by careful attention to other needs, in relation to sexual behaviour, in particular.

Survival, hope and recovery

Accounts of unrelenting harm are disturbing and uncomfortable. Though there are some bright episodes in the stories, there is a bleakness that will be striking to readers unfamiliar with lives tainted by violence. Is there no way out for such young people?

It is important to avoid the impression that young people subjected to violent and abusive childhoods are 'puppets' who have been simply propelled into despair and violence. Their emotional needs do not mean that they cannot make choices or acknowledge wrongdoing; the urgency of those needs can sometimes be managed by the application of other inner psychological resources that enable the individual to survive. A grim backdrop of emotional need, however, is inescapable, unless it is addressed by positive nurturing.

It would be tempting to view the lives presented here as damaged beyond repair and to think that nothing can be done. Because of the violence they have committed at an early age it is all too plausible to focus on the risks they may represent and to neglect the prospect of rehabilitation.

Despite the challenges, there is potential for services to intervene in damaged

lives; adequate support delivered through educational and social services can make a difference in preventing the onset of serious violence (Krug et al., 2002; Silvestri et al., 2009; Rose, 2010). Services for parents and children in homes affected by domestic violence can help to reduce the harms experienced (WHO/Liverpool JMU, 2009). Secure units based in local authorities have a track record of delivering appropriate services to children convicted of grave offences (Cavadino and Allen, 2000:14). Even in prison it is possible for services to develop potential in young people that can lead to better outcomes, especially if reinforced in a community setting: again, in the stories, there are examples of well-received programmes.

Therapy for young people can enable them to acknowledge their emotional needs and help improve their relationships, releasing their psychological energies to take up other opportunities and tasks in their wider lives as citizens, parents, and productive individuals (Bailey, 1996:35; Bailey, 2000:116).

Where then do stories fit in? As the respected expert on trauma, Judith Herman, makes clear, telling the story is a key step in recovery, 'undertaking remembrance and mourning' (Herman 2001:175). Recovery then moves to 'reconnection', enabling a new self and new relationships to be born (ibid:196). Retelling the story of trauma is therefore a positive step forward in therapy and recovery. The storytellers themselves reflect at times on positive aspirations about their futures.

Above all, it is to be hoped that listening to the voices of young people helps to clarify the meaning of life events that are crucial to understanding their childhoods; it should also renew a determination to give them as many opportunities as possible to seek the recovery that they need, thus benefiting themselves and, by the same token, the public interest.

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MYstory 1

PROFILE

Young woman

Offences:

False imprisonment, aggravated burglary in a dwelling and possession of an imitation firearm, committed at 16 years of age. Others were convicted in connection with these offences.

Sentence:

Imprisonment for terms of four years and two years.

Earliest memory

[My earliest memory was] when I was young, probably about two, playing in my nan's garden with a dog as well, but I can't remember my nan.

[Our house] was just a normal house. Three bedrooms. I can remember I lived there with my mum and my dad, my elder brother who's a year older, and my sister who's four years younger.

I can remember the way it was decorated. We had a dog as well so [my dad] built a kennel and fencing to fence it off from the garden because he built us a Wendy house in the back.

And then we had like swings in the back garden.

[My mother's routine was to] get up, get us ready for school, take us to school, and she'd pick us up and then we'd go either to the shops on the way home or back and then she'd do the tea. We'd play out all day and then come back in to have our supper and get in the bath and go to bed. That's all as I can remember really. It was my dad, the way that he was always out with us in the street.

He was the one who was always watching us.

Sometimes he had a car and then sometimes [not].

Relatives

I used to go and stay with my aunties and uncles a lot.

My cousin's a year younger than me so I used to always want to stay with her or she'd come and stay with me, and my friends.

My dad's mum had eleven kids. My granddad lived at the bottom of our street around the corner. I can remember him a lot more.

He used to live at the bottom of the cul-de-sac on another street. Me and my brother used to wait for him at the bottom of the street about five o'clock every day and he used to give us an apple or an orange each. I can remember being in his house and playing, but that's all I can remember of my granddad, waiting for him at the bottom of the street.

My mum's brother and his wife - I can remember their wedding. It was in a registry office and I can remember clapping at the end and then going into the park to get pictures done. I must have been about five.

So I'm on the pictures. I can't remember the reception, just the wedding.

I can remember when my granddad died. I didn't know him that much but he was laid out in our living room.

I can remember when I sneaked into the room and was playing underneath the coffin and it banged, it nearly come off and my mum had to run in.

[She] just screamed because I was playing underneath his coffin. I can remember him in his coffin. But that's only because I sneaked in.

Everyone was close

In some ways I'd say it was happy then. Everyone was close and everyone was always round like each other's houses.

Everyone was together and all the kids were young, so everyone used to sit together, and there was always loads of kids around.

I'd say our house was where everyone used to come to meet.

It was good. I liked it growing up. We lived in a good estate and all the kids played out together.

Everything was alright until when I was about nine. It was just normal I think.

My dad used to do loads of different things with us, and he'd hire a coach, he'd take the whole street away to [name of holiday resort] for the day and then back. And me and my sister and my brother and all the kids in our street went for the day.

I know my cousin come with us and I can remember her getting stuck in [one of the chairs on a ride] and she had to get cut out.

And she had two big dints in her shins. We were going a bit wild because we didn't think when we were kids.

There was a few older kids so all our mums give us money and then said, 'Meet us back here in an hour', so we just went off and went on all the rides and that's when my cousin got stuck in the swing.

They weren't very happy, my mum and dad, but that was funny.

I've got another sister, my half-sister. I can't really remember her from when I was young, but I can remember playing out at the bottom of our street, and she was five years older than me so she was with all her mates and she called

me over and she was saying to them she was my sister. Before my dad met my mum he had my sister. She can remember loads of things about me being young because she can remember coming to ours but I can never remember her. I can only remember her from playing out with my mates that day.

School

I think I went through nursery. [My school] was round the corner from where I lived.

I can remember this teacher and everyone used to say she was a witch. And I got told I was going into her class, and I think it was infants, and I was kicking and screaming to my mum, 'Don't let me go in that class, I'm not staying in this school'. And my mum left anyway; the teacher said, 'Leave her', and then as soon as I could, when my mum had gone, I opened the door and ran out of school and ran all the way home. And I can remember the teacher chasing me and taking me back to school. But then I was alright.

The one thing I was good at in school

I can just remember one of my friends from school. We used to do cross country for the school.

I must have been about eight or nine [when I started]. [My friend] used to always come first and I used to always come second, even when we were competing against other schools. If I was falling behind she used to slow down and encourage me to hurry up. We ended up getting picked to run for [a local running club].

I think it was the one thing I was good at in school.

[The rest of school] I hated it.

I didn't really like school.

I suppose I was alright in some parts of school but in other parts it was...I think it was some of the teachers, I just didn't like some of the teachers.

Getting away with everything

I think I was naughty all the time, and cheeky with it, [but] nothing ever really happened, because I can remember my dad used to be strict where once me and my mate wrote our names on the wall and he gave me a bucket with soapy water and made me go and scrub it off. Things like that he's dead strict on, but he never really used to shout at us that much.

If my mum did, we'd run to my dad, and my dad shouted at us in front of my mum.

If my mum shouted at us when we were kids we'd run to our dad. And if my dad shouted at us we'd run to my mum.

He'd just stick up for us, he'd say, 'Leave her alone,' and, 'She hasn't... she's

alright.’ Or if my dad says, ‘Oh you’re not going out today,’ then if he went out my mum would say, ‘Go on, go out for an hour, make sure you’re back here before he comes in.’ They used to stick up for us, so nothing really bad used to happen.

[It felt] cool! Getting away with everything!

Bunking off school

I remember it was snowing one day. It was freezing, me and my mate were at the bus stop waiting for the bus and it was taking ages. So we went back home and told my dad the buses had stopped. And he started laughing at me, saying, ‘I don’t believe you, you’re going back to school.’ So my dad went out and my mum said, ‘Oh you can stay off, don’t worry about him. Don’t worry. Don’t let your dad know.’ It was always the stupid little things, like my dad used to say, ‘You’re not allowed to go out until you’ve finished all your dinner.’ If he weren’t in the room my mum used to say, ‘Oh go on, go out, it doesn’t matter.’

‘You know I wouldn’t hurt you’

[What happened that changed things] was just my mum and dad and the sort of fighting.

Well, it was more my dad because he started drinking, and then when he’d be drunk he’d hit my mum. It used to happen a lot and then in the end she tried to get away from him and that’s when we had to move out of our house where we lived.

When I was about twelve she left him. Then she had to go in a hostel with me, my brother and my sister, to try and get away from him.

He was alright, it was just when he had a drink. He used to drink plenty.

I can’t really remember much because my mum obviously tried to keep us away from that, and I can remember him hitting her and then my mum was like, ‘Get out of the room and hide, and stay in there.’ And then when she left him, I don’t know how come but I think I was back in the house and my dad was trying to beg my mum to come and talk to him and she wouldn’t. I must have been about 11 or 12 at the time. So he said to my mum, ‘Well, I’m keeping [her] hostage until you come and talk to me.’ So then my mum had to phone the police, and then I can remember he kept me in one of the rooms upstairs. But I was with him and I knew that he wouldn’t hurt me, but there was loads of police outside the house trying to get my dad to let me go, and he was shouting things out the window. I can’t remember what he was shouting but I can remember feeling safe.

[I felt] scared for me dad. But not for me.

The police ended up kicking the door down and coming in, and then my dad was shouting, ‘She’s alright! She’s alright! I’m not gonna hurt her. Here you are, here she is.’ And then everything was fine. But I can remember just

sitting in the room with him and he was saying, 'Sorry. You know I wouldn't hurt you'.

[Mum] must have come to the house to get me and then.. I don't really know, I haven't asked her that. I haven't spoken to my mum about this for ages. I haven't mentioned it.

It was like that for ages, for months and months. We were staying somewhere in a hostel or something, I think it was a hostel. I'm trying to remember now.

I know it was going on for ages, but then I think my dad ended up getting his own place because he ended up saying that it was wrong for us to live in a hostel while he lives in a house, and he accepts that they weren't going to get back together so we're allowed to move back to the house.

But then everything wasn't the same.

He was always stressed

I used to see [my father] all the time.

