“WHAT COULD BE DONE DIFFERENTLY TO IMPROVE YOUR EXPERIENCE OF HAVING A PARENT OR SIBLING IN PRISON?” is a question that should be put to all young people affected by imprisonment. Unfortunately, it is one that was only ever posed to me after my brother’s sentence was over, following seven years of little to no support. My experience is similar to that of many young people affected by this issue, and it is for them that I have decided to speak out in the hope that, in future, others will not be in my position.

My brother was sentenced when I was only 12 years old, and at the time, I couldn’t imagine anything more shameful or shocking. Despite knowing that my brother was going through a difficult period in his life, and was involved in alcohol-related offences, I was far too young to understand the wider societal dynamics that can lead individuals to commit crimes. As far as I was concerned, people had always told me that ‘prison is a place where bad people go’, and it is no surprise that I, like many other young people in my position, internalised this.

Some of the emotions around a family member’s imprisonment are short-term, such as feelings of confusion, anger, and isolation, and these could be reduced if the right support was put in place. In my experience, the longer you harbour these emotions without engaging with them, the deeper they embed themselves into your mindset. If they don’t address them, young people will release these emotions by lashing out in various (and sometimes harmful) ways.

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Teachers themselves generally do not have the adequate experience to realise the trauma that can come from experiencing a family member’s imprisonment. To address this, I would highly encourage schools to engage with teacher training, such as that run by Families Outside, in order to fully commit to understanding young people’s experience of this issue.

Despite the fact that support for young people affected by imprisonment desperately needs improvement, I am hopeful that the possibility for change is within our reach. Every time I hear a supportive voice on the topic, I feel that bit more confident to speak out; and when those most affected are heard, that’s when real change happens. I hope here that I have conveyed the real urgency in addressing these issues, but most of all, I hope that other young people affected will have the courage to believe that we can change things!
The *UK Justice Policy Review* is an annual series of publications tracking year-on-year criminal justice policy developments in the UK since the formation of the coalition government in May 2010.

Each review focuses on the key criminal justice institutions of policing, the courts and access to justice, and prison and probation, as well as changes to the welfare system. The publications are free to download and the online versions include links to all the original data and the references used in the review.