



One Parent Families Scotland

changing lives, challenging poverty

Strategy 2019 to 2024

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OPFS Strategic Plan: What's it about?



OPFS is the leading charity working with single parent families in Scotland. We provide expert advice, practical support and campaign with parents to make their voices heard to change the systems, policies and attitudes that disadvantage single parent families.

Our **vision** is of a Scotland in which single parents and their children are valued and treated equally and fairly.

Our **mission** is to work with and for single parent families, providing support services that enable them to achieve their potential and help create lasting solutions to the poverty and barriers facing many single parents and their children.

OPFS strategic plan describes what we are working to achieve, in partnership with single parents, over the next five years. It is based on principles of equality, fairness and inclusion. We value and support the meaningful participation of single parents in shaping and delivering our services and to campaign for positive change in policies affecting single parents lives.

The plan includes:

- The context of our work and the issues which single parents face.
- Information about OPFS and what we do.
- What we want to achieve (our outcomes) for single parents.
- What we will do, and how we will go about it, in order to achieve these outcomes.

We have written it for:

- Single Parent families
- Our staff and volunteers
- Our partners
- Our funders



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The context of our work



Too many single parent families remain trapped in poverty, socially isolated and struggling to manage work and caring. We set out the context to this below

Number of single parent families in Scotland



Of families with dependent children 31 per cent (190,000) are single parent families¹



More than nine out of ten single parents are female (92 per cent)²



They support over 281,000 dependent children



By 2037 households containing one adult with children are projected to increase to 196,300 households³

Who 'single parents' are

Single parents have diverse characteristics and experiences that change over time. OPFS recognises this and supports the following groups of parents in different ways:

- **Single parents with majority care:** Most OPFS services are funded by for work with single parents who meet the legal definition: resident parents with the main caring responsibility for their child/ren. OPFS policy work focuses on parents with majority care so that we can influence government on the policies that most affect single parents.
- **Single parents of older ('non-dependent') children:** are still single parents. Some household surveys, including the Office for National Statistics 2017 survey, reflect this.
- **Parents who are not the main carers of their children:** may identify as single parents because they are very involved with their children. While equally-shared care is relatively rare (a 2013 study estimates around three per cent of families), a significant proportion of such parents frequently visit, see or contact their children.

¹ www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/news/census-2011-detailed-characteristics-population-and-households-scotland-release-3e

² <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/news/census-2011-detailed-characteristics-population-and-households-scotland-release-3e>

³ www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/household-projections/2012-based/2012-house-proj-publication.pdf



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The challenges for single parent families



Single parent families face significant challenges: poverty, isolation and loneliness, poor health or disability and judgemental attitudes. The majority of single parents are women, so gender inequality is a key barrier. These challenges are the result of structural issues - how our society is organised. It need not be this way. Single parents and their children face around twice the risk of poverty as couples⁴. Poverty and isolation have an impact on parent's and children's wellbeing, causing stress, anxiety and poor mental health.

Being both sole carer and breadwinner is a difficult balancing act because of the lack of flexible and affordable childcare and the lack of secure and family-friendly employment. This is coupled with the fact that the causes of single parenthood, which include bereavement and relationship breakdown, are in themselves stressful for parents and their children. We know from research by Caledonian University that 84% of single parents report being lonely⁵. Isolation, loneliness and poverty have a significant impact on mental health causing anxiety, low mood and depression.



