

# Jonathan's story: "I have education to thank for my family's pride in me"

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Jonathan | 24 March 2021



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**I am writing from my kitchen table. Like so many others presently I am working from home. It is less of a burden for me having spent the last six years away from this kitchen table. Time and patience are your nemesis whilst in prison but in the real world you seek them out.**

I reached the end of my prison journey last June. Now that I look back on the last decade or so – a timespan that included my professional demise, bankruptcy, arrest and imprisonment – I am staggered by the rapidity of life. My yardstick of passing time is not my diminishing hairline or creaking back and knees, but my three sons no longer being toddlers or reception scholars. They are growing into young men.

I have education to thank for the pride my family have in me. Education has been my companion on my prison journey, a surprising companion in a way. After all, I had a good education growing up, unlike the vast majority of prisoners. I attended university, passed the Law Society Finals, and for a time became a successful solicitor. I had life chances that so many in society do not, especially those who pass through prison gates, and I recklessly squandered them.

It was my re-engagement with education that provided the turning point in my prison journey.

“ Education awakened something in me. I discovered I could do something for myself – for my self-esteem to return – but at the same time make my family proud.

Firstly, I helped others as it is a great way of helping yourself. I worked with the [Shannon Trust](#), helping people learn to read, and became a distance learning mentor supporting fellow prisoners undertaking GCSEs, A levels and Open University degrees. I witnessed education giving people hope, confidence, and the opportunity to create a different identity for themselves. It was both humbling and empowering to be a part of.

It was this experience that motivated me to return to education myself. I started with GCSEs in Sociology and English Literature funded by PET, before then applying to Portsmouth University to undertake a Masters degree in Counter Fraud and Counter Corruption Studies by distance learning. I self-funded thanks to the support of my wife Natalie and immersed myself in the two-year programme.

Education awakened something in me. I discovered I could do something for myself – for my self-esteem to return – but at the same time make my family proud. It meant my children could identify with my journey. It sounds crazy given I was behind this permanent wall, but we were inseparable. Education became a joint venture. Whilst I studied, my boys would tell me what they'd been working on. Meanwhile, my daughters were at university and we'd talk about the assignments we were doing.

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It can be difficult to study inside. There's no internet, no core materials. In some prisons there are five or six decommissioned laptops – never enough to go around. And when there's an incident of misuse, everyone suffers. I was lucky, by the end they gave me a computer; I wouldn't have been able to finish my studies otherwise.

My arrival at open prison in March 2018 allowed me to attend Cardiff Metropolitan University to finish and submit my dissertation. I spent 20 days a month there. As a community student, I didn't go to lectures or tutorials but I could use the university facilities. Finally, I had the internet and what a revelation that was to my learning (MoJ take note!). In October 2018 I was awarded my MSc and the personal pride I felt was overwhelming.

But my journey did not end there. This is testament to the value of learning, and of its benefits as a lifelong, transformative experience. In January 2019 I commenced a PhD at Cardiff University under the watchful eye of Professor Mike Levi, a leading academic in financial crime. In October I started teaching as a graduate tutor on the Criminology and Law degree courses. It felt bizarre yet rewarding leaving open prison each morning and a few hours later running tutorials for undergrads.

Now at home, at my kitchen table I am preparing this week for a student workshop, completing an assignment for my teaching qualification, progressing my PhD research, whilst also setting up [IN8 Consulting](#), a business tackling financial crime, for life after university.

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Education has been a wonderful road to travel, that just keeps giving. It has restored pride lost, whilst also rewarding my wonderful family for their faith in me. It has been an extremely positive experience that shines brightly from the pages of an otherwise difficult chapter of my life.

So why not give it a go? Check out PET and the courses they offer. The support, resource and funding are there for you, you just need to take that first step and then see where it leads you. Pob lwc!

**Every year PET supports over 1,000 people to pursue an education in prison. [Help us fund more.](#)**

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