

## A light in the dark for Rosa and family

**Rosa, a member of Pact's Listen to Families team, shares her story of supporting her son in prison:**

I am mother to a son who is in prison. That's a difficult thing to say out loud. There's a certain guilt and shame that follows you and lives inside of you, sometimes silencing you as you imagine what people will think. It's protective, but I'm learning that the silence must be broken for the stigma to change.

I'd like to give you an insight into our family and the challenges we have faced, to help you understand how this happened to us - and that it can happen to anyone.

Our family has always been close. My son in prison is a twin who usually lives at home with us all. He's a kind, caring young man. So it's been devastating to have our family torn apart despite, all our efforts to hold it together. We were awoken to the sound of police smashing through our front door last year and witnessed our much-loved son being taken from us in handcuffs.

He was diagnosed at 14 with ADHD and ASD, he also developed school anxiety, depression and social anxiety. All his life he's struggled to fit in, learn and function in a world that he didn't process in a neurotypical way, masking his issues, trying to hide any lack of understanding and literal interpretations.

I feel that we as a family have been 'failed by the system'. My son is now a statistic. He failed in his education. Teachers weren't supportive, misjudging him, pushing him even harder, setting him up for failure. Our family, struggling to support our son, were treated as though we were guilty of parental neglect - a million miles from the truth. He was under the care of CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health) and we were relieved to have weekly support and home visits from a psychiatric nurse. It made such a difference, but the nurse moved on, we lost our support and CAMHS never replaced their only psychiatric nurse. Again, the system failed us.

Continued inside...



Pact team supporting another young man leaving prison

Continued from front...

Our son was frequently erratic, angry, disturbed - sometimes terrified. Our family were at crisis point, exhausted and hopeless. Our son began to self-medicate, smoking weed and running away from us and his feelings. In a nutshell he 'got in with the wrong crowd.' Now nearly 21, we can talk about what happened and how self-medication took away the anxiety, confusion and pain but then took him on a self-destructive path away from us. Now that he's in a locked cell, he can't run away from all his difficulties. He has time to process his thoughts and work out how he got here and what he will do on release.

Our prisons are full of vulnerable young men like my son, people with a lot to offer. Studies show that people with neurological conditions are more likely to end up in prison and get trapped in a cycle of reoffending.

Since joining Pact's "Listen to Families" team, I feel that I've found my tribe. We are using our compassion and lived experience together to try to bring about positive change. We have also created the most powerful, supportive group of family members imaginable. I LOVE being a part of Pact.

My story is just one of many. I am incredibly grateful to have been given a chance to finally speak my truth. I speak not only for myself and my family, but for many others. So, with a feeling of responsibility for all families with loved ones in prison, I'd like to thank Pact for shining a light in a dark place, bringing truth and compassion into the vital work you deliver. Thank you for working with families to move forward, creating a more just, caring system where we all matter. Thank you for listening and valuing us and empowering us to get through this together.



Listen to Families is a pilot project with the NHS offering families the chance to shape how prison healthcare services are delivered and developed.

Find out more at [www.prisonadvice.org.uk/listen-to-families](http://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/listen-to-families)



## Put your faith in to action this Lent and Holy Week

The Gospel tells us how Jesus responds to the 'penitent thief', someone who has committed a crime. You probably know this little exchange by heart: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:42-3)

This text is part of our Holy Week services, so Lent can be an excellent time to gather together and raise some money to support people affected by the criminal justice system and bring people in prison and their families before the Lord in prayer.



**Pray Pact's Stations of the Cross liturgy.** We can send a copy of the illustrated booklet with the inspiring words of prisoners and their families.



**Make a parish-prison pilgrimage.**



**Hold an event** - like a coffee morning. We can send Pact literature to share



Whatever you choose, have a collection and send the money to Pact.

