



Proofed for Parents by Parents

Participatory One Parent Proofing: Toolkit

Single Parent Action Network

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Single Parent Action Network

Millpond, Baptist Street, Bristol, BS5 0YW

Email: info@spanuk.org.uk

Website: www.singleparents.org.uk

Registered charity 1092929



SPAN

Written by Polly Wright and Susanna Giullari

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Contents

Foreword	2
Acknowledgments	3
Introduction to One Parent Proofing	4
– Who this toolkit is for	4
– What is One Parent Proofing?	4
Why do we need to One Parent Proof policies and practice?	5
One Parent Proofing practice points	7
How to One Parent Proof	10
STEP 1: Raise your awareness of some of the challenges facing one parent families	12
STEP 2: Identifying the impact of challenges on single parents' experiences of your initiative	13
STEP 3: Consider how your initiative might respond to the challenges faced by one parent families and develop a One Parent Proof Action Plan	14
Practice examples	23
Resources	25

Foreword

By Sue Cohen, Director Single Parent Action Network

SPAN's One Parent Proofing Toolkit was inspired by our work at the beginning of the millennium, helping to coordinate the European Network of One Parent Families, and learning from policies and services across the European Union. In the sharing of experience between nations we saw how some countries did so much better than others in creating a better world for parents and children¹. We saw how families – one parent and two parent families – were more likely to thrive in countries which invested in social and economic integration. We learnt from Professor Terry Rees's work adviser to the European Commission on gender equality, visioning women in the mainstream; and from Dr. Majella Kilkey on moving from the adult worker model to a more dynamic model facilitating transitions between care-giving and employment. We were supported in our work by Ann Van Lancker, then Vice Chair of the Women's Rights Committee in the European Parliament, and put forward a proposal for the one parent proofing of policies.

At the same time we realised just how important it is to contextualise one parent proofing. Employment, welfare and childcare policies are not only different in the UK, they have also changed dramatically over the last ten years. A one parent proofing toolkit would only be viable if it took account of the impact of policies and services on families in this country. It would be single parents themselves who would have the greatest knowledge of how these were impacting on their lives, and how they could best be improved. Thus the One Parent Proofing Toolkit was developed, involving single parent mothers from five different parts of Britain. In preparing the final publication representatives saw its application as not only benefiting one parent families in poverty but all parents balancing work and childcare. This takes us full circle to a vision of the worker of the 21st Century supported in combining the responsibilities of employment *and* family.

¹ *Single Parent Inclusion Networks*, ENOPF (2002), SPAN

By Jane Millar, Professor of Social Policy, Department of Social and Policy Sciences at the University of Bath

Helping single parents to get and stay in employment is an important policy goal. There is a considerable body of research which tells us that lone parents would like to be in a position where they can work, to increase the family income and to improve the lives and well-being of themselves and their children. But becoming a working lone-parent family is far from easy and those single parents that do manage this have to balance a number of competing demands. There are an increasing number of organisations in the public, voluntary and private sectors that are seeking to help lone parents achieve their aspirations for jobs which are secure and sustainable. It is imperative that these organisations offer help which is appropriate, timely and sensitive. This One Parent Proofing Toolkit has been developed by Single Parent Action Network who have extensive experience of providing such support. They have worked closely with a group of lone parents with personal experience of the challenges of managing work and care. The Toolkit thus provides a practical guide for analysis and action. Indeed it has wider application than single parents, since many of the issues also affect other families. One Parent Proofing will help organisations develop policy and practice which is fit for purpose and therefore more likely to be successful.

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Introduction to One Parent Proofing

Who this toolkit is for

The *'One Parent Proofing Toolkit'* is for those organisations whose work relates to single parents and their children and in particular those who work on child poverty and employment strategies.

Definition of 'single parent': Single Parent Action Networks' definition of a single parent is a parent with main responsibility for a child/children under the age of 18 years.

Although the principle of One Parent Proofing can be applied to any policy or service, this toolkit focuses on policies, services and practices that impact on single parents' ability to escape poverty by moving into and staying in employment. This will include national and local policy makers, providers of statutory services and community based initiatives and employers.

What is One Parent Proofing?

The Toolkit draws on the views of 68 single mothers, as presented in *'Participatory One Parent Proofing: Findings'*. One Parent Proofing is the process by which these views are used to inform the development, implementation and evaluation of policy and practice so that they respond effectively to the needs of one parent families. The toolkit is founded on the belief that policies which are:

- informed by the views of the single parents who they affect;
- make sense to single parents;
- and fit with the complexity of their everyday lives

are more likely to work.

The process starts by asking you to consider whether your initiative, which could be either a policy or service provision, is likely to have a differential impact on single parents. The One Parent Proofing Action Plan then guides you through a series of questions to ensure that, wherever possible, your initiative is modified to meet their needs. The completed Action Plan enables you to identify and monitor targets to evaluate the impact of your initiative on single parents.

The One Parent Proofing Toolkit is a practical instrument designed to develop and review policy and practice. In order to ensure that it is as user friendly as possible the toolkit includes:

- useful 'practice points' suggested by those organisations who piloted the toolkit, to help you to use the toolkit as effectively as possible;
- practice examples from initiatives which have demonstrated that they are meeting the Toolkit recommendations;
- a link to an electronic version of the Toolkit and One Parent Proofing Action Plan, so that additional forms can be downloaded and adapted to meet your organisation's needs (www.singleparents.org.uk/span);
- details of useful organisations and resources that provide additional information about one parent families and the policies that affect them.

Why do we need to One Parent Proof policies and practice?

One Parent Proofed policies and practice will meet the needs of all types of families

- The challenges and problems that one parent families encounter when trying to escape poverty, retain a work-life balance and sustain employment, illuminate many of the difficulties faced by other types of families.
- Policies and practices that enable a single parent to provide and care for their children are more likely to have beneficial effects for two parent families.
- A one parent proofed initiative is a family proofed initiative.

One parent families are an important and increasingly common family form which must be acknowledged

- 25 per cent of all families with dependent children are one parent families (LFS, Spring 2005).
- 91 per cent of one parent families are headed by single mothers (LFS, 2004).
- There are currently 1.9 million single parents with dependent children in the UK (ibid).
- There are 3.1 million children living in single parent families (LFS, 2004).
- This rise in one parent families needs to be understood in the context of a continuing process of family change, with high divorce and remarriage rates and a rise in cohabitation and births conceived outside of wedlock.

