



COVID-19

OPFS scenario planning to prepare for moving out of COVID-19 lockdown

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One Parent Families Scotland

One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) is the leading charity working with single parent families in Scotland. Building on over seventy years of advocacy and service-delivery expertise, OPFS provides expert information, advice and support for one parent families, along with training activities, employability programmes and flexible childcare across Scotland. OPFS campaigns with parents to make their voices heard to change the systems, policies and attitudes that disadvantage single parent families.¹ 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 they face.

Single Parent Families - Profile

In Scotland single parent families are 29% of families with dependent children (167,100 families).² The Poverty and Inequality Commission has highlighted that 37% of all children in Scotland living in poverty live in a single parent family³ and 94% are women. 27% of single parent households have a disabled adult and 16% have at least one child with a disability.⁴ The number of single parent households are projected to rise by almost a fifth (19%) by 2041.⁵

Seven in ten (68 per cent) single parents are now in work⁶. Over two-thirds of single parents enter the three lowest paid occupation groups: including 'unskilled' jobs like cleaning, shelf-stacking and catering work; jobs in sales or retail; and personal service jobs, such as carers or child minders.⁷

The most current statistics show poverty rates for children living in lone-parent families are at 54% almost twice as high as those living in couple families (28%). By 2021 single parents and their children will lose a fifth of their income due to welfare reform - an average of £5,250 a year.⁸ The predicted increase in the UK child poverty rate for children in single parent households to over 62% will have a devastating impact on the lives and prospects of so many children.

Single parents have sole responsibility for caring for and arranging childcare for their children, including managing illnesses and holidays, rather than sharing these with a partner. This results in a lack of flexibility which impacts on their ability to take up employment, to work towards progression by taking on extra responsibilities and shifts or to undertake training. For some, it necessitates part-time working or working more locally, constraining the range of progression opportunities that can be pursued. The majority of single parents are women, so gender inequality is a key issue.

¹ <https://opfs.org.uk/who-we-are/our-strategy/>

² www.gov.uk/government/statistics/personal-tax-credits-2016-to-2017
www.gov.uk/government/statistics/take-up-rates-2016-to-2017

³ <https://povertyinequality.scot/2018/02/Child-Poverty-Delivery-Plan-advice-February-2018.pdf>

⁴ www.gingerbread.org.uk/One-in-four-a-profile-of-single-parents-in-the-UK

⁵ <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/rgar/2018/rgar18.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2016/01/Employing-new-tactics.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/One-in-four-a-profile-of-single-parents-in-the-UK.compressed.pdf>

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

In Scotland, children living with a lone mother are less at risk of severe socio-emotional problems if their mothers are in work. Higher levels of household income, greater maternal psychological wellbeing and attendance of Early Childhood Education and Care centres are some of the factors contributing to their socio-emotional wellbeing. However not *all* types of employment have the same beneficial effect. Only children whose lone mothers work full-time or in higher status occupations show levels of severe socio-emotional problems as low as children in two parent families.⁹

COVID-19 Impact on Single Parent Families

COVID-19 is a global public health crisis which is rapidly developing into an unparalleled economic catastrophe. Before this crisis single parent families already faced significant challenges: poverty, isolation and loneliness, poor health or disability and judgemental attitudes.¹⁰ The lockdown has left many single parents isolated, lonely and cut off from their networks. Social isolation and distancing has been linked to increased anxiety, depression, stress and other negative feelings which can have a detrimental effect on health and wellbeing. These risk factors are also associated with poverty, which in itself increases the likelihood of social isolation.¹¹

Nearly half of households with dependent children in Scotland find themselves in the two most serious categories of financial stress - 'in serious financial difficulty' or 'struggling to make ends meet'. This amounts to 300,000 households in Scotland. This compares to just under one in three (30 per cent) of all households in Scotland reporting the same levels of financial stress, itself a shocking figure. One in five (20 per cent) of households with dependent children in Scotland (100,000 households) were in the most worrying financial circumstances - 'in serious financial difficulty' - compared to 12 per cent of all households in Scotland. This is the group most likely to be struggling to pay for food or essential items.¹²

We are extremely troubled about the impact of this crisis on every child affected by poverty. We are also concerned about the longer-term impact on Scotland's aspiration to reduce child poverty by 2030. The steps we take should not only support families now but also underpin progress towards ending child poverty. Those steps must also be consistent with a children's rights approach by continuing to protect children's economic and social rights as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹³

Single parent families, especially those with health conditions and disabilities, are suffering disproportionately from the current economic crisis. A report in May 2020 by the Institute for Social and Economic Research shows the pandemic is deepening UK inequalities.¹⁴ If government support continues to fail to address this, it will lock in 'building back worse'.