You can pay in donations on our Lent JustGiving page [justgiving.com/campaign/lent2024](http://justgiving.com/campaign/lent2024)



You can find Pact's Faith in Action work on Twitter and Facebook. Follow us @PactFaithAction

# Supporting young men in prison

Over the last 18 months, Pact has been piloting a new approach to supporting young men in prison at HMYOI Brinsford in Staffordshire.

Dealt an ACE provides specialist support for young men who have experienced significant trauma in their childhoods and who are exhibiting violent, harmful, or self-destructive behaviours.

Research shows that men in prison are much more likely than men outside to have suffered adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). The lives of many of these young men have been incredibly tough and shaped by various forms of abuse, familial substance misuse, imprisonment of loved ones, experience of the care system, and educational difficulties.

Dealt an ACE offers men help and hope whilst serving their sentence through a structured programme of individual support designed to build up their resilience and skills to navigate life's challenges.

Kyle\* told us how the programme had helped him: "This is my first time in prison. I asked Pact's Angie\* for help when I saw her on the prison wing. My mental health wasn't great, and I felt angry all the time. I didn't know what to do with it. The best part of the support is how it makes me feel. It cheers up my day – I actually look forward to the sessions. There's a trust. We have good conversations about anger, stress, and relationships. It's helped me feel like I've got a plan, and I'm moving forward."

"Angie brings Pact booklets, and we talk through them together – we've met regularly for three months. Now, I want to help as many people as possible to get ready to leave prison. I've been working on myself – I've done



a drug misuse course, a forklift driving course, and I play in a football team. I've got a strong relationship with my parents. I ring them every week, and they visit when they can."

"The hardest thing about coming to prison was hearing my mum say, 'I'll support you this time, but not again.' That makes me want to change. I've seen my whole family struggle with me being in prison. I used to help my brother financially, but I can't in here."

"I feel like since getting help from Pact, I appreciate things more. We've done work around managing my anger – I feel more mature, like I care about values and manners. I feel more focused on getting out, going home to my bed, and having beans on toast with my mum. I just wanted to say thank you. Keep doing this; it helps a lot."



For more information, go to our website at [www.prisonadvice.org.uk/prisoners-sunday](http://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/prisoners-sunday)

## Save the date for Prisoners' Sunday

**Prisoners' Sunday is a special day within the calendar of the Catholic Church in England and Wales. It is a day when Catholics are asked to remember those affected by imprisonment and to consider the meaning of Jesus' words, "I was in prison, and you visited me". We are very pleased to announce that it falls on Sunday 13 October 2024 this year.**

We are deeply grateful to all of the supporters and parishes who donated to last year's campaign; at the time of writing, we have raised an incredible £50,267! This will make a huge difference to the lives of those whom Pact supports.

Thank you all so much!

# A thank you to the Catholic Women's League!

A HUGE thank you to members of the Catholic Women's League who have so far provided:

- 350 backpacks filled with essentials for people leaving prison with very little
- 4000 hand-stitched Cross in My Pocket items to prison chaplaincies
- Funds to support Pact's life-changing work with prisoners and their families

This demonstration of solidarity, care and practical support means so much to people leaving prison in London, the South West, the West Midlands and across England and Wales.



## Dates for the diary

Go to  
[www.prisonadvice.org.uk/events](http://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/events)  
or scan the QR code



- **Hallam Mass and JustPeople Roadshow - 22 February, 5.30 pm**  
St Marie's Cathedral, Sheffield  
Bishop Ralph Heskett will celebrate Mass for People in Prison. Meet the Pact team over refreshments afterwards in Houlden Hall.
- **JustPeople Workshop - 6 March, 9 am to 1 pm**  
via Zoom
- **Prisoners' Sunday - 13 October 2024**

Register at [www.prisonadvice.org.uk/Event/hallam-mass-justpeople-roadshow](http://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/Event/hallam-mass-justpeople-roadshow)

## Staying in touch



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

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

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

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

member  
**caritas**  
social action network



## Contact us:

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