One parent families continue to face a high risk of poverty

- Although the risk of one parent poverty has fallen from 58 per cent in 1999 to 47 per cent in 2003, in 2005/6 half of all children living in one parent families were living below 60 per cent of the median income after housing costs, compared to 23 per cent in two parent families (DWP-HABAI, 2005/06).
- Poverty is dynamic, with people moving in and out of it. However, one parent families are three times more likely than two parent families to experience persistent poverty (DWP, 2005).
- Although one parent poverty is largely an issue of household structure, it can also be attributed to the fact that one parent families score relatively highly on the remaining key predictors of child poverty in the UK, which are: gender, working status, ethnicity, ill health and disability and housing tenure.
- Single parents also experience a high risk of time poverty as they often have sole and/or main responsibility for providing and caring for their children.
- Child poverty is very much linked to women's poverty. Nine out of ten lone parents are women. Following separation, mothers and children usually experience a 17 per cent fall in net income. Women also face unequal pay (One Parent Families/Gingerbread, 2007).

Why do we need to One Parent Proof policies and practice? continued

Single parents have low employment rates

- Parent working status is the most significant predictor of child poverty; three quarters of children living in households where no one works are living in poverty (Hirsh, 2006). As a result the Government has identified single parents as a key policy priority for addressing child poverty and has set a target to achieve a 70 per cent single parent employment rate by 2010.
- The employment rate of single parents fell dramatically to below 40 per cent in the early 1980s and has since increased to 56 per cent in 2006 (DWP, 2006). However, this rate does not only refer to full-time employment, and in 2004, half of all employed single parents were working part-time (ONS, 2006).
- In 2004, 41 per cent of single mothers had either no or limited qualifications, compared to a quarter of mothers in couple families (Lyons *et al*, 2006).
- Single parents on income support tend to have even lower qualifications; in 2000, half had no qualification and no relevant work skills or experience (Lessof *et al*, 2001).
- Employed single parents have twice the risk of cycling back to welfare once in employment.

Policies and services can only be effective if they meet the needs of single parents

- One parent families are a key policy focus, particularly in relation to employment and child poverty eradication strategies. Yet policies and initiatives aimed at single parents are seldom informed by a grounded understanding of what life is like for a single parent.
- Policy and service provision can only be effective if it recognises the differential needs, experiences and priorities of single parents and then modifies its content and practice accordingly.
- We can only really understand the reality of single parenthood by actively listening to what *single parents* say about their needs, experiences and priorities.
- The One Parent Proofing Toolkit presents policy solutions as identified by 68 single parents, all of whom are women, who drew on their own 'real-life' experiences of moving into and staying in employment. The parents represented a diversity of background and experience: one third were from Black and minority ethnic groups, one third were employed, some in elementary/low skilled jobs and others in medium skilled/professional jobs, while another third had been on Income Support for over two years.

One Parent Proofing practice points

Before beginning the process of One Parent Proofing, organisations may find it helpful to consider the following practice points.

1. Initiatives may have to overcome some organisational barriers in order to One Parent Proof effectively

It is important that organisations consider any barriers that might exist within their services, acknowledge that they are there and identify how they might be overcome, before they undertake the One Parent Proofing process. The following table provides examples of the types of barriers organisations might face¹:

Culture	Structure	Practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Preconceived ideas about single parents (stereotyping and stigmatisation) and lack of understanding may lead to a reluctance to recognise need and offer support. ● Gender discrimination (discrimination against women will adversely affect the majority of single parents). ● The ethos of an organisation will dictate whether or not it commits to 'owning' One Parent Proofed policies and practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● An organisation's commitment to One Parent Proofed policies and practices may have little influence without the support of Government policy. ● Devolved Governments, for example in Scotland, may have limited power to influence policy at a UK level. ● The lack of a common policy framework in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland may make it difficult to ensure a consistent approach to One Parent Proofing across the UK. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● An organisation's commitment to One Parent Proofing may have little effect without the provision of adequate funding. For example to provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Childcare – Paid parental leave – In-work training for career advancement ● Organisations need to become more flexible in order to meet the needs of parents. Organisations may be reluctant to change well established current practice. ● Lack of clarity about who is responsible for initiating policy/practice developments.

¹ These 'barriers' and 'solutions' to One Parent Proofing were gathered during consultation with the Participatory One Parent Proofing National Working Group and represent the views of single parents, single parent organisations, civil servants, academics and statutory organisations.

One Parent Proofing practice points continued

Solutions to these barriers might include:

- One Parent Proofing new initiatives (policies or practices) at the point of planning, so that changes do not have to be made when policies/practices have already been accepted/adopted.
- Ensuring effective communication between all staff, service users and volunteers so that everyone has a shared understanding of what One Parent Proofing means and why it is important.
- One Parent Proofing needs to be understood as good employment practice. Benefits include: helping to ensure good staff retention rates, helping to ensure that organisations are meeting their Gender Equality Duty², helping to not only meet the needs of single parents, but families generally.

2. Consider who should One Parent Proof within your organisation

Organisations need to consider who is best placed to undertake the One Parent Proofing process. It may help to reflect on:

- Who has sufficient knowledge and understanding of the initiative to evaluate whether it is meeting the needs of single parents?
- Who has sufficient influence to dictate how the initiative can be developed to meet the needs of single parents?
- Who has the time and resources to undertake the One Parent Proofing process?

'It depends on the service or work being evaluated; ideally a member of staff within the management team to facilitate and co-ordinate input from lone parents.' (Pilot participant)

Pilot participants chose various different individuals or groups to undertake the OPP process including: single parent service users, single parent employees, organisation directors, service managers and trustees. You could choose to involve service users either through allowing them to complete the OPP process or by drawing on evidence from past evaluations which have included their views.

3. Celebrate achievement

One Parent Proofing is not just about identifying the gaps in your service provision, but also about highlighting positive practice and policies. It should be an affirming process which allows you to recognise what you are doing well, as well as where you need to develop. Once you have completed the OPP process and met the recommendations, you will be able to celebrate and promote your initiative as one which is committed to meeting the needs of single parent families, for example, by recognising this commitment in organisational information (sent out in employment packs to potential employees, in leaflets and on posters), in funding applications and in evaluation reports.

² The Gender Equality Duty [GED] is a legal obligation which came into force in April 2007. The GED states that public authorities are legally bound to promote gender equality and eliminate sex discrimination.

One Parent Proofing practice points continued

4. Consider when you will One Parent Proof your initiative

One Parent Proofing can be carried out at any point in your service/policy development and delivery. However, as mentioned previously, it will be easier to implement the recommendations if the process is undertaken when a policy or practice is first being planned. The toolkit can then be used to revisit the policy or practice after set periods to ensure that the original aims are being met.