The earnings of single parents fell by more than double the amount experienced by households with children and more than one adult. Their average weekly household earnings fell £36, from £511 in February to £475 in April. But single parent households saw their average weekly earnings fall by £73, from £326 to £253 over the same period. The data show that nearly 18% of the lowest earners were behind on their household bills, compared with just 2% of those in the highest income bracket. The lowest earners were also

⁹ www.understanding-inequalities.ac.uk/living-with-a-lone-mother-in-scotland

¹⁰ <https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/esss-outlines/covid-19-social-isolation-and-loneliness>

¹¹ <https://opfs.org.uk/get-involved/single-parent-consultations/community-connections-project/>

¹² <https://www.ippr.org/blog/covid-19-how-are-families-with-children-faring-so-far>

¹³ <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>

¹⁴ www.iser.essex.ac.uk/fsingle-mother-income-loss-covid-19.pdf

more than five times more likely to report that they had been hungry but had not eaten at some time in the course of a week.

Single parents have been hit with a “triple penalty” as a result of the crisis. Many single parents have found themselves furloughed while experiencing increased costs because of their children are not attending school or nursery and have found their maintenance payments reduced or withdrawn.

The Bank of England forecasts¹⁵ that coronavirus will send our economy on its worst tailspin in 300 years. More than 2.5 million people have made claims for out-of-work benefits. Over 6 million workers have been furloughed, with an uncertain future once the scheme expires. Vacancies are down 60% on pre-crisis levels. Business confidence is fragile.¹⁶ Fewer employment opportunities, and the kind of corrosion in working conditions we saw following the 2008 crash, will disproportionately impact single parents, the majority of whom are women. They already have to work harder for job opportunities, are over-represented in precarious work, earn less on average and more likely to lose their job.¹⁷

Scotland's route map through and out of the crisis

The Scottish Government publication ‘COVID-19 - Framework for Decision Making Scotland’s route map through and out of the crisis’¹⁸ sets out the phases by which Scottish Government aims to ease lockdown. They are gradual and incremental and will be matched with careful monitoring of the virus. The publication highlights that the harmful effects on the economy of the crisis impacts hardest on families with low incomes and people who were already experiencing the effects of inequality. For example, the impact for women who take the disproportionate share of caring responsibilities (paid and unpaid), means they are likely to experience particular disadvantage. It states:

“We will take the chance, as we emerge from this period, to chart a better way forward in support of all of Scotland. As we move forward, we want not simply to return to where we were, but to build on the innovative responses seen throughout the crisis to build a Fairer Scotland. We will use the lessons learned during the pandemic to help us make progress towards our long-term outcomes of lower, poverty levels, greater equality, inclusive communities and respected and enhanced realisation of human rights.” (page 15)

The national approach to moving out of lockdown must aim for a “new normal” and an economy and society that is fairer and more sustainable. Achieving these ambitions will require continued progress toward meeting national child poverty targets. Even before the current coronavirus crisis nearly one in four, 230,000, of Scotland’s children were growing up in poverty.¹⁹ Some families are particularly affected by the crisis as they face multiple disadvantages - those priority families identified in the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan “Every Child Every Chance” - single parents, families with a disabled adult or child, young mothers, minority ethnic families, families with a child under 1, and larger families.²⁰

¹⁵ www.itv.com/news/2020-05-07/bank-warns-economy-could-plunge

¹⁶ www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/weekly-vacancy-analysis

¹⁷ www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2019/01/Setting-the-record-straight