He wasn't the same, but he was still the same, but not. And then he used to be stressed all the time.

That's how I remember him.

[Crying]

[Recording stopped owing to the distress being felt at this moment]

Sorry, can you remember what was said?

I remember seeing him, he was always stressed because he was on his own, and he was always saying sorry to my mum. But I think my mum didn't care, she just wasn't bothered. And then he moved again to another house and then he started doing alright on his own, and my mum was doing alright on her own. I started senior school, and then I met different mates and started going around with different people, and getting off the estate instead of staying on there.

[I was seeing my father] sometimes, because I was always out with my mates then, around town, you know, I was out all day. I'd be in school, I'd come home from school, get changed and go straight out. So I can remember I used to go to my dad's and sometimes I used to stay if it weren't a school night.

A couple of years before, he'd got a dog, a German Shepherd. My dad used to sit outside with it for two hours every day and train it and it was trained dead well. He had a dog in his new house. I can remember going round and watching films with them. And me and dad were night owls, we used to stay up till 2 o'clock in the morning, or 3 o'clock, and then go to bed, and stay in bed till 12 o'clock the next day. I can remember he used to make cheese mash.

And me and my sister used to love it, and we used to beg him to make it us all the time.

He was alright then. You could tell he was made up¹ when me and my sister

¹ Happy

or me brother went round. He'd always go out of his way to make us feel welcome. Then one day round the corner from his house there was like an off-licence shop and I was standing outside and I saw this man had this dog, and I said to my mate, 'I'm sure that's our [name of dog]', and the fella was like, 'It's just bit my ankles, I didn't know it was this vicious.' So when I went round to see my dad I said to my dad, 'Dad, I've just seen some man by the shop round there, it looks like it was our dog.' And he said, 'It is.' And I said, 'Well what's he doing with it?' and he said, 'I can't look after it no more, I'm not well enough.'

I can remember sitting outside the room crying

He says, 'I'm getting headaches all the time now', and that's when he started. It must have been about two days later I went round to his [home] with one of my friends and my cousin was there, and my dad was sitting on the floor by the chair, you know, there was like a 3-seater and two 1-seaters, and he was sitting on the floor by the 1-seater and the curtains were closed, and it was in the morning time. And he had a box of Ritz [crackers].

And then my cousin come in and gave him a cup of tea and he dropped the cup of tea all over him, and I says, 'Why, has he been drinking?'. And my cousin said, 'No, he's been like this all night', and I says, 'What's up with him?', and then my dad says, 'I just want to go upstairs 'cause I've got a headache, I feel sick'. So when we were walking him up the stairs I said to my cousin, 'Shall I phone an ambulance?'. And my dad was saying, 'No, no, I'll be fine, I just need to lie down and go to sleep'. And then we put him to bed. And he gave me money because it was Easter about a week later. And I was going to town with my mate and I wasn't that long in town and when I come back I was knocking on his door and there was no answer, and when I went back home to my house my mum said he's in hospital because my dad's brother had come to see him and found him.

When he went to see him he realised straight away that there was something wrong with him and that's when we found out he had a brain tumour. But because I'd saw him that morning, put him to bed thinking that he'd had a drink, but he was acting like that because of a tumour.

When I was younger I used to think that I should have phoned an ambulance. I knew there was something wrong because when I put him to bed I can remember sitting outside the room crying. Because I was worried for him. Then my cousin said to me, 'Don't worry, he's fine, he just needs a little sleep. Go on, go to town with your mates and I'll look after him.'

I still feel bad but I know I was only 13 at the time so I wasn't to know that there was something wrong with him.

He was in the hospital, and my mum come to see him, and he's woke up after his operation and we were told he had six weeks to live. So my mum spoke to him and she said, 'You can come back home', and he was made up then because he was coming back to the house where they used to live together.

Then we all went to the café in the hospital for something to eat because he was asleep, and, when we were eating our food, the nurse come in and said, 'We think he's only got about an hour to live', because he went into a coma.

And then, when we got back, I think he died within about ten minutes. And then because my mum and dad had split up, my elder sister, she was next of kin, but it's only my dad's daughter not my mum's. She was next of kin then so, because we were all too young, she was arranging the funeral and they arranged for my dad to go in my auntie's house, my dad's brother's, but we all knew that he would have wanted to come home.

I didn't want to think it was real

I remember everything about his funeral.

The only time I cried was when he was getting carried in from the front room where he was laid out to the funeral car, then the funeral car into the church.

When he was getting carried I was crying, but when he was at the cemetery I didn't want to be there, I was just moaning I was too cold, 'I don't want to be here'. I didn't want to think it was real. And then after we got back, we went back to the pub where we had like a buffet on for people. And then my mum never came to that, they had their own one.

She went back to our house and my dad's close friends and some of the family came.

I think because I was just young so I just stayed with my cousins. So I didn't go back to my mum's, I just said to my mum, 'I'm staying with my cousins.' And my mum said, 'Okay, I'm going back to the house if you want to come.'

I started going off the rails a bit

I remember going back to school and I was crying, and I had loads of hour detentions to do from before the funeral. And I remember the teacher saying to me, 'I know what'll make you smile, I'll take all your hour detentions off so you don't have to do them.' That was my first day back at school after that. I was always late for school, I couldn't really be bothered going in.

I can't even remember what I put down to do in the years [courses].

I got put into a unit in the end.

It was just for kids who are expelled from school, or the school couldn't cope with them.

If you were good for the week they took you to McDonald's or KFC. We had done a bit of maths, English. It wasn't really like a school.

I hated it.

Because I wasn't with any of my mates anymore. I just stopped going, I wouldn't go.

I started hanging round with my cousins.

I think I stayed at home.

I was just doing nothing. I just sat in front of the telly all day and followed my mum round.

I'd probably just stay out at my cousin's, if she was off school or she weren't in school, I'd probably just go and stay there and probably come home late when everyone was home from school. So I think that's when I started going off the rails a bit.

I started drinking, thinking I was older than what I was, and hanging round with different people, staying out all night. Going into town and going back to parties. Just getting into trouble all the time.

[Getting into trouble] with everyone, like my mum for not going home, my auntie if I was with my cousin. Just arguing with people and picking fights and [problems] with the police.

I think a lot of my time, when I was just doing what I wanted, and staying out with my cousin, because she and her mates were a lot older, I was just drinking with them and wanting to go out with them and associate with the people they were associating with. And my mum moved to a different area and I didn't want to move there so I stayed with my cousin.

We grew up together [and] we didn't live that far from each other either.

It was just always going out drinking. I don't know what we were doing, we were just hanging round together and I just didn't want to go to home. I always wanted to stay in hers and we did everything together.

My dad died in April – it must've been when I went back to school in September, sort of after Christmas, that I started going to my cousin's, and started staying away from my mates and not doing what my mum told me to.

I just wanted to come home

[A young relative of mine] met her boyfriend who was a lot older. He lives in [another city] and then we started going up to [that city]. And then because my mum tried to stop me from going and her mum tried to stop her from going we ran away.

He was a lot older and he was probably a little bit controlling of my [young relative]. But I can't really remember anything about him. Anyway, we ran away and we were just staying at his house and he was taking us here, there and everywhere. Obviously we didn't know our way around or know where we was or anything so we were just following what he told us to do really. And it probably just got from bad to worse.

It's quite hard when I try and talk about [the circumstances of the offence] because I think people might think I'm lying that I'm saying I can't remember but I really can't remember.

I think not long after that offence [which later led to being imprisoned], I went home.

I phoned my mum and explained to her that I was stuck and I had no money on me because I just wanted to come home and get away from all the people I was with. And she paid my train fare and then I come home. I didn't tell no one what had happened, I just carried on with my life really. Once I was away I just come home and met up with my old friends and started just being normal and going out and getting jobs. I'd left school, I was just hanging round with my mates and doing normal things. I got a little job, a part time job. It was good just being normal and doing normal things. I just moved from job to job and getting out with all of my friends and boyfriends and working through the week, going on holidays and just doing normal things. My life was totally normal after that. No-one knew that I was involved with [my relative] so I think probably after I never got in contact with her she never got in contact with me. I think we were probably just a bit wild when we were together, and I don't think any of us ever expected to end up in prison or end up in the situation we was. I think because of what we were involved in, I think I just wanted to move away and just sort my life out and just be normal. And I didn't want to come to prison.

I wouldn't want someone to do that to me

[My feelings when I came back] were relief to get away from it and probably embarrassment that I'd done something like that. And probably just loads of guilt. About being involved in the offences, and thinking that I wouldn't want someone to do that to me. I know [my] right from wrong so I knew that was wrong. And I was just in a situation that I couldn't get out of and was just going along. But probably I could have got out of it but you just feel like you can't. It's like a memory block, isn't it, when you try and block something out that much?

MYstory 2

PROFILE

Young man

Offences:

Rape of child under 13 and other sexual assault offences committed between ages of 13 and 14 years

Sentence:

Indeterminate Imprisonment for Public Protection
Previously attended boarding schools for emotional and behavioural problems

Earliest memories

[My earliest memory was] probably just before going to boarding school, probably [at] about seven [years of age]. [I was] at home living with my mum. My dad and my mum had split up. Because of domestic abuse and things like that

I remember once my mum and dad were arguing over something and my dad smacked my mum over the head with a broom.

He hit her over the head with a broom and she's still got a permanent lump on her head now, the lump's never ever gone down.

And then there were other times. When I had a sparkler and my mum gave me the sparkler and she burnt my face by accident with the sparkler and my dad went mad and things like shouting at her, effing and blinding. [At that time I was] probably about six.

I didn't really know what to think because I was so young. At the time I didn't really know what I thought about it, it was just something that was happening. Because I was so young there was nothing I could do about it so I just kind of got on with it.

They didn't bother telling me because there was no need for them to, they would just leave it and try and put it to the back of their mind and try and forget about it.

[My mum and I] we'd be together all day before I went to boarding school, unless I

was playing out with my friends obviously, because there'd be times when I'd be playing out with my friends. If we've gone home from seeing the family, because I used to live on a landing and I knew people in the landing, family friends and that, I'd play with them on the landing, sometimes go into their house, they'd sometimes come into our house.

Obviously if my mum went out for the night or something or went out to a pub or something then my nan would look after me.