'As an organisation dedicated to the support of lone parents, to carry out this exercise as part of the service evaluation would provide evidence, within a framework to ensure aims were being met. It could also be included in the process of starting new services from a very early stage (pre funding bids) where input from focus groups would be useful.' (Pilot participant)

5. Remember that the One Parent Proofing Toolkit is flexible

This toolkit provides a 3 step framework for undertaking the One Parent Proofing process. However, how each step is undertaken and how the materials provided in the toolkit are utilised, is up to you. It will depend entirely on the needs of the organisation, who undertakes the One Parent Proofing process (for example, it could be an individual or a strategic planning group) and the imagination of those involved! Suggestions might include:

- photocopying the Action Plan and using it for every initiative within an organisation;
- using the key message cards as an exhibition or training session to raise awareness about single parents throughout the organisation and prompt discussion about how the One Parent Proofing process could be undertaken;
- the toolkit could be used as an exercise in itself to be undertaken in a management team meeting;
- the Action Plan could be downloaded and inputted into all Service Delivery Plan frameworks;
- any additional issues raised by single parents within your organisation could be added to the list of questions in the Action Plan.

How to One Parent Proof

One Parent Proofing involves 3 steps:

Key issue to consider

It is important that the One Parent Proofing Toolkit is used alongside 11 key message cards in the back pocket of the toolkit. These cards present an essential overview of the key issues and associated policy solutions identified by single parents and provides an understanding of the context in which the toolkit was developed.

Step 1:

Raise awareness of one parent families and establish whether the initiative is likely to have a differential impact on single parents.



Step 2:

Identify the challenges, faced by single parents, which may impact on their experience of the initiative.



Step 3:

Consider how the initiative might **respond to the challenges** faced by single parents in either:

- A) Moving forward *and/or*
- B) Ensuring sustainable employment

Develop a One Parent Proof Action Plan which sets and monitors targets to evaluate the impact of the initiative on one parent families.

How to One Parent Proof continued

Step 1 enables the organisation to develop a better understanding of the challenges that some one parent families face.

Step 2 invites the organisation to consider whether these challenges will lead the initiative to have a differential impact on single parents.

Step 3 presents the One Parent Proof Action Plan. The Action Plan guides the organisation through a number of questions relating to the specific challenges that single parents identified to moving forward and sustaining employment and offers examples of potential solutions. By completing the Action Plan the organisation will be able to:

- illustrate that the initiative has acknowledged the position of single parents and the challenges that they face;
- illustrate how the initiative plans to address these challenges to provide equal opportunities for single parents to move forward and/or remain in sustainable employment;
- indicate how the initiative plans to monitor its impact on single parents.

Key issue to consider

This toolkit focuses on some of the challenges that single parents might face when moving forward and/or trying to stay in employment. It is important to recognise however, that **individuals have their own needs and experiences** which will impact on their lives. While some single parents may face significant barriers to sustainable employment, others may experience fewer barriers. Such barriers may be alleviated, but others may be exacerbated over time. It is vital that the challenges identified in this Toolkit are not used to further stigmatise an already disadvantaged group.

However, as previous statistics demonstrate, single parents, the great majority of whom are women, represent a group who are disproportionately prone to poverty and low rates of employment. Views of parents from diverse backgrounds and experiences further corroborate the fact that single parents as a group face numerous challenges to moving forward and retaining employment. This Toolkit provides a framework to encourage policy makers and service providers to recognise and act upon the solutions to these potential challenges, as identified by single parents.

Step 1

Raise your awareness of some of the challenges facing single parents moving into and trying to sustain employment to establish whether your initiative is likely to have a differential impact on one parent families. Single parents identified the following issues as examples of barriers that they might face in moving forward and staying in employment. Read the following boxes along with the 11 key message cards and ‘*Why do we need to One Parent Proof?*’ (pages 5-6), to raise your awareness of some of the challenges facing single parents.

Most single parents provide and care for their child single-handedly.

“Me and only me all the time, having to be mum and dad. Having to do everything alone and having no one to share these responsibilities with and feeling like the lynch pin holding it all together.”

Single parent families are at a very high risk of financial and/or time poverty.

“It’s like the juggling balls. Do you buy the food, pay the gas or electric or buy them whatever they need.”

Single parents identify positive aspects of being a single parent (namely a sense of independence and freedom from unequal or abusive relationships); however, they continue to feel stereotyped and stigmatised.

“The government penalises us for being single parents, but why should my kids see a violent relationship because I’m with a bloke. I think I should be given an award for what I’ve done, and I’m sick of them saying ‘Well you’re a single parent’. Because he did what he did, I’m a single parent, but I’m bloody well proud to be a single parent as well.”

Single parent families are more likely to live in temporary private accommodation and social housing.

“If you want to get a mortgage and there is only one income I mean, how are you supposed to move out of rented accommodation?”

Single mothers are more likely than other mothers to have low qualifications and poor work experience.

“I just can’t find the time to train and without that I can’t move forward.”

Single parents and their children are much more likely to suffer from ill health (both mental and physical) and disability.

“Constant stress for everyone and then you get depressed and your children, what happens to them then?”

Single parents are more likely to experience low confidence and low morale.

“[You need the support to develop] the kind of skills you need to stand up for yourself and help you identify the different kind of support that you need.”

Step 2

Identifying the impact of challenges on single parents' experiences of your initiative. Drawing on the barriers identified in 'Step 1', complete the following boxes with examples of the challenges that single parents might face within your initiative.

EXAMPLE

Challenge: Single parents are often sole-carers for their children.

How it will affect their experience of initiative:

May not be able to attend training/meetings outside of 9-5pm due to childcare responsibilities.

Challenge:

How it will affect their experience of initiative:

Challenge:

How it will affect their experience of initiative:

Challenge:

How it will affect their experience of initiative:

Challenge:

How it will affect their experience of initiative:

Challenge:

How it will affect their experience of initiative:

Step 3

Consider how the initiative might respond to the challenges faced by single parents and develop a One Parent Proof Action Plan

- The Action Plan should be informed by Steps 1 and 2. It is therefore essential that these steps are completed before Step 3 is undertaken. It is also useful to consider all the One Parent Proofing practice points and key messages before completing the One Parent Proof Action Plan.
- **Action Plan 'A'** provides the questions and solutions to consider when developing/reviewing MOVING FORWARD initiatives. These might include: learning/training providers; Employment Zone City Strategies; voluntary work providers; Jobcentre Plus or Sure Start initiatives.
- **Action Plan 'B'** provides the questions and solutions to consider when developing/reviewing SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT initiatives. These might include: employment programme providers; Jobcentre Plus initiatives; employers; local authorities implementing the Gender Equality Duty.
- Once completed the One Parent Proof Action Plan should be integrated into the appropriate sections of your initiative's strategic or operational planning documents and shared throughout the organisation with service users, staff and managers.

