

# Our Justice podcast, Elio and EJ

## **SPEAKERS**

Introduction, Speaker 1, Speaker 2, Speaker 3, Elio, EJ

### **Introduction** 00:00

[Mix of voices with music in the background]. The Empathy Museum presents A Mile In My Shoes.

### **Speaker 1** 00:12

Our justice.

### **Speaker 2** 00:17

Our justice.

### **Speaker 3** 00:18

Our justice.

### **Elio** 00:19

Our justice. You're listening to Our Justice, a series of true stories and conversations, co-produced with young people with experience of the Scottish justice system. I'm Elio. Would you just like to, like, introduce yourself?

### **EJ** 00:40

Hi, my name's EJ, I go by they/them. I live in Edinburgh. I'm a law student. I'm 21 and I am Elio's older sibling.

### **Elio** 00:49

So what's it like being a law student?

### **EJ** 00:51

I think it's interesting, especially how I've come onto it. We, well we experienced sort of like a bad side of the justice system in terms of, like, it was our dad who went in. And so kind of going from that into studying law, we kind of have to be slightly more open minded, kind of need to make sure my own opinions don't really leak out too much. But I also think it gives me an incredible background on what a lot of people feel about the justice system and law itself. But I'm really enjoying it. It's my third year studying law. And it has been difficult at times. But yeah, it's been, it's been good. It's been good.

### **Elio** 01:30

So yeah, our dad went to prison when we were both quite young. I think that brought us a lot closer?

### **EJ** 01:35

Totally agree. I feel like it could have gone one of two ways. It really could have broken us apart as a family or it could have brought us together. And thankfully, it's the latter. Especially like us and our other siblings. I think that's a bond that's never gonna break now.

**Elio** 01:50

Oh, yeah, definitely.

**EJ** 01:51

Like it's a support network that's never gonna go away. Despite where everyone moves off to, like, I've moved out now, but I feel like I'm still very much involved in your life.

**Elio** 02:00

Yeah, you're definitely involved. You were very protective of me until I turned 18. And I don't know if that's just because you were the older sibling when mum and dad weren't around as much.

**EJ** 02:11

I think so. I was 16 when dad went in. I was the oldest and I had to take on quite a lot of responsibilities. I had to work, I had to pay for things, I had to help mum out. Like me and mum, were like a team, almost, and I kind of, almost, felt like a parent to you guys, which was a really difficult adjustment from being like a sibling to a parent, and then back to a sibling again. So it's something that I've been working on. I saw you guys go through so much hurt, that it's not something I ever want to see again. It's not something I can control, but it's something that I want to make sure you guys are aware that I'm here for.

**Elio** 02:49

That's very nice. So, you're non-binary, I'm non-binary. But like, I want to get to know, like, what your experience was discovering your gender identity, because, obviously, I came out first.

**EJ** 03:01

Do you know, it's funny, because I look back at like Snapchats from like, years ago, when I was like 15, 16. And I was like, clearly going through some sort of gender crisis. And then obviously, you came out and it was a sort of case of like, okay, I've got to put my full support into this. I want to say I was one of the first people you told; I could be wrong.

**Elio** 03:24

No, you were actually.

**EJ** 03:25

So I was like, okay, I gotta like put my full energy into this. I kind of pushed all my feelings away; not in a bad way. Just in a, 'Okay, I gotta be here for my little sibling'. I started coming out to people in like 2019. And I think I told you that I was non binary. But then it was just sort of like, bad experience with other people's reaction to it, made me go back into the closet about it, but then it was sort of, especially beginning of this year, end of last year, I was like, 'Oh do you know what, I don't care anymore. This is what I am. Take it or leave it. I don't care'.

**Elio 04:01**

So, as you're talking about like your law, like, I know, you've done a lot of work around that and, like, Families Outside about your experiences. I want to know more about that. Since I don't actually know what you've been doing. Like you keep saying you're doing all this stuff. And I'm like, hmm!