My mum would always have to pick up the pieces

There were loads of times when my dad would say that he'll come and see me and he wouldn't come and see me and he'd let me down, and they were kind of big events for me because it was always a let-down and my mum would always have to pick up the pieces.

I'm sure it was my birthday and Dad said he was going to come and take me out for my birthday and he didn't turn up.

He used to be a bit of a dickhead. He'd say things and then go back on it, so he'd say 'Yeah, I'll do this for you or I'll do this with you, son,' and then he wouldn't do it, he would just leave it to my mum to pick up the pieces because I was upset. Obviously if your dad's telling you he'll come and see you and he's going get you this and do this and do that and he don't come and see you, you're going to be upset, aren't you?

I'd be really upset and Mum would have to come and talk to me, make sure that I'm okay, tell me it's all right, maybe ring him up and have a go at him, and just make sure that I'm all right and make sure that I don't get too upset. And if I'd lost out on something then my mum would try and do something with me to make me happy, like she'd take me out somewhere or buy me something.

After, I felt okay, because once your mind's taken off it, you're not thinking about it and then by the time you think about it again, it's not affecting you no more, because you've already been annoyed by it and you had fun with someone else so you just think 'Forget it', because it used to happen so regularly as well. Towards the end it just become like a formality. If he didn't come it was just a formality, [you] don't expect him to turn up but if he does turn up, it's a bonus, so towards the end, I was just so used to it.

I know that he used to live in [name of town], so it wasn't a million miles away.

So he wasn't ever too far away.

[I was also upset at] not being allowed to do things, like my mum not letting me go out; for example, I went to go out and my mum wouldn't let me so I'm getting angry with her, start arguing and things like that.

One of my uncles was staying at the house with me and my mum, for a period of time so I got really close to him which was good because he played that man role like, it's always good to have. You're there, your mum's there and no one else is there. There's always that little bit of insecurity of

something could happen or something might happen.

My Mum couldn't look after me properly

We moved closer to my nan, and me and my mum was good. She started working in a sweet factory just down the road.

And then as I got a little bit older it deteriorated.

I'd always had behaviour problems from a young age - just started being naughty, staying out late, arguing with my mum, smashing up the house and things like that.

They're the reasons why I went into boarding school, because my mum couldn't look after me properly. When I was really young my mum hanged me over a balcony- that was when I was only a little baby- and threatened to drop me, and then I was seen, I think I must have only been about two, I was out early hours in the morning on my own.

When my mum first had me she suffered from really, really bad depression, and there was just loads of times when my mum just couldn't look after me properly, and I got put on the Child Protection Register and from the age of 18 months I was demonstrating sexualised behaviour. It was hard for my mum to look after me because when she was 16 she lost a kid at birth and she was only, I think 20/21 when she had me, so she wasn't particularly old considering she had a kid not long before that and lost it and then plus she had, I suppose, I don't really know but I suppose after you've lost your first kid when you have a second kid you have all that worry and anxiety that this'll happen to your second kid. My nan was always having to step in and look after me and make sure that my mum was okay and look after my mum, because my mum was 21, so it was just really hard for my mum. So in the end that's why they decided after all these things had piled up that I should go to boarding school.

I went into a boarding school for behavioural problems

I went to boarding school 7/7½ [years old] and I had a social worker before I went to boarding school and it was felt best for my safety and for mum's safety, because she couldn't look after me, that I went into a boarding school for behavioural and emotional problems. They said to me you can either go to boarding school or we'll put you in care and you won't see your mum till you're 16.

I just thought I've got to go boarding school. I didn't want to go. I didn't want to leave my mum because there was no one there for my mum at this time.

Investigation into alleged family abuse

When you're young you don't really understand what's going on, you just go

with the flow because you're so young but now I've got older and I've read reports and you just understand how bad it actually was and how difficult it actually was, even when I went boarding school, how hard it was, and before, having to go to see nurses and psychiatrists and people like that for my demonstrating sexualised behaviour and people thinking that I'd been abused by my dad.

I used to be really defensive of my mum because, as far as I'm concerned, and it was back then and it still is now, my mum always will be number one and my mum always will be my world so [if] anyone criticises my mum or tries to say something about my mum that I feel is critical of my mum, then I won't have it. So it was hard but you've also got to remember that you're being assessed, so anything you do while you're having these meetings is going to be writ down. And it's just hard because you don't know whether to be affectionate with your mum, whether they might misinterpret that as something, considering that they thought I'd been abused by my dad. You just never know what to do.

And it was difficult as well, especially when I'm at boarding school and knowing that my mum's at home on her own.

I didn't know what to think because they come out with all these things like that, social services, 'We believe that you've been abused by your father', and it's like even if you say to them, no, you haven't, they still think you have, so you don't know what to say. I believe it never happened and I can't remember that it happened so until someone can prove to me that it actually happened then I'm going to say 'No' all the time. It's like someone saying you robbed a shop but no one can prove it and you can't remember robbing the shop, you're going to think to yourself, 'No I didn't, I can't remember it so it didn't happen'.

Exposed to sexual behaviour at a young age

[When they said we believe you've been abused] now I'm looking at it, I think they meant like being touched and things like that, being physically touched in places that you shouldn't be touched. Back then to me, I never really knew the difference, I never knew that sexual abuse could be someone showing you sexual images at a young age on a computer or on a mobile phone or seeing people have sex and you're being exposed to sexual behaviour and I never knew that. And when I was younger I was exposed to them sort of things, like I did see people having sex and I saw people on that, like pictures of people having sex, so when people are saying it you just don't know what to say.

And plus my mum don't believe it, and it's hard for my mum as well because my mum's been abused, my mum was abused by her brother when she was younger and a few family members in my family have been abused, like there's a history of sexual abuse in my family, so for it to be brought up and someone says that it's happened to your son you don't know what to say

really, do you? And I don't know what I said, it was just so hard, and even to this day when it comes up, I'll deny it but I'll deny it not because I want to deny it, I'll deny because I can't remember nothing.

People having sex

[Two]family friends, I knew them, my mum knew them and they were in the living room with my mum and I was sleeping in my bedroom and I heard music, and I was only young so I got up to see what it was and I walked into the living room and my mum's sitting on the chair and on the sofa both of them are sitting there with nothing on, just a blanket like covering their legs, so I see all their top half and everything like that, and I knew that they were lesbians before and I never had a problem with it, and then my mum put me back to bed and I went asleep.

Locked in a cupboard

There was another time when I went to stay with my dad and his partner at his partner's house, and they locked me in a cupboard downstairs.

They put in the cupboard downstairs and closed the cupboard while they went upstairs to have sex.

Yeah, it came out in an argument. A room, cupboard, you know, just in a room while they had sex and that.

I didn't know what was going on, I'm only a little kid so, it's your dad, you do what your dad tells you to do, don't you?

You don't disobey your dad because if you disobey your dad you get a slap, and because I never saw him all the time, when you do see him, it's a good thing to see him so you don't want to make him angry. You don't want to upset him, you just want to make sure that you do whatever he wants. You just make sure that you do what you've got to do to be good and make sure that you have fun with your dad while you're there and with his partner. And you're supposed to have fun with them because I never got to see him all the time so, the time that I did spend with him, I had to make sure that it was good times.

You don't ever want to see the bad in your mum and dad

I told my mum that I was locked in the cupboard and it come up in that argument. Yeah, it came out in that argument, my mum and my dad and that was it.

It's just something you get on with, don't you? You don't ever want to see the bad in your mum and dad, do you? You always want to see the best in them. Like knowing that my mum hanged me over a balcony, and you hang a little kid over a balcony- one slip and that's it, I won't be here today. And walking down the streets in the early hours in the morning as a little kid, a baby, it only takes someone to take you and that's it.

So all my family have done bad things and done things that they regret so I just see it as it's something you've got to get on with, there's no point holding grudges. If I hold grudges against everyone in my family I won't have no family and the same about me. If my family held grudges against me they won't have me as a family, so it's just something you have to put to bed and forget about it until the right time comes, or if there is a right time, where you ask your father these questions and you ask the people that have done wrong or done things that they wasn't meant to do, you ask them why did you do this, why did you do that, but at this present time it's not possible. I've done counselling and because my offence is sexual so you have to talk about all sorts of things like that and my crime and the effects it has on family, it's just something that, I don't feel angry and I don't feel upset or I'm worried about talking about it, it's just something that you know that you're going to have to talk about and so if you talk about it now or ten years down the line you've got to talk about them so I don't mind I just feel, sometimes I think it's good to talk to people instead of keeping everything bottled up.

I'm so close to my mum so I know whatever happens between me and my mum and whatever the outcome if I do ask all the questions, there won't be no animosity, there won't ever be no problems about it. It happened and I'll ask my mum why it happened when I get out, and I'll talk to her about it why it happened. My dad on the other hand it's a bit different because all my dad's kids yeah, he's not been there for them all of the time and me and my sister are the only ones that call him Dad, the other [children] call him [by his personal name] so it's going to be harder for me to ask my dad these questions because our relationship is not as close as what mine and my mum's is.

Now I don't see [my brothers and sisters] because obviously where I am [in prison] and my dad don't see none of them, because my dad let them [two] down so much they call someone else dad and because one of my offences is against my [half] sister and my dad's [living together now] with my mum. My dad don't get to see his daughter unless he takes her out without my mum, so it's a bit hard for him to see [her] because that's one of my victims. Her mum don't want my mum being around her if you get what I mean.

Sexualised behaviour

At 18 months I was showing signs of sexualised behaviour, I'm not too sure in what way but when I got a little bit older I was caught having sex with two [young relatives].

That one where I was so young I didn't get arrested.

Basically the one where I was really young I was like six or seven.

Social services got involved, it was investigated and it was recommended that I don't be around them on my own. It was recommended that I get some therapeutic help with my sexualised behaviour, but nothing never come of

that, it was just that I was kept away from them for a period of time.

Boundaries

I didn't think nothing of it because up until I got arrested and come to jail I never had any boundaries.

I could get away with most things, I never had no boundaries, so when I did this, I didn't get in trouble for it. That was my thinking when I was young that I can do these things and I don't get in trouble for it, so I didn't really think anything of it, I just thought that it was okay, I knew that it wasn't okay but I didn't think that it was as bad as what I know it is now obviously. I didn't know and because I'd seen sex all my life and no one had ever- you know you have your mum or dad and they give you the sex chat- I never ever had the sex chat about 'You do this, you can't do that, make sure you do that, you only can do this at that age', so it was just a normal thing to me, I didn't get in trouble for it, I got told off but that was it.