Key issue to consider

The One Parent Proof Action Plan provides examples of *potential* solutions to the challenges raised by single parents. The aim of the OPP process is not for initiatives to offer all of these solutions, but rather to acknowledge that challenges exist and identify a solution which meets the needs of single parents within the capacity of the organisation. The practice examples on page 23 demonstrate how two different initiatives have sought to meet the needs of single parents within their organisations.

Step 3 continued

A) Setting and monitoring targets for MOVING FORWARD initiatives. Complete the following table if your initiative aims to provide support to individuals who want to move forward into employment and off benefits. For example, through training and work experience programmes.

Policy/Initiative/service being One Parent Proofed:

<p>One Parent Proof Question and examples of potential solutions</p>	<p>What solution does your initiative currently offer/plan to offer? Please provide details of solution, how it is delivered and to whom.</p>	<p>Who is responsible for delivering solution? Provide details of individuals or services responsible for delivering solution.</p>	<p>How will you measure impact of One Parent Proofing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify your success indicators – measurable, realistic outcomes which can illustrate change over a given timeframe. ● How will your outcomes be measured? ● Who has responsibility for measuring/evaluating whether the outcomes have been met?
<p>How will your initiative offer opportunities to gain medium/ high level qualifications and work related skills?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Medium skills paid or unpaid work experience opportunities ● Structured and accredited volunteering opportunities to foster employability ● Career guidance built into appraisal sessions; referral to career guidance services ● In-house training during service/ programme time ● Flexible training times ● Provide time off for studying/training ● Develop links with local learning providers including further and higher education institutions ● Provide access to information on courses available and allocate funding to cover childcare costs for further/higher education. 			

A) Setting and monitoring targets for MOVING FORWARD initiatives continued

<p>One Parent Proof Question and examples of potential solutions</p>	<p>What solution does your initiative currently offer/plan to offer?</p>	<p>Who is responsible for delivering solution?</p>	<p>How will you measure impact of One Parent Proofing?</p>
<p>How will your initiative provide opportunities for soft-skills development (i.e. personal development including increasing self esteem)? How will you ensure that lone parents can engage in activities that boost their self-confidence and self-esteem?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide soft-skills training (see practice example: SPAN Study Centre) ● Referrals to locally provided soft-skills training ● Time to train ● Cover or provide information about funding for training fees ● Provide related transport and childcare costs ● Signpost to or identify a lone parent mentor. 			
<p>How will your initiative address needs for holistic advice to deal with acute need such as mental and physical ill health; disability; debt; domestic violence and homelessness?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build an understanding of the impact of these barriers and of the time it takes to tackle them into the design and review of targets and time frames ● Make allowance for the impact of such barriers when assessing individual's performance in order not to discriminate on this basis ● Develop links and signposts to lone parents organisations and local statutory/voluntary advice agencies ● Allow time to attend advice meetings ● Allow time off for emergencies. 			

A) Setting and monitoring targets for MOVING FORWARD initiatives continued

<p>One Parent Proof Question and examples of potential solutions</p>	<p>What solution does your initiative currently offer/plan to offer?</p>	<p>Who is responsible for delivering solution?</p>	<p>How will you measure impact of One Parent Proofing?</p>
<p>How will your initiative address single parents' childcare needs? Does the single parent already have childcare? Does this fit with your service/programme times, including dropping and pick-up time? Do times fit around nursery/school times or is it run at atypical hours? Consider the number and ages of children, as this could impact on the type of childcare required.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide free on-site childcare at times of programme/service delivery ● Refer single parents to the local Children Information Service to find out about local availability of childcare ● Ask the local Jobcentre Plus Lone Parent Advisor about childcare taster opportunities and childcare funding ● Cover both informal and formal childcare costs. 			
<p>How will your initiative address parents' needs for time to care for their children? How will your initiative ensure that lone parents are not discriminated against as a result of having to take time off to care for sick children, attend school events/ meetings, or care for children during half/term holiday times? Does your initiative time fit around nursery/school times?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Flexible and short delivery times ● Entitlement to paid time off when children are ill and to take leave during school holidays ● Opportunities to recuperate lost training/working time/ appraisals ● Entitlement to take a period of time out due to family or health needs without losing place in the programme/service. 			

A) Setting and monitoring targets for MOVING FORWARD initiatives continued

<p>One Parent Proof Question and examples of potential solutions</p>	<p>What solution does your initiative currently offer/plan to offer?</p>	<p>Who is responsible for delivering solution?</p>	<p>How will you measure impact of One Parent Proofing?</p>
<p>How will you ensure that the service user/programme attendee will not be financially worse off?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cover related reasonable expenses such as lunch and travel ● Develop links with the local Jobcentre Plus Lone Parent Advisor and lone parent's organisations to gain and distribute information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) funding/benefit or tax credits aimed at covering childcare costs b) premium available to benefit claimants to attend training or work related activities c) lone parent mentoring opportunities. 			

Step 3 continued

B) Setting and monitoring targets for SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT initiatives. Complete the following table if your initiative aims to support individuals in employment. For example, an employer implementing the Gender Equality Duty or as an employment programme provider.

Policy/Initiative/service being One Parent Proofed:

<p>One Parent Proof Question and examples of potential solutions</p>	<p>What solution does your initiative currently offer/plan to offer? Please provide details of solution, how it is delivered and to whom.</p>	<p>Who is responsible for delivering solution? Provide details of individuals or services responsible for delivering solution</p>	<p>How will you measure impact of One Parent Proofing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify your success indicators – measurable, realistic outcomes which can illustrate change over a given timeframe. ● How will your outcomes be measured? ● Who has responsibility for measuring/evaluating whether the outcomes have been met?
<p>How will your initiative provide job and working hours security? Is the work placement/programme or job likely to entail changes in hours or job duties? How are you planning to address the impact of these changes on those who single-handedly care for their children?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Offer re-deployment opportunities ● Offer retraining opportunities during work time ● Minimise the need for working hours changes as much as possible for those who have childcare responsibilities ● If changes in working hours are expected make this clear at time of offering job or placement and if changes occur provide plenty of notice to allow time to find alternative childcare arrangements ● Provide flexible childcare on site. 			

B) Setting and monitoring targets for SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT initiatives continued

<p>One Parent Proof Question and examples of potential solutions</p>	<p>What solution does your initiative currently offer/plan to offer?</p>	<p>Who is responsible for delivering solution?</p>	<p>How will you measure impact of One Parent Proofing?</p>
<p>Does your initiative involve atypical working hours (i.e. hours outside of 8am-6pm) and if so how will you enable those with childcare responsibilities, women and men, to meet this requirement?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide childcare on site for atypical hours ● Find out whether there are any local atypical childcare providers and relay information to parents ● Find out about local youth/community facilities for children aged over 11 and relay information to parents ● Provide information on childcare element of tax credits and childcare employment vouchers which can be used to cover home based childcare costs. 			
<p>How will your initiative provide opportunities for advancement? Are you committed to providing equal opportunities for advancement to lone parents and all those with children?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide training opportunities and cover training fees ● Provide training during working hours ● Provide childcare or cover childcare costs attached to attending any training development opportunities run in the evenings or weekends ● Provide paid time off for study ● Provide sabbatical opportunities ● Develop links with local further and higher education providers. 			