⁴ www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-199495-to-201516

⁵ www.opfs.org.uk/policy-doc/community-connections-briefing-papers/



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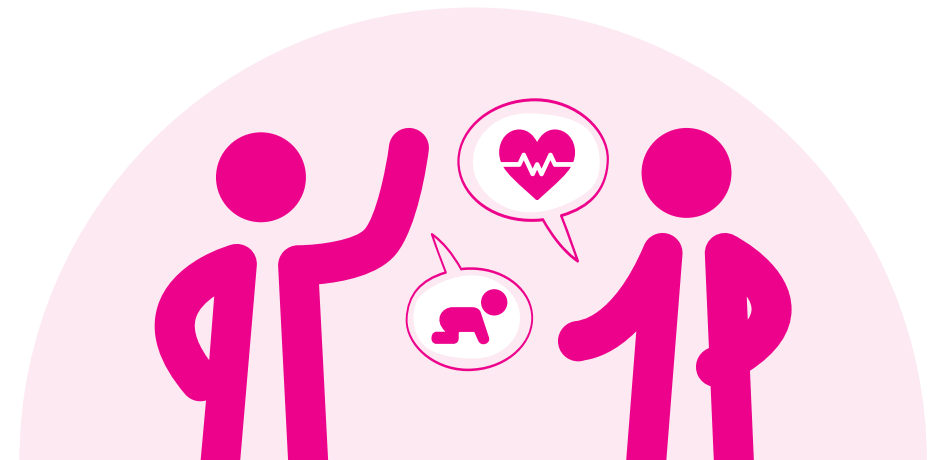
Key statistics on single parent families



Single parent families life chances are affected by UK Government policies on the economy, welfare reform, employment and child maintenance, and by Scottish Government policies on employability, skills, education, health, childcare, family law and social work.

- A third (36 per cent)⁶ of all children in poverty live in a single parent family
- Almost half of children (50 per cent) in single parent families live below the poverty line⁷
- This is predicted to rise to over 62 per cent by 2021⁸
- By 2021, single parents and their children will lose a fifth (20 per cent) of their income because of welfare reform an average of £5,250 a year. This is the biggest predicted loss among different household types⁹
- A third of households with incomes of £15,000 or less don't have home internet access, many are single parent households.¹⁰ Therefore digital exclusion is a key challenge affecting single parents.
- 27 per cent of single parent households have a disabled adult, 16 per cent of single parent households have at least one child with a disability.¹¹

The injustice single parent families face is widespread and can't be overlooked. Single parents should be celebrated and recognised for the remarkable job they do. OPFS gives a voice to single parents to improve policies that impact on their lives, challenging barriers that create poverty, discrimination and stigma; celebrating single parents and their children for their achievements.



6 www.povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Child-Poverty-Delivery-Plan-advice-Final-Version-23-February-2018.pdf

7 www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-199495-to-201617

8 www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/cumulative-impact-assessment-report.pdf p153

9 www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/cumulative-impact-assessment-report.pdf p153

10 www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-people-annual-report-results-2017-scottish-household-survey/

11 www.gingerbread.org.uk



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The External Environment



The external environment will have a critical impact on single parents, as well OPFS policy work and service delivery. Political, economic, social, legislative and technological factors will influence how we chart OPFS path for the future.

Political instability suggests third sector's priorities may be overlooked in an economically uncertain climate dominated by Brexit. Whilst the potential of a second independence referendum offers an opportunity to explore what powers Scotland requires to tackle the challenges we face, it may increase the period of uncertainty for the third sector and families we support.

Departure from the European Union remains wholly unprecedented and the potential impacts on the third sector include: loss of income due to the end of European funding; fewer corporate partners as companies move overseas; likely drop in public spending as priorities change; increased demand on services caused by the social-economic fallout of Brexit including increased unemployment, inflation and unequal economic growth.

The majority of single parents are women. Gendered pay inequalities persist and single parents, like many female workers, face insecure contracts, zero or part-time hours and inadequate parental leave and flexible working rights. Child poverty is predicted to increase

dramatically in single parent families and judgmental attitudes towards single parents still need to be challenged. The toxic convergence of universal credit, the benefit cap, the 2-child benefit limit, the 'requirement to work' and sanctions on single parents will have ongoing damaging impact.

Planned legislative changes will influence single parents lives. OPFS will consult & involve single parents to contribute to Scottish family law changes and new legislation on the suite of newly devolved social security.

The way that people use the internet has changed rapidly. The proportion of adults who use a smartphone has reached 76%. Increased automation and resulting digital exclusion, advice and other services moving online, more online service delivery and reduction in face-to-face support/contact will all impact on single parents.

OPFS aims to not only mitigate these factors and press for change, but also to ensure that our assessment of major external factors enables strategic thinking and promotes innovation and opens up new opportunities to benefit single parents and their children.