And the thing was, as well, there'd be times I'd be staying at my nan's house sometimes and [the mother of the girls] would come and drop them off there while I'm staying there, full well knowing that I'm not allowed to be there with them, and my nan's not going to kick me out, is she? And she's not going to kick them out because they're only little kids, so it was like, 'Yeah, I've been told I can't do it, yeah, I got in trouble for it, but then you're leaving them here again while I'm here so it's like it's okay, nothing's wrong with it'. So I'm thinking 'Hold up, what's going on here?' and there'd be times when my nan would have to call my mum and my mum would come and pick me up and I wouldn't be allowed to stay with my nan and I'd get told 'No' and I'd have to go and stay at home with my mum.

So because I didn't get in really big trouble for it I didn't acknowledge how bad it actually was, I just thought it was something, I knew it was bad but I kind of just thought it was normal like. I was going to boarding school at the time and having sex in boarding school.

All the time I was having sex in boarding school.

Yeah, just girls. And I used to have sex with the girls that were in the dormitory. Obviously they wasn't made to do it, everyone who was there had emotional and behavioural problems, as you know, which is something that you'd have long-term, which was a regular thing. I could go to their bedrooms whenever I wanted.

Yeah, this is, the thing, there was a number of times that I'd been caught in bed with girls and I never got in trouble for it.

I was never suspended, I never got kicked out of school, I may have got a little telling off but that was it and I'd still be left on the same wing with the same girls. There was one time, me and one of my friends, we were barricaded in one girl's bedroom, and we just kept on constantly having sex, I'll go, then he'll go, then I'll go, then he'll go, then I'll go and then he'll go, and the govs.¹ were banging on the door telling us to come out but because

¹ Staff

we had barricaded it they couldn't open it, it was a handle thing, you know where you turn the handle down but we'd put wardrobes there so you couldn't turn the handle down to open the door and once we'd stopped and we'd opened the door the first thing the gov. said to us,' Do you want showers?'

Yeah. 'Do you want a shower?' not 'You're in really big trouble, get to your bedroom now', like nothing was wrong. Obviously there were times when we got in trouble for it and got told off, but if you get told off for doing something, you won't expect to be put back in the same place where you were doing it.

It's in all the reports, it's very well documented, that sexual activity.

It was probably from about eight [years of age], maybe eight and a bit upwards, to eleven.

Boarding school education

The education was good. It was on the same grounds as where we lived and you just had to walk over to another building. You just done normal things like English, Maths, PE, science, history, computers, you had your break time, so it was all good.

I was in one class and then I moved out of that class upstairs to another class and then I stayed, and then I always stayed in that class upstairs. I don't know why but that's just the class I preferred to stay in so I stayed in there for how long I was there for.

I got on with people there. I got on with people in the class better and that was more to my level.

We had two teachers and then we had like a teaching assistant. It was all good. I got on with them and I think there was about five or six of us in the class, maybe a few more.

I got on with everyone there, we all got on really well. Obviously a lot of arguments, there's always arguments. You're not going to be around people all the time and not argue, or not get on, because it doesn't mean you don't get on when you argue, but the majority of the time it was all good.

A really nice hot day

My whole class, I think it was the charity Sport Relief, and we arranged a car wash and, for the whole day, which was like the whole school, we just washed loads of cars. It was a really nice hot day, we just had loads of fun and we laughed and it was just really good. All the teachers got involved, like all our teachers in our class got involved.

A really, really bad scary day

Obviously there's bad memories. There's loads, like me and a couple of boys we run away from the school. And everyone run away, sometimes we'd just run away, mess about and leave the campus and run off. There was me and a few other people. And as you leave our school, you have to cross a road and we crossed the road, me and a couple of the other boys, we're on the opposite side of the road to the school now, and I can't remember what happened but one of my friends, we didn't see no cars and he just run out in the road, the car just smashed into him.

I'm only young now. The car just smashed straight, like we all was (sound of smash), and then I just ran back to the school, like he got up and just ran towards the school, he just got up in shock and just run towards the school and then I run back onto the school campus as well, we all did like, chased after him. And then obviously he got taken to hospital and I just remembered a really, really bad scary day because he was on my unit as well.

He went to hospital and then he never come back, like he left the school.

He come back to visit us, to say thank you and say bye, but he never actually come back and stayed there.

Time out

[If you broke a rule] nothing really happened. You'd get in trouble. You might get taken up to your bedroom and get told you've got to stay in your bedroom for a little while but nothing major, because we are only really young so there's nothing they can really do. Sometimes you'll get taken to one room. They built this one room and would just leave you in there all day. You're in the room, the govs. are outside and they just won't let you socialise with anyone in the unit.

I think they called it something like the time out room.

The govs. are outside and you're just sat there. I think there were little games they'd leave in there for you. You were just on your own, no-one to socialise with. Wow! It's boring. But that only happened when you were naughty or you had a fight and you had to get separated from each other for a little while.

If you're being good then they take you off campus

[If you did something good] nothing really [would happen]. The unit would get told that you'd done something good. If you're being good then they take you off campus and you might go down to the town, you might go cinema, you might go up to the park. Some of them had dogs and they'd bring the dog in and you'd go take the dog out for a walk with them. You'd go for little walks and then you'd go BMX-ing because the whole thing really was backed onto like woods.

Family days

I was able to ring my mum whenever I wanted to. I'd go home very rarely, it was just mainly phone calls and they'd have family days and on a family day your mum would come up, and other family members, look around the unit, take them up to your bedroom, show them your bedroom, show them all around the unit, play out in the back garden. Your keyworker talks to your mum, let your mum know how you're doing and let your family know how you're doing like. If your family's got any questions your keyworker's there to answer the questions. It was just a fun day where lots of people's family will come up and you'll all just integrate together.

They always let me speak to my mum, always made sure I was okay, if I had problems or was upset.

I went there when I was about seven and a half and I left when I was about eleven.

He needs to go somewhere else

Basically, me and a couple of friends, we kicked off and we climbed onto a little porch roof and we was ripping off tiles, smashing tiles. The police had to be called in with all their shields. When we eventually got brought down and we got taken to the police station, I got sent home and then they said basically we feel that we can't help them here no more. He needs to go somewhere else.

We were out on the field and then one of the guys messing about, we're meant to be indoors yeah, we weren't allowed to be out and we were just running around, had staff chasing after us, and then we knew we could get on the roof and they wouldn't be able to get us and then we got on the roof. We're sitting there, not doing nothing, the tiles were loose and we just started picking up the tiles, throwing them at the cars, throwing them at the police through their riot shields and that. I remember I was lobbing the tiles and the police come out with these big shields over their head and they had a ladder. They put a ladder up against the roof and I went to kick the ladder and my foot got stuck in the ladder and they pulled the ladder and I had to kick my foot out and my boy had to grab hold of me otherwise I'd have been hanging upside down off the roof.

Might as well go all out

From what I can remember it was just like messing about and then one thing led to another and you get on the roof and start throwing tiles and then you know that you're in major trouble. You're damaging school property and you're not going to get away with this lightly and then when the police come, you just think to yourself 'Fuck it. Might as well go all out'.

Before, my mentality used to be like if I've lost something, like if I've lost

everything I've got nothing to work towards, 'Just go all out, fuck it like, just go all out, I don't care, I'll just do what I've got to do and that's it.' That's been my mentality from when I was a little kid. It's changed a little bit now. It's not as bad now, if I get in trouble.

I used to ruin things for myself

One minute I can be okay and then a minute later, I can start to kick off, I can just change in seconds and my whole attitude, my whole mentality. I'll be calm and then I'll just get angry and then I'll just think 'Fuck it, I've got nothing to work towards now, I've lost it all anyway, just go do what you've got to do'. I used to ruin things for myself, like, I would have something coming up like maybe a football match that I wanted to go to, or play for like the school, and I'd know that that's coming up and I'd do something to stop myself from being able to go. Not meaning to, but it would just happen, that I'd kick off and then they'd say 'No you can't go,' and then I'll get really upset about it. So everything that was going well for me I'd end up destroying it some way. That's just the way it was.

I was just so, so, so scared. It was just a big shock because when you're having a laugh, you don't really think of the dangers until you see the danger of you nearly have the accident and in the end I got down and I got taken over to where they serve the meals. That's where the time out room is, and the police took me over there, spoke to me, took me down to the police station and then that was it. I never, ever went back to that school apart from when I got invited once, that was it. One of the biggest mistakes I made, that thing on the roof.

They felt that they couldn't help me no more. They couldn't help my moods any more so I had to go to another school that dealt with behavioural problems.

While I'm there, that's my home

It was a boarding school. Just boys this time, all boys. [It had several] units on campus, [and] units off campus that were for older trusted people, and one off-campus unit for when you left if you wanted to go to college, and it was deemed suitable by everyone. Obviously [I] had problems there, my behaviour problems, and being bent² up, assaulting staff, smashing things up. I was good at my education and it was a really nice boarding school. They had their own outdoor swimming pool there. They had motorbikes there. They had a big playing field there. They had a hard court there to play football, basketball, tennis, you name it. They had a grass pitch there as well and it was just really good. Obviously I had my problems there but I got on with everyone else there. I liked all the staff that were there. They was all really nice. Basically, because the way I looked at it is, while I'm there, that's my home. Certain people are like family to me. A lot of people there that I

² Restrained

really, really liked and you get on with and you build relationships with and you can talk to them and you know you can trust them.

Obviously I had my problems there

I was gardening, doing what we had to do basically, and one of my friends wound me up.

It was just like an inconspicuous little joke and I think I may have been a bit pissed off already and I started lashing out, smashing up the polytunnel. They all had to evacuate the polytunnels, I was throwing forks at the polytunnels, smashed all the plastic sheeting. Just went literally mad and there was a [female] staff member outside the polytunnel trying to talk to me, calm me down. I remember there was one at the front of the polytunnel and I had a fork and I picked up the fork and I threw the fork. A proper big pitch fork.

The fork's gone through the polytunnel, like the plastic sheeting and it just missed her neck by inches, literally by inches.

I then walked to the time out room. After that I think, it hit me like, 'Wow, you need to calm down'.