B) Setting and monitoring targets for SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT initiatives continued

<p>One Parent Proof Question and examples of potential solutions</p>	<p>What solution does your initiative currently offer/plan to offer?</p>	<p>Who is responsible for delivering solution?</p>	<p>How will you measure impact of One Parent Proofing?</p>
<p>How will your initiative allow time to care for children? Consider flexible working, fostering short working weeks practices, and allowing paid time off for childcare related emergencies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guarantee flexible working to parents of all children, including those over the age of 11 ● Agreed paid time off for children's sickness ● Consider providing paid parental leave ● On site subsidised childcare available from 8am to 6pm. 			
<p>How will your initiative ensure access to good information on local childcare provision and tax credits and other benefits available to working families?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop strong links with and signpost parents to: Jobcentre Plus lone parent advisor, lone parent organisations, local CAB or money advice agencies, Children's Information Services and Local Authority Children and Young Peoples Services ● Make leaflets and information packs readily available in the work place. 			

B) Setting and monitoring targets for SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT initiatives continued

One Parent Proof Question and examples of potential solutions	What solution does your initiative currently offer/plan to offer?	Who is responsible for delivering solution?	How will you measure impact of One Parent Proofing?
<p>How will your initiative guarantee sufficient childcare opportunities for working parents? Have you considered the need for wrap-around and atypical childcare? Have you considered the role played by informal childcare providers?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review availability of atypical and home based childcare ● Foster development of home based childcare projects in deprived communities (see practice example: Childcare@Home) ● Consider the costs endured by informal childcare providers. ● Consider the implications of insufficient childcare access in terms of the Gender Duty. 			

Practice examples

A) Meeting targets to help single parents to MOVE FORWARD

<p>Name of organisation</p> <p>Contact details</p> <p>Service delivered</p>	<p>Single Parent Action Network Study Centre</p> <p>Address: Millpond, Baptist Street, Easton, Bristol, BS5 OYW Tel: 0117 952 2712 Website: www.singleparents.org.uk</p> <p>SPAN Study Centre is a small, diverse, multicultural learning centre working with both single parents and families with children. The Centre offers a range of free training and support programmes including: weekly parent drop-ins; career planning and life coaching; English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL); 1:1 money advice; parenting education programmes; childcare training and qualifications and volunteering opportunities.</p>
<p>How service meets the needs of one parent families (i.e. how it addresses the OPP questions to ensure that single parents are effectively supported to move forward)</p>	<p>Opportunities to gain qualifications and work related skills The Centre provides a range of accredited learning programmes such as childcare courses. It also provides parents with work related skills through career planning courses and 1:1 Life Coaching. The Life Coaching service is specifically for single parents on benefits and offers a series of 6 individually tailored sessions which explore the barriers to moving forward and how they can be overcome. It also helps to develop the practical skills needed to move forward such as: interview skills, completing applications forms and promoting yourself to a potential employer. The Centre also offers opportunities to volunteer in administrative roles within Single Parent Action Network. ESOL classes are also provided for those learners whose first language is not English, aiming to improve their listening, reading, writing and spelling skills.</p> <p>Opportunities for soft skills development The Centre believes that it is essential that parents build their confidence and self-esteem so that they can then progress on to accredited learning. As well as offering a specific course on 'How to Boost Your Self-Esteem', there are also programmes aimed at promoting relaxation such as yoga classes. 1:1 support also provides parents with guidance about how to overcome barriers to moving forward such as self esteem and confidence levels.</p> <p>Holistic support The Centre seeks to offer single parents a 'holistic learning package' so that their services are geared towards the needs of a single parent as a whole. This includes addressing the issue of isolation by providing outreach, drop-ins and peer support groups; providing stress reduction and relaxation courses to enable respite for single parents; signposting to support services such as domestic violence agencies and mental health services and building confidence through 1:1 sessions and programmes aimed at building assertiveness and assisting with parenting skills. The Centre also offers a free money advice service that offers specialist, confidential advice 1:1.</p> <p>Childcare The Centre provides free on-site childcare for parents accessing training/support services and/or volunteering at SPAN.</p> <p>Time to care All courses are delivered during term-times and within school hours (9.30am-3pm).</p>

Practice examples continued

B) Meeting targets to help single parents remain in SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT

<p>Service</p> <p>Name of organisation</p> <p>Contact details</p> <p>Service delivered</p>	<p>Childcare@Home</p> <p>OPFS(One Parent Families Scotland)</p> <p>Address: 13 Gayfield Square, Edinburgh, EH1 3NX Tel: 0131 5563899 Website: www.opfs.org.uk</p> <p>Childcare@Home offers an innovative childcare solution predominantly for low-income families who are either working or studying and unable to access other childcare to meet their needs. This may be due to the times that they require childcare, living in a rural area, the ages of the children, irregular shift or study patterns or because of a child's special needs. It operates 7 days a week from 7am until 10.30pm and caters for children aged 0-16. It delivers services in 7 local authority areas across Scotland. Childcare is provided in parents' homes by childcare staff, who are all checked through Disclosure Scotland, who have or are working towards SVQ Level 2 and have undertaken certificated First Aid training. Affordability is recognised through a sliding scale of charges calculated on the family's income. As the service is a registered form of childcare those claiming Working Tax Credit can apply for help with their costs. Childcare @home services have a cocktail of funding streams including: childcare partnership funds; working for families; parental fees etc.</p>
<p>How service meets the needs of one parent families (i.e. how it addresses the POPP questions to ensure that single parents are able to stay in employment)</p>	<p>Job and working hours security</p> <p>Job security can be difficult to provide due to the reliance on funding streams. Working hours can also change due to the nature of the service being offered. However, all members of staff provide details of when they are and are not available and this is taken into account when they are matched with clients. A growth in the mobile crèche service provision delivered by the service means there will be more stable employment hours available to some.</p> <p>Atypical working hours and the provision of childcare</p> <p>The service provided enables lone parents to work atypical hours and have access to childcare. For employees therefore, atypical hours are involved. All sessional staff give notice of their availability and are only allocated work which fits with these times. Any staff member with childcare difficulties is offered support to find replacement care and signposted to the local authority childcare information/support services.</p> <p>Opportunities for advancement</p> <p>Equal opportunities policy is implemented and practiced in all projects and lone parent employment is encouraged. Flexibility of employment gives opportunities for those with care responsibilities to enter employment and access training for career progression.</p> <p>Time to care for children</p> <p>Contracted staff have access to a variety of family friendly policies including care leave, facility to bring child to work if practical and flexible working.</p> <p>Access to information on childcare, tax credits and other benefits</p> <p>Information and trained staff available in-house on issues such as tax credits ,CSA and support for children. Information included in newsletters and website. Management staff, in all projects, are trained in tax credits and all have awareness of benefits available. Networks established locally to assist in facilitating access to additional benefits.</p> <p>Childcare opportunities</p> <p>Project provides childcare at atypical hours on a flexible basis, often in partnership with other informal or formal childcare providers, primarily for those in work or education.</p>

Resources

The following lists present details of useful resources which provide information about single parents and the policies/services which might affect them.