**EJ 04:18**

Well, you left me, you left me all by myself [laughter]. So obviously we did our first conference together in 2018. And I think from then I just sort of grew a really good relationship with Families Outside. So Families Outside is an organisation that, I mean the clue's kind of in the name. They help the families that are on the outside, when a member of the family's in prison; they offer like a range of different sort of support. So they've got the helpline. They've also recently started a young person's group called Time Matters. And they've got, like, in-person help as well. Yeah, they offer like a range of different support. And you can basically access that from any point, which is really, really cool. They supported me in a very different way like they supported you guys. And then gave me these opportunities talk about how I feel. I had to stop actually, for a wee bit. Last sort of October time, you know, two years after dad's come out, I finally had my massive breaking point of like, oh, I can't talk about this anymore. I can't do this. And I was just like, lying in bed, I didn't go to work. And it was just because I suddenly couldn't process these things that had happened, what, five years ago coming up to six years, since dad went in. But we're getting back into it, which is good. So recently, I was working with a theatre company. They're called All Things Considered. And they basically take verbatim content and make them into plays. So this particular one was about your experience with parental imprisonment. So I got interviewed, it must've been like the beginning of last year. And they took a bunch of stories and made it into a play. It was really, really, really interesting. So I did that. And I was asked to, like, be part of the discussion panel afterwards. I'm just slowly getting back into it. So I'm still working with the likes of, like, INCCIP, which is the International Coalition of Children with parental imprisonment. They do like bi-yearly conferences, but I'm part of the young person panel for that as well. I also took a wee step aside from just doing stuff on like children's rights and parental imprisonment, and I'm working with Waverley Care right now as well, who are like, a sexual health charity. And I've been working with Families Outside again, because it's their 30th year anniversary. So I'm gonna be part of their video, and I'm gonna be on the panel to like, introduce that as well. I think for me, the support they gave me in the sense of giving me a platform to speak, was what I needed to get me through which I really, really appreciate. I mean, I'm still in contact with them, what three years later.

**Elio 06:57**

Like, I stopped working with them as soon as dad came home, so is there, like, a specific reason as to why you stay on there and keep doing that work?

**EJ 07:06**

If I can, like, help in any way, one person, I know I've made my difference. I know that that makes me feel better. That's just my way of almost handling the trauma that I've gone through is just making people aware that it does get better. And, like, sounds silly, but maybe seeing me chat about it just makes them feel a bit better. I know it did for me when I saw people talk about things.

**Elio 07:30**

Yeah, definitely. I chose to go for acting, which is, you know.

**EJ 07:36**

Well I guess an important thing to note is we process things in different ways, and that's cool. And I think the way you display it is so interesting, like through your music or your artwork.

**Elio 07:46**

There was a lot of other things that happened around that time. Like I've got a lot of like, my own memories of stuff that was good and bad during that time period. I'm wondering like, have you got any of your own memories like your own stories about like, how you were feeling around that time?

**EJ 08:04**

I feel like I was just going through your typical, like, teenage angst at the time, like, unfortunately, I didn't stop falling in love and breaking up; falling out with your friends. You've got all the typical stuff going on as well. And then I think on top of it, you're trying to like, fit in seeing your dad, you're trying to, for me, it was make sure you guys are okay. Like there were sometimes where I couldn't go out because I had to be there for you guys if mum was working or she was doing anything. Which is sometimes really difficult for other people to understand, like, I had people fall out with me over this because I was never there as a friend for them or something. And I was like, oh my god, I'm just going through so much right now that it's hard to handle.

**Elio 08:40**

I think I only ever remember you working or being at home looking after us.

**EJ 08:45**

I was in college. Most of the time while I was there, I had a full time job. And yeah, I was at home, helping you guys. And then of course, we had a few deaths in the family as well. And our family dynamic really, really changed. A lot of people don't speak to us anymore. They stopped speaking to us based on this circumstance. It's still, I still struggle with it. I still struggle that they're not in our life anymore. And I've got friends that aren't in my life anymore, because of that situation.

**Elio 09:18**

Yeah. I don't think I lost any friends when dad went away. I just eventually lost them, because anytime we'd fall out, they'd bring that up. I don't know if you've had that experience as well.

**EJ 09:30**

No, thankfully, it's never been used against me like that. But I understand that it has for you and that is horrific. You have done nothing wrong. But I do remember feeling really unsafe, like going back to, like, where we used to live and stuff, purely because I have had stuff shouted at me in the streets but that was really early days.

**Elio 09:52**

There was a lot of the good things about having, like, that situation with dad. Random little things that we, like, you wouldn't appreciate it, unless you were in that situation and, like, we didn't see him until once a week, so we would tell him all these really stupid things.