They just asked me why I'd done it. Explained to me the seriousness of it. That was it really.

I got in trouble for it. I wasn't allowed to do gardening again for ages!

I was banned from doing gardening for a long time. And plus there's a woman as well getting nearly hit.

They didn't like the look of it. Adds a little bit, more extreme, I suppose. I don't know, like it's just this country really, I suppose. If you're a man or a teenager, if you hit a woman it's worse than hitting a man, do you know what I mean? If a man hits a woman, it's all bad. If a man hits a man, there's nothing really wrong, so I felt really bad afterwards.

Problems at home

There were problems at home throughout my time at boarding school. My mum was going out with this guy and he was going out with another girl as well. It was all confusing basically and this girl's brother come banging on my mum's door. My mum knew him, my mum opened the door, got a big machete. My mum's on the stairs and I'm on the stairs as well and I'm the only one, he's banging the machete off the carpet.

Yeah, he's banging it on the floor in anger, having a go at my mum. That was quite surreal. It was day to day life. So it's not something that affects me or something that gets to me or something I'm shocked about. It's just like normal occurrences.

I'd seen it so many times, whether it was my dad beating up my mum or my mum getting into arguments or fights, it was just fights. I just got so used to it.

I'd take my anger out on people that I liked the most

When I was younger my mum used to hit me. When I used to step out of line and was naughty, my mum would give me a slap. It didn't work though.

If it did, I wouldn't be here [in prison], would I?

Obviously when I was a kid, I'd sit and I'd get upset about it [a slap] but then after a little while, just get used to it. Becomes a regular occurrence. Because there was so many problems all the time, like it didn't affect me. It did affect me, like I'd think about my boarding school and I'd be naughty and I'd get bent up there, have arguments and assault staff. That was it. I'd take my anger out on people that I liked the most.

Loads of times, there was like govs. that I got on with, female, male and it don't matter when, or they might bend me up, or I'll just lose it, and be a proper little cunt to them. I will make them chase after me. I'll spit at them. If they try and bend me up I'll hit them.

From bail to remand

[After being arrested for the offence that led to my imprisonment] I had bail to my school and I breached my bail.

I got sent to a secure training centre. It's basically like a boarding school but behind bars.

That first wing was good. It was just like that every day, like go education, come back to the wing, play computer, watch TV, play cards, talk to the staff, play pool, go out and exercise. It was like that for a good couple of months. Obviously I had incidents where I kicked off, smashed things up and things like that-for example, stole their radio, messing about with their radio. That's a major security breach.

Then I got sentenced and I remember I went up to the strip search room and I'm waiting now to go back to my unit, it come over the radio, move to [name of unit]. I refused. 'No I'm not going, I'm not going back to [name of unit]'. I kicked off, hid under the chair, got carried all the way over to [name of unit], put in my cell.

GCSEs and incidents

[There were] normal lessons, English, art, maths, I was doing art GCSE, I was doing GCSE geography, GCSE RE, and GCSE food tech.

Everything was good. I obviously had my incidents there. I remember one time I got pissed off and on the pool table you've got clips where you can take off the top and we'd undone the clips and I tipped it upside down. The wooden bit fell against the wall and the big slate bit snapped the wooden bit straight in the middle- clean. So that was broken. Everyone was pissed off with me. Not happy. I got on with some good guys there. I had arguments with them, but apart from that everything was good. But wherever I went I

had problems. I got physically restrained- 15 times out of 31 days.

Anger management

I was doing anger management while I was there. I was doing anger management placements. That's the psychology people.

[The person] just talked about what I can do to calm my anger, what staff can do to help me, like we had these cards, red and yellow. I think the govts. had some and I had some and red was 'need to stop, calm down'. Yellow was 'you're starting to get a bit het-up, you need to calm down'. If I was getting pissed off or I was getting really angry, I'd show the cards to them or if they thought I was getting pissed off or really angry they'd show the cards to me and that was a way to help me calm down and count to 10 and there was some relaxation things that I had in my cell that govts. would do with me on the night time.

A specialist unit

I went to the [name of specialist long term prison Unit], to do the [name of programme for young people who sexually abuse] to work on my offence. I was doing my work. Everything was okay there. Everything was good. Then I got kicked out of there as well.

We had had a sports day and, I'd got a shower before dinner time, when I wasn't meant to and I'd asked for a phone call to my mum and I was on [the] basic [regime] and he said 'No you're not having a phone call to your mum'. I kicked off, pushed the alarm bell, squirted shower gel at the governor and then the final trigger was I refused to leave the class and they told me if you keep on kicking off you're going to get kicked off the unit and get sent off. And I refused to leave the class and I refused to leave and that was it.

I said 'Oh, I just want to leave, go up to [a young offender institution] and they said 'Okay then'.

I said it out of anger but once it's said, it's said, isn't it?

Programmes for young people who sexually abuse

[It was] just talking about my offence. Watching some American DVD. You saw the person that committed the offence, why he committed the offence, to see if there's anything similar. In my case, if there was, I would pause it, say 'Yeah, that's a similarity to my case'. And then also heard from a victim's point of view, how she felt, what it felt like for her, and we watched that DVD and just spoke a lot about family, background, did a bit of victim empathy. Watched some DVD, the A to Z of Sex guide, I'm not too sure what it was. Like just to get a better understanding of sex. And just mainly worked on why I committed the offences and things like that.

I just told the truth. Say for example, if they asked me why I done it, I just explained [that] I'd asked my girlfriend for oral, she said 'No' and that I wanted to do it and that was the opportunity to do it [with someone else] and that it was power and control- that I was in control of the situation and she couldn't say 'No'. That's why I done my offences as well.

As soon as they asked me that's what I said. I just told them the truth. I don't need to lie.

The only way I can help myself is by telling the truth and working as hard as I can to do everything I can.

[The person who talked with me was a] really nice person, easy to talk to, never made you feel uncomfortable and just really assuring. Made you feel at ease, even though the subject we're talking about is difficult.

[I] had done Juvenile Enhanced Thinking Skills, went for parole and the recommendation was that I had to do the SOTP programme, sex offenders treatment programme. I left [a young offender institution], went to [a second young offender institution] for a night, then got shipped to here. [Now I have] finished the SOTP course basically.

Motivators

Being able to do the courses I wanted to do. That's made me really motivated to do construction when I get out.

When I was in [a specialist prison service unit] my nan passed away so the last memories of me and my nan were in prison and I just want to make sure that I change that and make sure that won't be my last memory of anyone else in jail. Make sure that if people are going to come up and see me I'll be able to see them when I get out as well. So that's a motivator, just want to get out and be there with my mum, help my mum out, because since I've been in jail my mum's been through a lot, having to deal with a lot of things on her own.

I don't need to dilute my feelings

I just try and be as honest as you can be. Everything in there is the truth. I don't need to dilute my feelings, I don't need to dilute the situations or try and make the situations worse than they are, I just tell it how it is.

MYstory 3

PROFILE

Young man

Offences:

Murder committed at the age of 14 years.

Other family members were also convicted in connection with this offence.

Sentence:

Detained at Her Majesty's pleasure.

Earliest memories

I remember [Mum and Dad] happy but also remember them pissed off at each other all the time.

I think I must've been three or four [years old].

There was a lot of arguments. When it was good it was really good; when it was bad it was really shit.

I remember my first holiday with my mum and dad; we went to Butlin's.

There was me and my mum, my dad, my mum and dad's friends and their son who's a year younger than me. I remember going on the canoes with my dad.

Even though I was a kid, I was defending my mum

My nan split up with one of her boyfriends, and my nan was staying round the house and her boyfriend come round and kicked off and tried to beat my mum up and he pushed my mum, and obviously my nan wasn't there at the time. He was living with my nan and he forced his way in, pushed my mum and my mum hurt her back here on the door handle. I think my mum says I attacked him, I threw something at him and basically I didn't do much, I was only a fucking kid, but I threw something apparently. I think it was a glass or something and my mum basically just managed to get him out of the door; even though I was a kid, I was defending my mum.

It was the year before I started school so I must have been four.

His temper's very volatile and my mum's exactly the same

My mum's quite a fiery woman, quite passionate, very angry. When she gets in a mood she's very tough. But at the same time she's very caring as well, so two ends of the extreme. And my dad's got quite a temper on him as well. He's exactly the same, like he's very caring and very loyal to people who are close to him, he'll do anything for them, but at the same time his temper's very volatile and my mum's exactly the same. So it's going to cause tension, isn't it?

I used to play football with my dad out in the back garden. That used to piss my mum off because I used to break the shed window. But other than that it was alright, but at the same time I remember, my dad used to come home pissed, just more drunk, and my mum would kick off and they'd start arguing about two or three in the morning. And then there'd all be fist marks in the doors, coffee stains, alcohol stains all up the wall there; people had been throwing drinks around, plates. I remember one time my dad broke the door; he just ripped it off the fucking hinges. That was just before school. He kicked off. He threw the coffee up the wall, smashed right there and then my mum threw something at him and he closed the door and grabbed the door and just ripped it off the hinges, and then my mum took me to school.

I was upset because I didn't know if I was going to see my mum

The only time that I ever really got upset was when they were arguing one night like proper loud. I had a babysitter who had obviously put me to bed. And I woke up and I come downstairs, I don't even know how old I was. I was young, it was only, I must have been about six, seven, something like that. They were arguing and I told them to stop and I thought they were shocked. They stopped for about five or ten minutes, I went back upstairs, so I'd gone back to sleep and then they started arguing again. And I come down, I hit my dad and then told him, because I remember hearing him mainly, and then I went back upstairs and went to sleep and I was angry. And then I went downstairs and I slapped my mum for that on the leg, you know. I said. 'Stop arguing', it was like that. And then I come downstairs again because my mum was shouting and screaming but she wasn't, she was just making noises sort of thing. And I thought my dad had hurt my mum so I went downstairs to protect my mum and they were just stood there arguing in each other's face.

And then Dad's like 'I'm leaving and I'm taking [my name]', and my mum was going 'No you're not', and my dad's told me to go and pack my stuff. I remember going and packing my stuff and brought it all downstairs and my mum had obviously given up on the chance of trying to keep hold of me, and I remember just crying. I was upset because I didn't know if I was going to

see my mum. That one's quite clear. But in the end my dad saw how much it hurt me and he left me with my mum and he went. But the next day they were back; it was back to normal, back to them being together again.