NATIONAL SINGLE PARENT ORGANISATIONS

Single Parent Action Network (SPAN)

SPAN is a uniquely diverse organisation supporting single parents to empower themselves throughout the UK. SPAN aims to give a voice to one-parent families living in poverty and isolation and supports the setting up and development of self-help groups. SPAN develops partnerships with organisations and agencies to improve policies for one-parent families.

SPAN Study Centre provides training and courses, a free on-site crèche and a drop-in service.

Website: www.singleparents.org.uk

Telephone: 0117 9514231

One Parent Families/Gingerbread

An independent charity working to promote the interests and welfare of lone parents and their children. The charity provides a self-referral helpline for information as well as an out of hours answer machine.

The website includes 'Lone Parent fact sheets' with information ranging from benefit advice to housing options for single parents. Gingerbread runs self-help groups offering lone parents and their children practical and emotional support, giving them an opportunity to meet people in the same situation.

Website: www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk

Helpline: 0800 018 5026

One Parent Families Scotland

Provides a confidential advice and information service for lone parents. Also offers publications, training and details of local support groups.

Website: www.opfs.org.uk

Helpline: 0808 801 0323

Resources continued

ORGANISATIONS PROVIDING INFORMATION/SUPPORT ABOUT BENEFITS AND WORKING RIGHTS

Working Families

Working Families focuses on the issues surrounding work-life balance. They help and give a voice to working parents and carers, whilst also helping employers create workplaces which encourage work-life balance for everyone.

Website: www.workingfamilies.org.uk

Child Poverty Action Group

Produces publications on legal and welfare benefits. They also provide an advice line for advisors only.

Website: www.cpag.org.uk

Citizens Advice Bureau Head Office

Offers a confidential, independent and impartial advice and information service for any members of the local community. Advice includes debt, benefits and social security, housing, disability, advocacy, discrimination, employment, family and personal matters, law and consumer rights.

Website: www.adviceguide.org.uk

Citizens Advice Scotland

Offers a confidential, independent and impartial advice and information service for any members of the local community. Advice includes debt, benefits and social security, housing, disability, advocacy, discrimination, employment, family and personal matters, law and consumer rights.

Website: www.cas.org.uk

Commission for Equality and Human Rights

A non-departmental public body whose purpose is to reduce inequality, eliminate discrimination, strengthen good relations between people and protect human rights.

Website: www.eoc.org.uk

CHILDCARE ORGANISATIONS

Daycare Trust

Provides confidential advice, information and signposting to other relevant services. Also offers information on childcare options for parents, childcare providers, employers, trade unions, local authorities and policy makers.

Website: www.daycaretrust.org.uk

4Children

Provides confidential information and advice to parents and playworkers on all aspects of childcare.

Website: www.4children.org.uk

ChildcareLink

The Government launched the ChildcareLink helpline and website in December 1999 as part of the National Childcare Strategy. The ChildcareLink service comprises the ChildcareLink web site, a national information line and details of local Children's Information Services (CIS). The CISs provide face-to-face or phone advice on all aspects of childcare. The ChildcareLink national website provides childcare and early years information collected from over 170 English and Scottish local authorities, with sign-posting information from the Welsh National Assembly.

Website: www.childcarelink.gov.uk

National information line: 08000 960296

Resources continued

USEFUL REFERENCES

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Department of Work and Pensions (2006a) *A New Deal for Welfare: Empowering people to work*, HMSO, London

Department for Work and Pensions (2007) *In Work, Better Off: next steps to full employment*, HMSO, London

Department of Work and Pensions (2006b) *Working Together – the UK National Action Plan on social exclusion 2006-2008 the Annexes*, HMSO, London

Department of Work and Pensions (2007) *Working for Children*, HMSO, London

Evans, M. (2003) 'How is the New Deal for Lone Parents working? In *OPF Working to Target: can policies deliver paid work for seven in ten lone parents?* OPF, London.

Giullari, S. (2007) *Proofed for Parent by Parents; Participatory One Parent Proofing: The Findings*, Single Parent Action Network

Harker, L. (2006) *Delivering on Child Poverty: what would it take?* Department for Work and Pensions, The Stationery Office

Taylor, F., Cohen, S., Crawford, K., Giullari, S. and Walker, J. (2007) *Integrating Children's Perspectives in Policy Making to Combat Social Exclusion Experienced by Single Parent Families: a Transnational Comparative Research Project*, Cyprus College, SPAN UK and University of Lincoln.

Listening to Lone Parents About Childcare (2007) Daycare Trust

Gender Equality Duty: Making a Difference for Women and Men (2007) Equal Opportunities Commission

Workforce Plus: an employability framework for Scotland (2006), Scottish Executive, Astron

One Parent Proofing Key Messages

Based on the views of 68 single parents, these cards present the key messages and associated policy solutions from the Participatory One Parent Proofing project. These key messages have informed the development and content of the One Parent Proofing Toolkit and are presented in full in: 'Participatory One Parent Proofing: Findings'.

In order to protect the anonymity of the parents who contributed to the Participatory One Parent Proofing project, none of the individuals in the photographs took part in the project (the quotes are therefore not their own); however, they are all single parents or children from one parent families.

The positive aspects of being a single parent



Single mothers recognised positive changes as a result of becoming a single parent, ranging from a sense of financial independence and autonomy, to being able to prioritise their relationship with their children and offer them a happier, safe, stable, non-violent family life. Yet this positive side of single parenthood is seldom acknowledged in public discourse. Instead single women voiced their frustration for continuing to be stigmatised as scroungers, fiddlers and bad parents.

“The government penalises us for being single parents, but why should my kids see a violent relationship because I’m with a bloke. Because I’m a single parent now, I think I should be given an award for what I’ve done, and I’m sick of them saying ‘Well you’re a single parent’. Because he did what he did, I’m a single parent, but I’m bloody well proud to be a single parent as well.”