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About One Parent Families Scotland



OPFS aims to enable single parent families to achieve their potential, to reach a decent standard of living and contribute to Scottish society. Those with the greatest expertise about what makes a real difference are single parents with lived experience. We support all single parent families whether headed by mothers or fathers, young parents or kinship carers.

Our direct services tailored to the needs of single parent families cover:

- Single parent tailored advice and information.
- Welfare Rights and Money Advice
- Family support
- Mental health and wellbeing service
- Support into training, education and employment programmes
- Flexible childcare services
- Training for practitioners
- Services to reduce the digital exclusion facing single parents

We want to change single parent families' experiences of isolation, loneliness, poverty, inequality, stigma and poor health, for the long-term. We will develop a theory of change based on our work with

single parents. Our approach is to support single parents to build their self-esteem, confidence and skills, to take up employment, training and education opportunities and to participate in OPFS policy and campaigning activities.

Our way of working, delivered by committed and experienced staff, is tailored to the unique challenges faced by single parent families and has a long-lasting impact on families and communities because it:

- Is inclusive. We provide free, accessible and non-judgemental information, advice and support to increase families' confidence, resilience and capacity.
- Gives single parents the means to achieve their personal goals which increase their chances of sustainable employment.
- Strengthens families and communities. We give parents and children, from different family backgrounds, an opportunity to participate in learning and development as well as peer mentoring and group support.

This strategic plan sets out what we intend to do to enable transformational change consistent with our way of working



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OPFS Approach



We work alongside single parents and their families, creating ways to overcome barriers, changing their lives and fulfilling their potential. We also celebrate the many achievements of single parents and their children.

Our work supports Scotland's National Performance Framework, contributing to making Scotland more inclusive, equal, and a healthier, wealthier nation.



We:

- Deliver services in local communities with some of Scotland's most disadvantaged and marginalised parents.
- Help increase family wellbeing by supporting parents with family life.
- Enable single parents to increase their self-esteem, confidence and skills and help tackle the barriers they face to give them equal access to education, training, and employment.
- Engage with children and young people to develop their confidence and wellbeing, and to raise their aspirations and expectations.
- Value and support single parents to meaningfully participate in shaping and help deliver OPFS services ensuring they have the space and time to share their experience and expertise.



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What we do at a glance



We provide support to over 7000 parents, children and young people each year through a national advice and information service, online information and resources, training for people working with one parent families and local services in Edinburgh, Dundee, Glasgow, Falkirk, Lanarkshire and Aberdeenshire.

This includes:

- Flexible childcare services to allow parents to participate in training and learning leading to work
- Community based group work and one-to-one activities
- Helpline information and advice
- Welfare rights and money advice
- Connections through information and resources available on our website and social media
- Personal development and training for parents
- Training for practitioners working with one parent families

We work in partnership

We cannot make transformational change on our own. We work with partners, nationally and locally, to build impact, increase our influence, add value and reach more single parent families.

We work in partnership with organisations who complement and add value to our expertise in providing direct services to single parent families but also on common concerns such as welfare reform, childcare and child poverty.



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How we do it: our vision, mission and values



Our **vision** is of a Scotland in which single parents and their children are valued and treated equally and fairly.

Our mission is:

- To work with, and for, single parent families, providing support services that enable them to achieve their potential.
- To help create lasting solutions to the poverty and barriers facing many single parents and their children.

Our **values** are inclusive, professional, resourceful and innovative. That means:

Inclusive: we work in partnership, with parents and families, staff, and stakeholders, treating everyone with respect and fairness, encouraging active participation, and listening to everyone's views

Professional: at all times, we aim to provide the highest quality services, being caring and enabling, acting with, integrity, reliability, and responsibility; and taking pride in, and ownership of, all that we do and say.

Resourceful: we recognise and share the knowledge, skills, and experience of families, staff, and volunteers, within a co-operative and mutually supportive environment. By working this way, we can build upon success, overcome obstacles, and make the most of new opportunities.