Spoilt rotten at Christmas

I had all the Power Rangers, because my dad used to go and work in [another country] sometimes and I remember a couple of months before he'd come back with every single Power Ranger, like the big action figures, Action Man size. He come back with loads of them and he got me all the little cars to go with it.

Basically I got spoilt rotten at Christmas, I got a bike, I got the laptop [educational computer] for my birthday, as well as loads of other bits. I had like a little party for my birthday. I think he went in jail a couple of months after that.

Always in trouble

He was always in trouble so he'd disappear to either [another country] for a while or he'd go back to jail.

My dad just had to go away for a little while. It happened regularly so it was nothing out of the blue for me. I remember the police kicking the front door down or just banging on the door asking for my dad. One minute my dad was there and then I'd look round and he'd fucking gone. He'd hop the fence and fuck off. But my mum would just say 'He ain't in'. It wasn't anything unusual. It wasn't until I got a lot older that I realised that that wasn't the average thing. I just thought that was normal.

My mum and dad split up

There was always a lot of arguments in the house, always. It must've been just before I finished primary school, my dad moved out, my mum and dad split up.

My auntie and my uncle split up so my dad moved in with my uncle just to smooth it over, and then my mum and dad got back together, he moved in and then something happened.

They were back together for about two weeks and my mum took me to karate in the evening, as we were in the car taking me, my mum and dad were arguing. I'd seen them argue bad but really bad. Something had gone on a couple of weeks before that was really, really bad. And my dad smashed the fucking windscreen, and when it just pfffffft, cracked and my mum shit herself and I was alone in me own little world.

I didn't want to lose my dad

My mum had found a loophole with my dad, because the house is under my mum's name. My mum said she phoned the police and said 'Oh, I've been kicked out the house' by my dad, and my dad was on bail at the time. Basically, by doing that, my dad would go to prison because he didn't have a bail address. So I remember there was like six or seven of the big police wagons, then there was the little cars, there was a good 50, 60 police officers there just trying to remove my dad and his friend from the house. But they didn't go round the back, everyone was just stood out front.

I remember looking out my bedroom window and there's a little field outside my house where all of us on the estate used to play football, and I just remember seeing the police everywhere and then my dad put some music on really loud and he packed his bags and he'd snuck me out the back door with his friend, and we got out the back gate and we walked round and got away from the police, but because he had me in his arms, he was using me to his advantage really, and he knew that the police weren't going to touch him, because he was physically carrying me. So basically we got to the end of the road and we got out of the estate and my dad didn't want me to miss soccer school, which I've got to give to him. But he knew he was going to get arrested at the same time so he just sat there. He explained things to me that he could be gone for a while. He knew that he'd lost the battle in a way, the way we were going, but he tried to do his best. I remember him crying, which made me cry and then, yeah. That was the end of the first year of junior school.

When we got to the end of the road and we sat there just waiting for my friend to pick me up, and then I realised that I wasn't going to see my dad for a while. I can't even remember how I realised but I remember I was terrified. I didn't want to lose my dad.

He's my dad, isn't he, so I was scared of [pause] I didn't know when I was going to see him next. I was upset obviously, I was angry.

Basically my mum's friend picked me up with her son, and I remember literally them having to rip me away from my dad, and my dad was obviously trying to push me away to get in the car, but I could tell it was ripping him apart sort of thing. I got in the car, I cried all the way to soccer school because obviously I'd seen the police arrest my dad before, but this time I'd never seen that many police. And obviously I've embarrassed him but, you know, you've just been ripped off your dad. I go to soccer school, I was perfectly fine, go out to play football, cheered up, then saw my mum and that was confusing.

I remember when my mum picked me up from soccer school on the last day, because I never qualified. I was doing alright, I enjoyed it a lot, one of the happiest times I've ever had. And then my mum picked me up halfway through the last day and I hadn't seen my mum for about four or five days and she looked a bit distressed and upset. She give me a hug and said,

‘Come on, we’re going’.

I was a little bit upset that I couldn’t finish soccer school. Obviously I didn’t understand. But my mum was saying, ‘Look we’ve got to go.’

The place was trashed

After that I didn’t see my dad for god knows how long, and then I remember my auntie used to come and pick me up. I remember she sorted something out. That night my mum, because she knew my dad had moved from the house, she went back to the house without me and the place was trashed. I mean the whole place. The police had to come and take photographic evidence; there was nothing left in the house usable.

My dad had left my room completely fine - perfect. All my toys that were around the house he took and put in my room, all my stuff, all the photos of me, anything that involved me basically he left perfectly fine, but anything involving my mum he’d just trashed. It took my mum four or five days to clean it all up with friends. So he wasn’t happy. But neither of them will tell me why the original argument happened still so it’s got to be something bad.

The rest of my family messed my life up

My dad’s always struggled with drink and drugs, and my dad’s dad is an alcoholic, he used to beat up my dad, he used to rape my aunties, and he used to have his friends sexually abuse my aunties. It was a long time ago.

Things would happen with him and my cousins as well. I mean nothing had ever happened to me, thank god. Well, my granddad hit me a few times, but my dad always defended me. That was after my mum and dad split up and my dad was living with my granddad.

I don’t speak to him. Only if I ring up my nan, because he beats my nan up regularly. He put her in hospital the other month, but what can you do? It’s quite full on.

All of this has already been through court: there’s all these convictions; there’s all these ‘not guilties’.

The rest of my family messed my life up and they’re pretty much the reason that I’m in jail.

I suppose I had my mum and dad’s temper

By this point, even though I was young, I was always set in my ways, because I was stubborn. I could speak my mind, I used to get in trouble when I was at school for doing it, and the teacher would tell me off and I’d be like ‘No’.

I was very argumentative even though I didn’t know what I was talking about. And so I lost all contact with [my dad]. I don’t even know what happened. Basically when I falled out with my mum’s boyfriend it’s water off a duck’s

back; Mum got another boyfriend and by this point I'd progressed through the school, I slowly started getting into more trouble. As I was growing up I wasn't a troublemaker but I wasn't a goody-goody.

I'd get in trouble for fighting at school. I mean I was only in junior school, so it wasn't ever nothing serious.

Not doing my homework was always big thing [with] me, I fucking hated doing it. But when my mum and dad were together, I used to do it all the time because I had my little laptop and they used to sit there with me and read the Chip and Biff books. I was really good. I was quite well behaved when I was in primary school, but when I hit junior school, the older I've got, the problems with my mum and dad [trails off]. As an adult I can look back at it now and say that's why that happened, but as a kid you don't realise that you're just angry and you're just lashing out. I was throwing things in class and just generally being a bit of a class joker really. I was a bit of a class clown, but I was always smiling. But at the same time when I used to throw a wobbly, I used to proper throw it.

I suppose I had my mum and dad's temper every so often. I got in a lot of trouble once when I flipped a desk and threw a chair at the teacher, but I don't really remember that because I used to black out when I used to get angry as a kid, so I'd do something and next thing I know I'm in front of the headmaster. I'd be like 'What's going on here?' I was just an angry kid, get in fights and stuff like that really. After that my mum was single for a while and we were getting proper like really, really close, because when my mum was with [name of boyfriend], the guy that used to beat me up, obviously because that was happening to me, even though I knew he made my mum happy but my mum didn't do nothing about it, even though I hadn't said nothing and there was no evidence, I distanced myself from my mum on that. And obviously I was getting in trouble at school and she didn't understand why, and I never told her so I can't hold it against her, our relationship broke down, I used to start lashing out at my mum and shouting at her. She'd be shouting at me, and neither of us know how to deal with the situation.

She was single for about six months. I hadn't been fishing for years since my dad left and I remember one morning my mum just woke me up at about seven in the morning. She got someone to teach her how to fish, because I was so young when I'd done it with my dad I couldn't remember nothing. I think I caught a couple of little fish about that big [mimes size], but we just spent all day with my mum, picnic sort of thing. And after that we'd spend a lot of time together and our relationship built up again.

My dad come back into my life. My dad rung me on my mobile and I hadn't spoken to my dad for like four and a half years. I was 11. I didn't recognise him and he didn't recognise me like, but obviously he knew who it was because he'd got the number off my cousin and he was like 'Oh you all right?' I was quite vocal, I think my actual words were 'Who the fuck are you?' And my dad's like, 'It's your dad'. He rung and then was talking to me for hours, I don't really know what about, you know, just catching up and I told

my mum, and she seemed happy that I was happy because I'd spoken to my dad. Because obviously I missed my dad and I used to talk about him a lot to my mum, and like, 'When can I see dad?' She was like 'I don't know, I'll sort it out'. She never did, but at the moment I know why she didn't, because my dad was a fucking wreck. He was on all sorts of drugs, he was an alcoholic, always getting in fights, I don't know, he was living in the same area as us, I just never fucking saw him.

Obviously I had my mum and her boyfriends and whatever, all that shit going on, and then after that my mum and him were on the phone for hours, I mean absolutely fucking hours, sorting things out, just talking, I suppose in a way trying to build a relationship of some sort. Because as far as I knew they hadn't spoken for the same time as I hadn't. So they arranged for me to go fishing with my dad, because obviously that was mine and my dad's thing when I was a kid, he used to take me fishing all the time.

I got heavily involved in drugs round about that time

My dad, which was probably the most mature thing I've ever seen him do, signed himself up for rehab. and it was a 12 month to 18 month programme. I can't knock him for that in fairness. He was only in there 12 months, worked his fucking arse off and got clean.

I don't remember my dad clean, that's how bad [it] is. I don't remember him not being drunk. I mean even when he come fishing with [me] that time he was drunk but he wasn't plastered. He was drinking while we there, I mean my dad's an alcoholic, of course he's going to fucking drink, but I suppose that's the dark side of my dad, he's got a lot of demons.

He come out and he'd done well for about two months and then everything went downhill again. This was when I got really bad, I got heavily involved in drugs round about that time and I started drinking and smoking weed. For some reason I just changed, because I'd always been a bit aggressive, I was protective over my mum, but then I think because I was spending so much time with my dad my mum got a little bit jealous.

I used to like going down the pub with my dad, because everyone treated my dad differently to the way they treated my mum. When I used to go to the pub with my mum I'd only enjoy it every now and then, because my mum when she drinks she's either really good or she's really fucking bad.