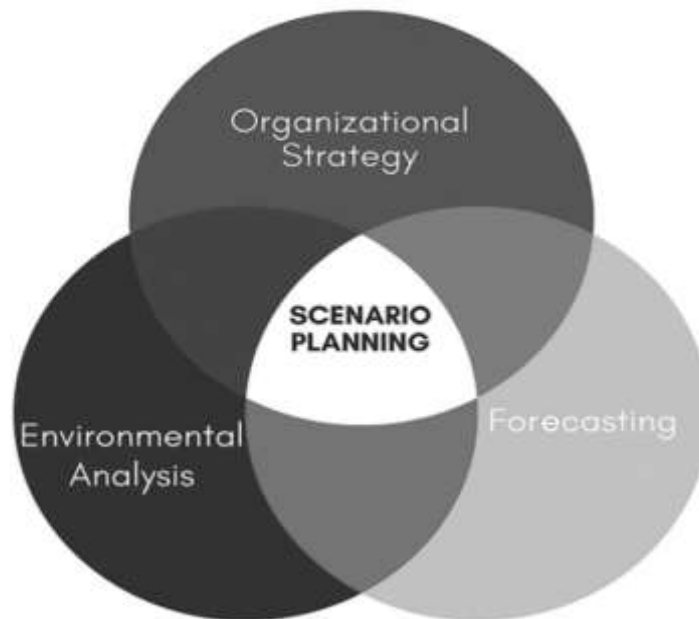
¹⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/covid-19-framework-decision-making-scotlands-route-map-through-out-crisis/>

¹⁹ <https://cpag.org.uk/official-stats-show-nearly-one-four-scotlands>

²⁰ www.gov.scot/strategy-plan/2018/03/child-chance-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2018-22 PDF

OPFS Planning Ahead: Our Approach

OPFS as an organisation must take the crisis as an opportunity to contribute single parents experiences and views to help transform Scotland in a radically positive direction. Scenario planning is a structured way for OPFS to think about the future. We look at how the future might unfold and how those future conditions could impact the organisation and the single parent families we work with. The diagram below shows how scenario planning is the central connection in our organisational strategy; forecasting, using data from the past to estimate future trends; and environmental analysis to look at factors external to OPFS that may impact on the effectiveness of our work.



Forecasting & Environmental Factors - Some Signals

The following are some of the key issues and trends which could have impacts on OPFS and single parent families in Scotland.

Scottish Government Framework for Decision Making

- Scottish Government published 'Coronavirus (COVID-19): Framework for Decision Making' on 21 May 2020.²¹ It indicated the order in which Scotland will gradually lift lockdown restrictions and sets out the criteria to be met for progressing through route map phases.
- An updated route map was published on 18th June to reflect the move to Phase 2.²² This includes new measures including 'Extended Households': Someone who lives alone - or a single parent who lives only with children under 18, can agree with another household to form an 'extended household' and be treated as being part of that household. This is the form of (social) meetings between households inside their homes that is now permitted as we move into Phase 2.

²¹ <https://www.gov.scot/covid-19-framework-decision-making-scotlands-route-map-through-out-crisis/>

²² <https://www.gov.scot/scotlands-route-map-through-out-crisis-phase-2-update/pdf>

- Further route map details were announced on the 24th Jun which gave indicative dates for Phase 2 and early Phase 3 measures announced.²³ Provisional dates for the relaxation of travel restrictions, restarting of the hospitality industry were among further route map measures announced. The changes remain contingent on scientific and public health advice. Physical distancing of 2 metres continues to be required in Scotland. Final decisions on moving into Phase 3 will be taken on 9 July. For example:
 - 10 July - People can meet in extended groups outdoors, with physical distancing. Households can meet indoors with up to a maximum of two households, with physical distancing.
 - 13 July - Non-essential shops inside shopping centres can reopen, subject to the Scientific Advisory Group review.
 - 15 July - All childcare providers can open subject to individual provider arrangements. Museums, galleries, cinemas, monuments, libraries will reopen with physical distancing and other measures.

Third Sector

- One in 10 UK charities are facing bankruptcy by the end of the year as they struggle to cope with a £10bn shortfall caused by soaring demand for their services and lost fundraising income due to the coronavirus pandemic. The analysis, based on Pro Bono's weekly tracker survey²⁴, found nine in 10 (88%) charities anticipated COVID-19 would reduce their income over the coming six months compared with pre-crisis plans, and over half (59%) would "significantly" reduce their activity. Two in five said the biggest issue was the impact of physical distancing on their ability to deliver services.