Innovative: we are committed to continuous improvement, reflecting on practice, challenging the status quo, and constantly seeking new ways of ensuring that the needs of single parent families are recognised, and met.

These values underpin all of our work. We celebrate single parents, and their children, for their achievements – recognising the skills, strengths, and capacity of parents, children, and communities. Working with families, we seek to change lives and challenge poverty. We make sure that these values are prominent in all that we do: including in internal communications, on our referral forms, and in all OPFS offices.



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Looking ahead: what we will do



Our Aims: OPFS will influence the key drivers influencing child poverty: income from paid work; the cost of living; and income from social security. We will support preventative initiatives that stop today's children and young people becoming adults who live in poverty. We will provide family-centred services tailored for single parent families. We will also influence local and national policy, and decision makers to ensure that single parent families' voices are heard at all levels of government. Over the coming period OPFS will focus on:

1. Supporting families

Single parents often face huge challenges as sole carers and breadwinners, as well as stresses associated with isolation, judgmental attitudes and poverty. Our single parent tailored information and advice, one-to-one family support as well as a new mental health and wellbeing service and peer group support will enable parents to be more confident, self-assured and empowered to overcome personal and structural barriers.

2. High-quality flexible, affordable childcare

Designed for single parent families, but open to all, OPFS has developed a model of high-quality flexible childcare solutions to give parents greater flexibility with training, education and employment and achieve

work-life balance. We will work with our sister childcare delivery social enterprise 'Flexible Childcare Services Scotland' set up by OPFS to further develop and expand the flexible childcare models we have established.

3. Employability - leading to training, education or employment

Single Parents will be supported to build their confidence, prepare for and move into volunteering, training, employment or enter education. The provision of programmes are tailored to single parents needs by recognising they face a unique myriad of challenges in getting into further education, training and the job market.

4. Challenging policies and attitudes that create poverty, discrimination and stigma; celebrates single parents and their children for their achievements.

OPFS will work to achieve systemic change. We will engage with single parents who are living in poverty and ensure their voice is heard by the decision-makers. We will support parents, experts through experience, to tell their stories. Across Europe, single parents do better in societies where there is greater gender equality. We will join with women and equality organisations to work for policies that invest in childcare and time to care, and that see children as our future at the centre of society.



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Our long term outcomes



In the long-term OPFS wants to see the following:

1. Building Single Parents' Capacity & Resilience

Single parent families will be stronger and more confident in knowing their rights, controlling their lives and increasing family well-being.

By using OPFS's inclusive service, single parents have the capacity and resilience to deal with the complex issues they may face and are equipped to ensure that their children can grow up and flourish within a healthy, stable, and supportive home environment.

2. Reducing Child Poverty

Single parent families will have improved their standard of living, so reducing child poverty

Single parents have the time and ability to engage in training, education and employment opportunities giving them the disposable income, and financial capability, required to ensure a good standard of living, and the opportunity to realise their ambitions, for themselves and their children.

3. Empowering Families to Participate

Single parent families will participate and take an active role in making positive change.

OPFS approach is based on our extensive experience and informed by single parents' voices. Transformational change also means structural change, influencing policies and practices to reduce poverty and improve equality and inclusion. Involving parents means our approach is based on parents' every day experiences. This will mean more and better services and support for single parent families.

4. Delivering Excellence

OPFS will be sustainable and equipped to deliver excellent services that meet the needs of single parent families.

OPFS is an innovative and resilient organisation, delivering high quality services, embracing a culture of learning and development, with a sustainable financial strategy. We are a high quality, professional, single parent specific organisation that aims to ensure that parents are able to access high quality support. We will implement the digital transformation of the organisation necessary to compete in the new digital landscape while recognising and responding to the fact that many single parents are digitally excluded.



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What we want to achieve



Over the next five years OPFS will focus on consolidation, improvement and innovation combined with new areas of activity.

We want to make sure that single parents are **valued** – whether by employers, policymakers or society as a whole. Single parent families have been part of mainstream family life in Scotland for many years. More action is needed by government at all levels to ensure they see **positive change** and their children escape poverty.



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