I'd come home at about half ten when I go back to his place, bang on the door, get the PlayStation out, have a smoke, get drunk, play the PlayStation for five or six hours just not really saying much, just talking absolute shit. I remember there was one time, it sounds bad, you know, we were both drunk and we were stoned but one of the best times I've ever had with my dad. We were sat there playing the PlayStation - James Bond - and I couldn't even do the first mission. We were just off our heads, but we were just sat there talking 'Oh shit, your go'. 'Shit, your go.' I think we was up nearly all night.

All of my friends were always older than me

I used to stay out on the estate, literally thirty of us, 40 of us. We were just all like drunk, drugs, just walking around all the time.

All of my friends were always older than me, they were always about 15, 16, they were always a lot older than me because of my older cousins, obviously my dad had a reputation and he knew their dads so I've known them since they was kids.

But because I was out, because I was drinking and smoking, they kind of took me in.

I suppose, if you're the average person, it's 11 at night and you see just forty young people walking towards you, you ain't exactly going to be most welcoming, are you? Especially when we're all drunk and shouting and play fighting.

We'd be thieving from the shops

My mum used to hate me being out. If she's telling me to be home at 9 o'clock I used to think 'Why? I stayed out at 11 on Monday night and it's Friday night, I haven't got school in the morning, why can't I stay out until 11 or half 11, 12?' She'd be like 'Because I don't want you to', and to me that wasn't a good enough argument so I just done what I wanted. Whereas we always used to find money as well to get our drink and drugs, so we'd be thieving from the shops, a burglary here and there. Sometimes during [the] day we'd be bunking off school, just hijack the shops. One woman used to take me and my mate in her car, we used to give her £20 petrol money - well, we used to give her £20 of what we'd earn.

And we'd just rob the shops blind and stop off in [name of city] and just terrorise [name of city] shops. By the time you get to [name of town] you've got [name of supermarket]. That is what we usually used to do which would cover our petrol money for driving us about, because we just used to rob a shop, so we'd fill up a trolley, take it in [name of supermarket]. We used to just walk in one entrance, do the shopping and walk out the other entrance, because there were two entrances so they couldn't monitor.

My dad knew I was up to little things like that but I think he viewed it as if, as long as he's not being stupid and going out selling drugs and things like that. And then obviously he went to jail and I done it a whole lot worse. I was out every day just thieving, taking drugs every day, drinking. My mum didn't know what to do, because I wrecked myself and I think I drove her to drinking more and drugs more herself. So although I was never high on drugs, really I don't think, she just started smoking weed a lot more, drinking every day, so when she told me not to smoke and not to drink and do all this I just viewed her as a hypocrite.

‘Right, I need to sort my life out a little bit’

There was about 10 or 15 of us and we’re all on our way back to the estate, and we were in the park just having a little breather.

Some guy that we knew, we knew his brother, he’d just been remanded for a series of cocaine sales.

He walked through on his own and we were taking the piss out of him and threw a couple of beer cans at him, empty ones. And he was like ‘Yeah, you think you’re hard, you lot’, and then we all just got up and just formed a massive circle around him.

I just run up behind him and banged him, I punched him straight in the back of the head, just darted off at him. So obviously he’s turned round to look for me and someone else has just clocked him, and it just kept going on like that for about five minutes. Everyone must have hit him about 10 times, run up to him banging him or kicking him in the back and when he got back up someone else would bang him. It was horrible thing to do, he had a black eye and big old thick lips, and a couple of grazes on his head. And I sat outside the prison gates the next day waiting to visit my dad with my dad’s girlfriend, and I looked to my left because I was leaning against the rails, and I just see him stood dead next to me and I don’t think he even knew who it was who attacked him. He was all battered and bruised and I shit myself, I thought [makes squeaking noise].

I told my dad what happened and my dad just started pissing himself laughing, not at the fact that I’d attacked someone but the way I was just so nervous, and he was having a bit of banter with me, calling me a pussy and all that. I knew he didn’t mean it, he was just trying to wind me up because he knew I felt guilty, and I was nervous as it was. He said afterwards that just as we were leaving [the man] walked past and he went ‘Oh, hold up’, because he’d seen my dad and he goes ‘What happened to you?’ He goes ‘Oh, a lot of little shits beat me up last night’. And my dad goes ‘Yeah he’s one of them’, and I’m like ‘Oh’, my heart sunk. I was so scared, you know. Obviously because he knew who my dad was, he just went ‘Oh little bastard’, like that, and give me a little clip round the back of the ear. But it wasn’t maliciously because he knew that my dad would have kicked off, so he just give me a little tap on the back of the head and he goes ‘It won’t happen next time’.

And that’s one of the first times that my dad actually saved my arse. That was one of the times when I thought ‘Right, I need to sort my life out a little bit’.

School

Never fucking turned up [at school] after a while. There you had report cards. You’d have a red card to go outside, it was a laminated piece of card

that was folded in half. You'd have a slip of paper inside that - three targets for you. It got to the point where I had about nine pieces of paper so I had 30-odd targets. It was just ridiculous. They give them to me but they knew what a little shit I was so there was no point in giving it to me anyway because even if I did go I'd forge the signature.

I turned up [to a class] with about three or four of my mates. We was the last ones in the class anyway and everyone was still moving about. And [the teacher] was stood in the hallway and he goes 'You're late' and all of us went 'No we ain't', and [after further exchanges] he pushed me to the floor and I sat right and I got up and jumped biting and punching him, and me and him were just basically rolling round and went flying through the door. All the pupils were like [makes 'ahhh' sound], screaming and shouting, and he was punching me, I was punching him.

I went over the top, but at the same time he shouldn't have pushed me. He's a teacher, but two wrongs don't make a right, do they? I got suspended for that.

A teacher [in design and technology] told me to do some work, I said 'Ain't doing that', he goes 'Get out of my class'. I said 'I ain't getting out your class', he goes 'Oh I'll move you'. I said 'You move me and I'll cut your head off with your fucking bandsaw'.

It's really impossible to do it because there's only about that much gap, but he walked towards me so I threw a stool at him. Nearly took his head off. And then got suspended for that as well.

I had issues with other pupils, as soon as I look at them I'd fly off the handle and they weren't even looking at me when we had problems. [One] kept gazing at me. And I said to him, 'What the fuck you looking at?' And he was daydreaming, he didn't even know I was talking to him, and I just got up and punched him in the face and he was on the floor. 'What are you punching me for?' Started stamping on him. But I got suspended for that. I was an arsehole really, because all of it come from anger though, I think, anger with my dad for going to jail, and with my mum for being pissed at me, she was just stressed with me. Even though I caused the stress I didn't see it so I was like, 'Why does she care? If I'm going out with my mates I'm having fun, what's her problem?'

I couldn't trust my mum

I was 13 when he went to jail because I remember I had the Christmas with him. And when he went to jail I just went completely nuts. I was in trouble a lot anyway but I was just even worse, I couldn't do nothing, I was in court all the time, police were always knocking at my door. It got to the point where they'd turn up and my mum called me home. She'd go, 'Yeah, he ain't in.' She'd call me home and, 'The police have turned up, they're looking for you'.

[After being arrested at home] I later found out that my mum had called the

police on me, she said 'Yeah he's home now, come and nick him'. They'd left me in the cells, gone home. That happened loads of times.

I think that's where the anger come from, because I couldn't trust my mum. I couldn't trust her with nothing.

I remember I was suspended from school for a week for something.

Said like I'm going out and I didn't come back for like a week basically and stayed at a mate's house.

Obviously she'd rung the police, in fairness she thought her fucking son had gone missing sort of thing, but at that point I didn't fucking see it as that, I just went like 'Fuck that'. And then that started a massive argument, like proper bad. Because I stormed out the house and I shut the back door and it fucking shattered, because we've got a glass panelled door.

Then one of her mates, someone who I'd previously had problems with, come flying round the corner.

[After a struggle] she's got into her car through the passenger seat, and she's got my hood and she's still dragging me.

She's managed to get the door fucking closed and she's got hold of my hood still and I can't wriggle out of it because I don't want to hit her. And she just started driving off, and she's dropped me off at my dad's girlfriend and she said, 'Get the fuck out of the car, I don't want to see you out again.'

I just stayed with my dad's girlfriend for a week or two, and I didn't speak to my mum the whole time. I come back and [after exchanging words] 'Fuck you, I'm moving out.' And that was it, I just moved out of my mum's house.

She was, 'Where you going to fucking go?'

She stood in front of the door, 'You're not fucking going'.

I was 'Bang!'- straight out, jumped out the window. Because under my bedroom there's a porch, so I just fucking stepped down basically and then just fucking jumped over the fence onto the building site, run across onto the other side of my estate and went to my nan's.

Basically I was thinking I could go on for the rest of my life thieving

When I moved in with my nan things just got worse as well.

Yeah, fighting, drinking, drugs, I was on cocaine, I was taking cocaine every time and I was taking speed every day, ecstasy all the fucking time, drinking every day. Because I had more freedom with my nan.

Because I was young, they wouldn't sell me weed, yet I'd go to another guy and he wouldn't sell weed because he sells class As and class Bs, he saw weed as a pointless fucking sale because he's selling seven or eight g of weed for £20, yet he'd sell seven or eight g of speed getting £80-90, so where's your profit going to be? You're taking the fucking speed, ain't ya? So he sells that, but because he's more profit minded he's more willing to sell me the speed than what the weed dealer is because he's got a little bit of self-conscience and he can't sell it to a 13 year-old.

Basically, I was thinking I could go on for the rest of my life thieving, turning

over a tiny little bit of profit when I do a little bit of deals on the drugs, and drinking, and that's how I thought I would spend my life. To me it seemed like a feasible option. But I knew that when I was 16 I could get a job in construction or anything, so with my dad's friends, I knew that I could get a job straight away so I knew that maybe at 16 when I'm good I'll have more money to spend on drink and drugs and I could still do my thieving and I could still do my this and that.

Basically my auntie rung up, and my auntie was pissed up as well.

I said, 'Oh grandma's accusing me of thieving again'. I was a thief but I just didn't off me nan, I knew where certain boundaries were. And she goes, 'Oh come and live with me'. So I moved in with my auntie.