Policy solutions

Strategies aimed at supporting single parents to move forward into sustainable employment are more likely to work if they:

- Foster a recognition that what matters is the quality of relationships and family life, not family structure.
- Value single parents for having exited unhappy and/or unequal family relationships and for single handedly providing and caring for their children.

Single handed juggling to provide and care for children



Having single-handed responsibility to provide and care for their children entails a very high risk of financial and time poverty. Single parents who rely on benefits struggle to make ends meet, which often involves having to choose between paying for food and bills and buying children's birthday presents, school uniforms or days out. Those who are employed experience a constant and exhausting juggling act, which negatively impacts on their ability to sustain a job, reduces their choices of employment, and renders career aspirations obsolete. Lack of time to oneself and exhaustion often result in high stress levels, sometimes with ill-health implications.

“It’s like juggling balls. Do you buy the food, pay the gas or electric or buy them whatever they need – new shoes, a wee bit of bedding...”

“I can’t be more ambitious and do things like move to pursue my career or work further away and commute.”

“I feel like I don’t see my child because I work. I then come home and force-feed my child because I want them to go to bed so that I can go to bed.”

“Me and only me all the time, having to be Mum and Dad. Having to do everything and having no-one to share these responsibilities with and feeling like the lynchpin holding it all together.”

Policy Solutions

- Increase Income Support rates for adults and the CSA maintenance premium.
- Increase tax credits for single parents to take into account that there is only one income.
- Affordable, good quality childcare to cover atypical hours and emergencies.

Studying/training to move forward



Studying/training, especially at further or higher education levels, was identified as the most effective step in moving forward. Although the premium attached to accessing training through the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) was seen as a very positive measure, a key limitation of this programme was that it only offers access to NVQ level 2 and below.

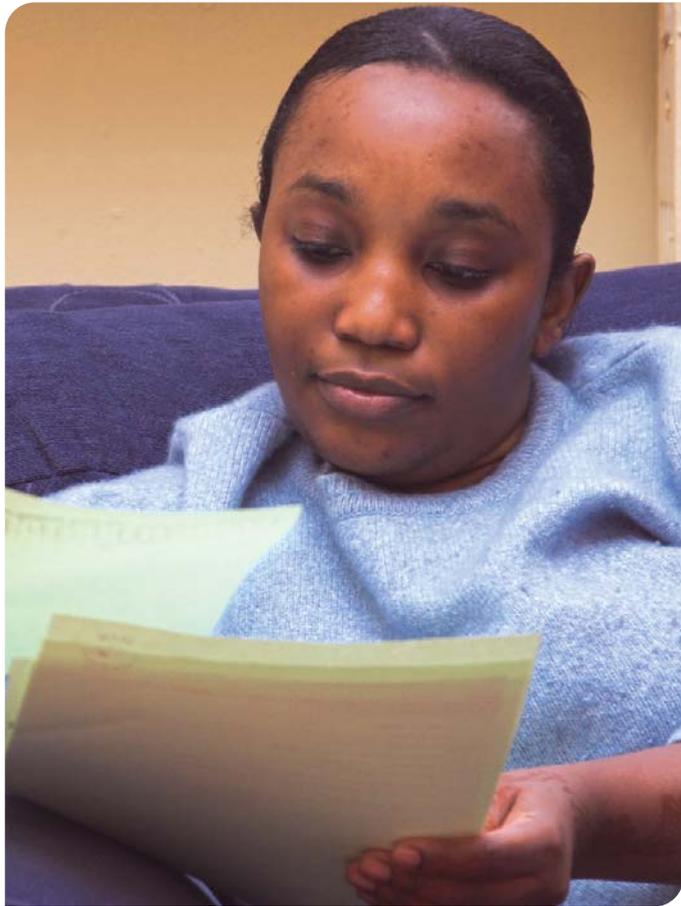
“You need to top up with more qualifications to get a reasonable salary.”

“People that have got a few qualifications from school, like GCSEs, they don’t want to be repeating Level 1 or 2 again, they want to go up to Level 3. Why because we are single parents should we go for low paid jobs?”

Policy solutions:

- Funding to cover fees and childcare costs for further and higher education courses.
- Provision of affordable evening or weekend childcare for those who want to engage in part-time studying/training while working.
- NDLP to provide access to NVQ level 3 and taster courses so that single parents can access training which best fits their aspirations and previously acquired qualifications and skills.

Accessing structured voluntary work to move forward



Loss of self confidence and social networks was a common experience for single parents and therefore the development of soft skills and opportunities to escape isolation were identified as key steps in moving forward. Voluntary work was seen to offer these steps as well as offering the advantage of increasing work readiness without the pitfalls, pressures and risks of paid work. New Deal for Lone Parents and paid work were seen as far less effective.

“Make sure that volunteering is structured in some way, so that you can make sure that you can use it.”

“You need to be able to develop and not go into a low level job. Will you get a CV with everything you have done and learnt? An official documentation? A portfolio of voluntary work or a letter of recommendation?”

Policy solutions:

- Initiatives aimed at supporting single parents to move forward, such as the proposed Work Related Activity Premium (WRAP), should be linked to a structured volunteering programme which: develops soft and hard skills, provides career guidance, ensures proper supervision and performance reviews are conducted and enables the development of accredited work portfolios.
- Lone Parent Advisors to promote structured volunteering opportunities in addition to paid work and training.
- Volunteering to be recognised as an effective way to move forward into employment and as such be supported through financial incentives such as the proposed WRAP.

Financial support for training and personal development



Single parents identified financial gain, without losing the security of benefits, as key to moving forward. In this respect benefit premiums provided by the New Deal for Lone Parents and the proposed Work Related Activity Premium (WRAP) were seen as very positive. Single parents also highlighted that developing soft and hard skills takes time, during which they need financial security.

“Premiums help you to move on without affecting your benefit.”

“The £20 a week for six months, I mean, personally I think it should last longer than six months because if you have been out of work for eleven years, it is still not enough experience to make you employable really.”

Policy solution:

- Benefit premiums linked to moving forward initiatives, should be increased, for example the proposed WRAP should be increased to £30 and extendable to a maximum of two years with six monthly progress reviews in place.
- Childcare costs covered for Work Focused Interviews, training including soft skills and voluntary work.

Provision of holistic support



A major concern of single parents relates to the 'work-first' approach that underpins current employment programmes. When visiting Jobcentres and meeting with advisers many felt a pressure to get a job, as if any job was better than no job. Single parents overwhelmingly disagreed with this approach. Those who had not been in work for a long time or had returned to welfare wanted holistic support to tackle acute problems such as debt, isolation, domestic violence, depression, and low-self-confidence as well as the time and opportunities to develop their qualifications and experience. Support from single parent organisations was favoured over Lone Parent Advisors and New Deal for Lone Parents as they provided: holistic, longer term support; advice not singularly aimed at getting parents into paid work and a deep, grounded knowledge of single parents' needs.