**EJ 10:05**

Yeah, all the really dumb things we'd done that week, or even all the exciting things we'd done that week. Like, I got into studying law while he was still in there. So the day that I got to tell him that I passed my exam, or like my exam results were good enough that I was going to do law like that was such a wild day. But you also kind of feel a little bit guilty because you're like, oh, you can't celebrate this, like, with us. [Yeah] I remember when I passed my social science course, in 2016. I got like a cake and like a well done, and I was just kind of like, this is lovely, and I love you guys, but I wish dad was here.

**Elio 10:39**

He was just never there. Like, parents' evening, like he was never there for that. I had to tell him all my stuff myself.

**EJ 10:46**

Yeah. So I feel like it's, you know, all these things that were missed, like birthdays and Christmas. I feel like Christmas got increasingly difficult every single year.

**Elio 10:56**

Definitely. And even the first year he was back, I felt was so hard.

**EJ 10:59**

Yeah. Yeah, for sure.

**Elio 11:01**

We weren't even certain if he would be able to stay with us.

**EJ 11:03**

And then obviously, lockdown happens. And then suddenly, he was home with us for hours and hours and hours. And I was like, it's lovely to have you back, but this is a very strange adjustment. I still sometimes text mum being like, tell dad. And she's like, you can tell dad yourself.

**Elio 11:20**

Text him yourself, yeah! [laughter]

**EJ 11:21**

And I'm like, oh, yeah, I forget that I can pick up the phone and call dad, like, because obviously we couldn't do that. I think that really sucked, not being able to like, phone him whenever you wanted to. I got almost lucky in the sense of I was older, so I think I was 18. I could go in for visits by myself. Which was good, but it also meant I could take you guys into the family visits.

**Elio 11:44**

Yeah, we got the children visits, which I think we were quite lucky. Like you didn't get that option. That was all...

**EJ 11:50**

Oh, that was a whole other kettle of fish. Yeah for, I think, the first year or so they were telling me that I couldn't do them because I was 16, and I was too old. But actually, you look on their website, HMP's website, it says it's up to 18 year olds, and we had to tell the prison that. So I think that was our first like jump into, like, social justice! Like, there's just things, like I would get so jealous at the fact that you guys could, like, hug dad for longer, you know?

**Elio 12:19**

And sit next to him. And yeah, we got to do a lot more of that stuff.

**EJ 12:23**

And that was a prison wide issue. Like that wasn't, that wasn't just us, like it was obviously happening to so many other families.

**Elio 12:31**

If people are listening who have no experience of the justice system, or having a family member in prison, are there things you'd want them to know?

**EJ 12:39**

I think it's just keeping an open mind. I've told people, oh, my dad's in prison, or my dad was in prison. And I've had a range of different responses. Some that haven't been so great. So I think the biggest one is the immediate, what did he do?

**Elio 12:57**

I still get that, it's a very uncomfortable situation to be put in.

**EJ 13:01**

If, like, a family member was ill and you said they were ill, I don't think they'd be prying and being like, oh, what's exactly wrong with them? I think it's a similar situation here. Which is why whenever I talk about my situation, I try and keep it away from him and like the situation, and more like our experience, because you know, that's what I know, and just listen, if they want to talk to you about it. Listen, be there for them. If they don't want to talk about something, don't push them to talk about it. Also, actually just to bear in mind that it doesn't define them as a person. People can sometimes just pin you as the, oh, yeah, their dad is in prison. Whereas actually, we're so much more than that.

**Elio 13:47**

You've done a lot of talking. Have you got any questions for me?

**EJ 13:49**

What's the kind of things that you took away from that happening to us? Like, how does it affect you now, that it's been a few years later?

**Elio** 13:59

I'm definitely more closed off. I'm not very open about what goes on in our family. But I'm definitely more, I'm a lot more mature. I felt like I had to grow up and understand a lot of things very quickly. [Yeah] I'm like a mum friend now. I think I had to develop a really open mind about so many situations. That damage did lead to me being a mum friend, because everyone's like, you've got such an open mind about everything now. And I'm the one most come and talk to, so that's, I mean, that's a good thing I guess.

**EJ** 14:36

I was gonna say I think that's a great thing. It's not something that a lot of people have. Definitely feel the same way. And I feel like people could tell me anything, and I'm not ever going to judge.

**Elio** 14:46

Exactly. And, like, we're great, great friends.

**Elio** 14:51

I hope.

**Elio** 14:58

Thank you for listening to Our Justice. This is a Boldface production in partnership with Community Justice Scotland and the Empathy Museum.