Anyway, she just kind of switched, and she's like, 'Right, we're going to get you in school'. I was like, 'Huh? Like where the fuck did this come from?' And I agreed to it, I went, 'Yeah, fuck it, let's go to school.' I thought, after like three weeks of getting smashed, 'Yeah, fuck it, you know, let's have a go and sort myself out'. I had a few chats with my dad, then my mum come up, she sat me down, she had a heart to heart with her.

When you're a teenager and you move to a new area

And obviously you know what guys are, when you're a teenager with the girls, they're just as bad as you, so you're just shagging all the time, which I was doing anyway, but it's just new girls isn't it? Because basically when you're a teenager, when you move to a new area, and because for some reason when you were naughty you got little presents they'd buy you, where you talk to people you've got a little swagger to you and people pick up on that sort of thing, especially if you're a naughty kid on your first day at school you turn up with trainers and a Burberry hat on, people go, 'Oh yeah, he ain't conforming to the school uniform.'

So straight away you get accepted by the bad kids. Then in the summer holidays I was behaving myself, started to build a relationship up with my mum and her boyfriend again, and they're coming up to [name of city] to see me.

I'm writing to my dad regularly. I'm not seeing him because he's been transferred to a place in [another county] so there's no way for me to visit. But he's doing all right.

My anger management counsellor was coming round every Wednesday, having these little chats, 'How are you doing?' Because I always enjoy doing a bit of art, and she used to bring loads of stuff for me to do.

[My cousin] coming round, was playing the Playstation with me, giving me spots, like days of work.

Once I got back into full time school I had done my exams.

The last person I lived with before I come to jail

[One day my auntie] grabbed me by the throat, woke me up in the morning,

scratched me and hit me in the stomach. She was drunk and just spazzed out really and she just come and grab me out of bed, and grabbed me by the throat and I had all scratches up my neck.

After that she started drinking a little bit more and then in about a month or so I moved in with [my cousin] after she went on another bender.

He was the last person I lived with before I come to jail.

He was also viewed by a few of my family as someone who could control me and contain my mischievous behaviour, because he was kind of like me as a kid, so I was moving around with a lot of family members.

I remember my YOT worker, my counsellor, my welfare officer, everyone was happy with the situation because I was attending school, I had my highest attendance rate in years, I hadn't been arrested for a long time. I was working, I was behaving - I was actually doing what I should have been doing.

On my 14th birthday [my cousin] threw me a massive party where loads of my school friends come round.

I fell out with my dad

[On a previous New Year's Eve] we were staying in my dad's hostel.

My dad had had a disagreement with a member who was living in the house, because he fancied one of the women that my dad was sleeping with. He got really jealous and he'd approached my dad and argued, a little scuffle broke out between him and my dad, and my dad had hit him and an ambulance had been called.

He'd gone to hospital and he'd come back and then he'd realised that my dad and this woman were obviously getting a bit flirty and they'd been drinking, play fighting, kissing, and he's got even more jealous, and he's cut his wrists and he's been rushed off to hospital.

He'd come back from hospital. He's got a knife and he's threatening to stab my dad. My dad, as you can tell he's not someone that backs down from anyone particularly easy no matter what, and they got in a tussle. My dad's grabbed the knife and he's cut quite deep into his hand, he had to have stitches, he was lucky not to have nerve damage. But in the tussle he's grabbed the knife and the bloke's been stabbed in the back.

[My father]'s been taken off then down [name of village] police station, they've woken up to say 'Look we can't leave him there ', saying they can't leave me here without a guardian.

[Having been asleep] I've woke up with the police there panicking. I've got drugs on me and things I shouldn't have so I'm like trying to slip things down the side of the bed as well as get rid of things that I can see lying around the room that's going to get everyone in trouble.

And then I went downstairs, I pushed my way passed the copper and he was trying to hold me back. And he can't really do nothing because I wasn't doing nothing wrong, I was just, 'Let me out of this place'. I've gone downstairs and seen blood all over the sofas, all over the walls, everything,

and then the police by this point had grabbed me and dragged me out the residence and put me outside basically, out front of the hostel, and the woman's come out and she said 'I'm going to look after him'.

[Later] my dad explained to me what's happened and I was just like, 'You're a fucking idiot' and fucked off.

So I fell out with my dad for that because I wasn't happy with the way he reacted with things. Because the guy, I knew he knew was totally insignificant and he was proving nothing by getting involved in the fight.

'Well if he can do it I can do it'

[After my father received a long sentence of imprisonment] that's when my behaviour seriously deteriorated and I was virtually non-attendance at school. So hostile towards everyone. I mean I was pissed that my dad was in jail but I didn't realise until later on in my life that that was one of the core reasons that I really went downhill.

My dad also sets the bar for my violent outbursts if you will, because he's the one that taught me how to fight and when I was a kid I used to have punching bags in my room. And basically he used to come up when he was drunk and he was like here, 'Do this, do this, do this', and show me punches. No, he wasn't hitting me, he'd have me hitting the punch bag, and he was the one that got me into crime when I was a kid and he was always supportive of things like that. And if I got in a fight at school and if I run back saying 'Oh he hit me', my dad would deal with their dad, if he knew them, or even if he didn't, he'd find out who it was and deal with it. My mum would be, 'Oh don't let them bully you, stand up for yourself', but my dad would be, 'Smash him as hard as you can'.

As I got older I saw my dad obviously kicking off in the house, smashing things up, but the older, the more teenage as I got, I saw him in fights at his level of violence and I thought, 'Well if he can do it I can do it'. Because when you're a kid, especially when I was growing up, in junior school if you got into fights you only really kick someone in the leg or you'd punch them in the stomach, and I saw my dad fight and I was like, 'Well, if he can punch someone in the face I can punch someone in the face'. And that raised my level of violence tolerance if you will, so when I'd see my dad just randomly hitting his mates, that was it, 'Bang, I can do that sort of thing'. And then it come to things with weapons and I was like 'Well I want to be better than my dad.' So it was things like that that really set my characteristics to a notch.

I think also it kind of showed me, well more so, I never saw my dad feel guilty for nothing.

Like in aspects I did. He felt bad for a brief period, you could see that he felt bad so he'd try and make up for it. But I didn't know this, I just thought it was my dad being nice, so if I'd done something wrong I never felt bad about it, never showed remorse, and if I did feel bad about it I was like, 'I ain't used

to this feeling, I'm not going to let no-one know anyway', because I was quite closed down. If I felt bad for hitting someone I wouldn't apologise to anyone, I wouldn't go 'Oh mum, I punched someone today, I feel really bad, what shall I do about it?' I would just hit someone, or break a law, thief something, or hurt someone in any way and I wouldn't let anyone know. It would just be everyday part of life. No remorse.

I think the less remorse you have the more you are willing to do as well. Especially in breaking the law, if you can just attack someone and not feel no guilt at all then you can, 'Well that didn't bother me beating someone up', so you take it a bit further and you attack someone with a weapon and seriously hurt him. And if you don't feel bad about that, then you're going to do it again, and especially if you hit someone, I've seen people, and I've also participated in assaults with weapons and I've seen certain people just take a beating ...bumps, a few stitches, a few cuts and they just carry on with life sort of thing. Then if you go to my offence, participating in another assault with weapons and the person dies.

And you go 'Oh, what the fuck'. You know, you don't expect that to happen because it didn't happen last time.

Especially from being in prison I've met a lot of people that have literally got into a fight, punched someone once, the guy's hit the floor, he's hit his head or something and he's died. That's got to be a horrible way to go for both people, the person dying and his family obviously, and the person that threw the punch. I mean he's never killed no-one before, so he probably punched a lot of people before and they've swung back or they just knocked him out and he's got back up, he's been all right. But because they've banged him in and he's died they go 'Uh, I'm not punching no-one again.' That's what I've found anyway, I try to avoid all situations that relate to what's happened to me in the past through fear of - well it's easy enough to say but I don't want it to happen again.

I don't want to be out there hurting people

I've learned from my mistakes whereas he didn't, he just kept repeating them and repeating them and repeating them.

All he did was learn a way of prison behaviour and a way of keep doing things to come back to prison, and not seeing that you've done wrong, whereas I've realised that. The lifestyle he'd chosen he was happy with, the lifestyle I've chosen I'm not happy with. I don't want to be in jail, I don't want to be out there hurting people, I don't want to go out there and have to take things. I want to be able to get a job and earn respect from people and not go out there and demand it because I can throw a punch. I want to be able to earn their respect for the way I live my life, how I in the future raise my kids, how I treat my wife.

Remand, trial and sentence

[After the offence of murder was committed] we were all remanded in custody for a year. And in that year it was a bit strange for me because I obviously had never been in jail before and I lost contact with pretty much all of my friends, all my family.

I did deserve to be there because I participated in it, but as I was young I didn't really see it that way. And I blamed my family, I blamed everyone but myself really.

They ask you to stand before they give the verdict. When they said guilty my knees went weak and then I had to hold myself up but no-one really said anything. And [one of my relatives in the dock] didn't say anything to me when I walked past him, he didn't say anything when I was convicted, and neither did anyone who was up in the gallery, none of my family who were up in the gallery. It was kind of like, 'Oh well'.

Getting focused

I think it was Christmas, I was a bit down [because] I'd got another seven years or eight years to go in [prison]. But I got over it, got focused again, done all my GCSEs, done them a couple of times over, so improved my grades. I got grade Cs and Ds, which is good for someone who wasn't really academic at all. I had done art, English, maths and business studies and obviously then I had done bricklaying courses and painting and decorating courses. I had done all my offending behaviour courses and done them to - I wouldn't say a very high standard - but they're pretty good, and I learnt a lot from them as well. And then obviously now I'm studying for my NVQ.

The victim empathy courses do change you, you just don't realise it until you get in a conversation with someone and your opinions change without you realising.

Everything that's happened to me happened for a reason

I don't want people to read it and go 'Oh, I feel sorry for him'. I mean there's no need to, I'm perfectly fine. Everything that's happened to me happened for a reason and it's made me the person I am today. So I want people to read it and say these are some of the reasons why I got in the situations that I got in because I thought everything was normal, and I didn't really understand a lot of things when I was young. So maybe, for example, a young parent reads this and then goes, 'Oh I'm a bit like his parents', and then they go, 'Well I don't want my kid going to jail, I don't want him to feel like how I felt as a kid, I don't want him going to jail when he's like 14, 15 for getting involved in a murder or something like that'. So that's where I'm coming from really.

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