“They want single parents back into work to fill in all these jobs, you know, all the not so good jobs.”

“Personal advisors should look at the future; focus on career rather than work.”

“It should focus on the individual needs rather than just getting people into any job.”

“[Single parent organisations] give you the kind of skills that you need to stand up for yourself and help you identify the different kinds of support that you need. You feel that you can talk to them.”

Policy solutions:

- Support single parent organisations' delivery of holistic support.
- Holistic Work Focused Interviews to cover acute barriers such as debt, domestic violence, ill-health and housing problems.
- Establishment of local one stop shops so that single parents can receive advice and support on a number of issues simultaneously, with childcare on the premises.
- Ensure good communications and links between single parents' organisations, Lone Parent Advisors and Employment Zones.
- Single parents' organisations could train Lone Parent Advisors.
- Lone Parent Advisors could use the premises of voluntary/community organisations to provide advice.

Childcare to enable single parents to move forward



In order to move forward single parents need to be able to try, trust and access good quality childcare. Childcare tasters were seen as a very important measure, and yet the concern was that very often childcare was not available or affordable to single parents who were not in paid work and were trying to move forward. Single parents also identified that there was very little childcare available for children over 11 and stated that this needed addressing given that recent welfare to work initiatives seemed to be focusing on those whose youngest child has reached secondary school age.

“Childcare for 11+ kids is not appropriate. We need more community facilities that are for that age group. It’s not childcare that you want.”

“There is not childcare for them, before or after school. I don’t want him on the streets.”

Policy solutions:

- Childcare costs covered for Work Focused Interviews and training including soft skills and voluntary work.
- Develop more youth/community facilities for children over 11.

Atypical hours and the need for childcare



For those parents who are single handedly juggling caring and breadwinning responsibilities, changes in working hours including the expectation to work longer or atypical hours was impossible to manage. Parents found that opportunities for advancement were severely curtailed by the lack of affordable good quality childcare during atypical hours, such as weekends and evenings. Given the expansion of employment during atypical hours, and increasing demand for working longer hours, childcare was also essential in order for low-skilled parents to secure and sustain employment. Single parents also talked about the difficulty of meeting childcare costs, which due to marketisation had continued to rise, even with the aid of the childcare element of child tax credit.

“Can’t do the training at the weekend as this is a problem in my current position as a manager in the public sector.”

“When I worked at [supermarket], they were like: “Oh, these are your hours” and they’re 20 hours. You look at them and think “Oh I want more”. But the reason I left was that she wanted me to work on a Sunday, I said I can’t on a Sunday because obviously I’ve got my daughter. Then another time she says “Oh there’s somebody off sick, can you come in at half past 7?” I went, “Well no, ’cos I’ve got my daughter – who’s going to see to her?” And she turned around and said “Childcare is your problem and not ours.”

Policy solutions:

- Home based childcare services in deprived communities.
- Pay informal childcare at cheaper rate than formal childcare through Working Tax Credit.

Ensuring income security



Single parents identified income security as paramount but difficult to achieve due to the complication and unreliability of tax credits, CSA payments and better-off calculations. Being better off is important for job retention. Unfortunately due to unexpected work-related costs, and loss in housing benefit as well as other passported benefits, many of those in low-pay jobs said that they were no better off, and in some cases less financially secure than they were on benefits. Crucially single parents also lose the advice and support of a Lone Parent Advisor once they enter employment.

“Better off calculations are not accurate, they’re misleading, they don’t take off bus fares and school meals and all these things that you lose.”

“It’s just stupid, because they take all these benefits off you and then because you have to pay for everything else you are actually worse off.”

“Overpayment [of tax credits] is a constant worry and it is not fair.”

“You’re not getting an incentive to get a better job. If you go to a higher level then if you earn over your threshold you’ve got to pay it back... I had to live on, I think it was, about £50 a week after I’d paid my bills and everything like that. I got myself into debt to keep my house up, to keep my kids on.”

Policy solutions:

- Extend New Deal Plus nationally and guarantee the £40 in work credit, access to emergency fund and mentoring support to all.
- Simplify tax credit applications and award notices and do not claw back overpayments automatically.
- Ensure joined up understanding of tax credit system between Inland Revenue, Lone Parent Advisors and single parents.
- Better-off calculation to include loss of housing benefit, passported benefits and transport costs.
- Better-off calculation to be performed at time of job offer by an independent body.
- Less steep tapering of housing and council tax benefit.
- Passported benefit such as free school meals, dental and NHS costs to continue once in work.

Opportunities for advancement



The opportunity for advancement was seen as key to sustaining employment, as it often meant being better-off and having increased job satisfaction, self-esteem and motivation. Low skilled parents seldom came across these opportunities, whilst those who were established in middle level/ professional jobs could not advance as their childcare responsibilities did not easily allow for inflexible and time consuming training requirements.

“I had no energy left. The hoops I had to jump through and nobody once offered any support for anything. And I got a young child, she was a toddler then. If they’d said, okay you can have extra time to do this I wouldn’t have been staying up until five o’clock in the morning.”

Policy solutions:

- Increase the threshold of Working Tax Credit to maintain incentive to move into better jobs.
- Ensure equal opportunities for single parents in the work place.
- Provide paid time off to study.

Time Poverty: the need for time to care



Not having enough time to care was a common everyday experience for the single parents who worked. Parents talked of feeling guilty for not being able to be there at school events and being too tired to spend quality time with their children. Managing childcare breakdown, sickness and school holidays was a frequent problem for them, and they argued that current work-life balance policies were not helpful in this respect. Parents identified paid time off as vital in enabling them to sustain employment. They stated that the unpaid work that they did on top of their job was extensive but unfortunately went unnoticed and unvalued. Not all unpaid care work can be substituted by services because it is bound in the nature of intimate child-parent relationships. Single parents argued that they needed paid time off to make sure

that they can: care for their children when sick; care for their children when formal childcare cannot; spend quality time with their children; chaperone and organise extra school activities; offer emotional support; attend school activities and deal with school related problems as well as maintain a healthy home environment.

“Work places need to be a more friendly environment and realise that parents really need time off to attend school plays, concerts etc. and this is important for children, they need that investment from their parents and society should respect that. They need to realise that children and child minders get sick and that working that day could be a major issue for lone parents because they don’t have the other parent to provide childcare.”

Policy solutions:

- Promote shorter working week.
- Right to flexible working for parents of all children, including those aged over 11.
- Paid leave for children’s sickness.
- Provision of flexible paid parental leave.
- Grants to small and medium sized enterprises to cover costs of flexible working and paid leave.

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Single Parent Action Network**

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