

#3 – Elio

Empathy Museum presents A Mile in My Shoes.

You're listening to Our Justice, a series of true stories and conversations, co-produced by three young people with experience of the Scottish Justice System.

I'm Elio.

Cosplay is where you become a character from a TV show or movie or a book or any story. You basically act as that character and you dress up as that character. So I've done Cosplay of a Zerofel, Crowley, most of the doctors from *Doctor Who*... I'm currently making a Doctor Strange cosplay, which is taking me ages. It's really fun to do and it just helps me practice acting and look at how other actors play roles. And then I can mimic that. Playing another character kind of frees me up. My personality is basically just a mix of every character I've ever loved.

I'm Elio, I'm 18, and I live in Edinburgh. I identify as non-binary – I use they/them or he/him pronouns. So I grew up with my mom, my dad, my older sibling, and my two younger siblings. My mum works in the theatre and my dad is a writer, and I was always a character in one of his short films. I just had a really big influence in theatre- and film-making, growing up.

I also grew up involved with a lot of my cousins. We would always have family gatherings and events. So it's a really nice dynamic we have. We used to play a lot of games in the garden, cuz my grandma had a really cool garden, which was split in half by a path, so we'd always play a little game: 'Over the Hedge'. We'd play over the hedge and the path is the hedge and we'd split up into groups by how many of us there were. We'd have to get into the other side of the garden to steal stuff from the other group without getting caught. So it was really fun game to play.

It was summertime when I was about 12 or 13, my mom came into the room with me and my older sibling and told us to sit down and that she needed to talk to us. So at that moment, we thought we were getting surprised with another surprise holiday. Because that happened a year previous. And then our mom told us that our dad was going to have a court date.

We were told two days before the court date. And then we found out on that day when they came back from court and that's when everything blew up. It was the worst news we'd ever heard. Probably worse than like, just being told that one of our parents was dying. It would've been easier to cope with.

My dad went to prison for three years. That news – of my dad being in prison – spread about our hometown really quickly. It was in the newspaper, our address was in the newspaper. We had people coming up to our house and throwing stuff at our windows and shouting abuse. And we had to come stay with my grandparents. And I ended up moving school for a bit because I got bullied a lot – I ended up leaving because I didn't feel any safer there, and I went back to my old high school.

I think we went to visit him about two times a week. I don't remember much of it. I just kind of remember being scared a lot of the time, especially the first time I ever went in where we had to line up and then go through the security, and then walking into this big room where I couldn't even get to spend time alone with my dad. You were in a room with, like, a million other people talking, which I found really difficult so I didn't really have much of a relationship with my dad for those few years. I couldn't really concentrate enough to talk to him, or I was just in a panicked state the entire time.

After my granny, which was his mom, she passed, I was really close with her. I'd go to her house every day at lunch cause of the bullying and have lunch with her and sit with her. But when she passed, we had a funeral. My dad was still in prison at that point. He was able to be there, but he was in handcuffs and there was, like, officers with him as well. I couldn't even, like, hug him. And it was really difficult.

I was always scheduling my time around having to go see my dad, and then avoiding places for a really long time where people would possibly like, you know, jump me for supporting my dad. I've been beaten up, I've had people call the police on me, I've had to call the police on people for harassment. It definitely does make it harder. I constantly feel like I have to, like, tell people about my experience. Or new people I meet – I have to at some point mention: by the way my dad was in prison, or they're gonna find out in some way and they might take it negatively, which has happened many times. Or where I've made new friends and they've found out, and then we've stopped being friends.

I came out halfway through my dad's sentence. The bullying was already bad from that. And then everyone found out I was trans in school and as it kind of got leaked around the school, there was just a whole lot of stuff, but I basically blocked all of it out.

I struggle in many situations now and dissociate and switch off completely, black out a lot, and get a lot of amnesia. So I can be going through my entire day and only remember like five minutes of it. I'm in therapy right now. And we think it's a personality disorder, so I'm just kinda tryna deal with that and hopefully find a way to overcome that.

I've had quite a few bad experiences with counsellors. I've opened up to them about having this personality disorder and they'd be like, oh, we can't help you, we'll find you a new counselor. And then the next counselor: oh, she can't help. So I'm constantly starting from scratch. My new counsellor is the exact same, is trying to find me a person who hopefully this time can actually help.

Then there was a bunch of good stuff that happened as well. We worked with a company called Families Outside. We got so much help from them and they also gave me and my older sibling the opportunity to be able to travel and go to conferences and do loads of different things to tell our story.

All the conference work definitely helped me overcome a lot of fears. Like, I had really big stage fright, but because of this experience, I got to open up about my story and stand in front of audiences. That really helped me overcome and definitely pushed me into, like, going into my dream.

I study at Edinburgh college, part of the theatre company, also doing dance and costume design. I made a bunch of new great friends at college who are all very much supportive. They're aware of what I've been through. Like, they don't bring it up unless I bring it up – something I found quite helpful. And also just being able to chill and hang out, but then also be comfortable enough to just cry together or have so much fun together. So that's great. Cuz I never really had that experience before.

I definitely don't see my family as much now. Like, we've all kind of gotten back into our routines, but I think we're definitely closer. I'm very close with my dad because of his passion for film-making and writing, and mine for acting.

Acting for me growing up was a hobby. But then after everything happened and I went through all this experience and I started trying to share my story and help people, I really enjoyed that.

For my future, I would like to be an actor, but also be a role model for people who have had similar situations and be able to use a platform to open up about my story. And hopefully that'll help.

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