Education

- Schools will return full-time in August if Scotland continues to make progress on suppressing coronavirus (COVID-19).²⁵ However, this remains conditional and dependent upon ongoing scientific and health advice. If this is not the case, then almost all children and young people will experience a blend of in-school and in-home learning from the start of the school year in August 2020. While recognising that in-home learning takes many forms (including support from families) and is by no means all IT based, Scottish Government say an approach to digital learning will be implemented to mitigate negative impacts on equity. This will specifically focus on providing digital access for pupils who do not have this at present.²⁶

Early Years and Out of School Care Provision

- The Scottish Government have withdrawn the legislation that requires education authorities to secure 1140 hours of ELC provision for all eligible children from August 2020, rather than 600 hours. This means there will be no statutory duty to provide 1140 hours from August 2020.
- Scottish Government issued 'Coronavirus (COVID-19) Phase 3: guidance on reopening early learning and childcare services' on the 15 July 2020.²⁷ This guidance applies to all providers of registered day care of children's services, including

²³ [Scotland's route map: indicative dates for the remainder of Phase 2 and early Phase 3](#)

²⁴ www.probonoeconomics.com/news/

²⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/news/return-to-full-time-schooling/>

²⁶ www.gov.scot/covid-19-pandemic-strategic-framework-reopening-schools-early-learning-childcare

²⁷ www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-on-reopening-early-learning-and-childcare-services

nurseries, playgroups, family centres and crèches who provide care to children under school age.

- As part of the Phase 3 route map, out of school care services can also reopen from Wednesday 15 July 2020. Guidance to support reopening of these services, will be issued early July.²⁸

Poverty and Inequality

- The economic fallout of the pandemic could leave 1.1m more people below the pre-COVID-19 poverty line at year end, including a further 200,000 children, according to the IPPR. Without urgent action to protect families from the financial hardship caused by the pandemic, this would bring the total number of children living in poverty in the UK to 4.5m, an increase of almost 5 per cent.²⁹
- Women will also bear the brunt of the pandemic economically. A recent report by Close the Gap finds that Job disruption will disproportionately impact women because men and women tend to do different types of work.³⁰
- Single parents hit with a “triple penalty” as a result of the crisis. Many single parents have found themselves furloughed while experiencing increased costs because of their children not attending school or nursery or having their maintenance payments reduced or withdrawn.³¹
- Benefit sanctions have been reintroduced as jobcentres in England start to reopen after lockdown. Face-to-face meetings in jobcentres were suspended in March, and with them the system of “claimant conditionality” - a set of rules that require people to agree to carry out job search activities as a condition of claiming benefits.³²

Personal Debt

- Government has implemented a series of crucial public health measures to control the spread of coronavirus that have profound consequences for the economy and household finances. Government has also put in place a series of unprecedented measures to protect incomes and businesses during the outbreak period. However, these schemes have not protected all households against loss of income. But Struggling households now face a cliff edge when temporary protections against eviction and enforcement action expire.

Stepchange³³ estimate that 4.6m people negatively affected have accumulated £6.1bn of arrears and debt, averaging £1,076 in arrears and £997 in debt per adult affected.

Health and Wellbeing

- Children’s charities report increased financial stress and associated anxiety, loneliness, and more complex mental health problems amongst the families they work with.³⁴

²⁸ www.careinspectorate.com/coronavirus/Early_Learning_and_Childcare_-_Covid-19

²⁹ www.ippr.org/1-1-million-more-people-face-poverty-at-end-of-2020

³⁰ <https://www.closesthegap.org.uk/The-impact-of-COVID-19-on-womens-labour-market-equality.pdf>

³¹ https://opfs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Response_to_COVID-19_OPFS.pdf

³² <https://twitter.com/jreynoldsMP/status/1277616406553677826>

³³ <https://www.stepchange.org/policy-and-research/debt-research/post-covid>

³⁴ https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/gb/reports/evidence_of_families_needs.pdf

- To determine which demographics have been most affected by lockdown restrictions, 'Verve Search' invited 2,000 people to take the UCLA loneliness test, assessing their mindset before and during lockdown.³⁵ Key Findings:
 - Single parents and people living alone have recorded the highest level of loneliness during lockdown.
 - Single mothers with one child, however, saw the biggest increase in loneliness levels - more than any other demographic.

Single parents have been solely responsible for childcare after the lockdown. If they were able to rely on other family members, such as grandparents, for help with childcare, that has no longer been possible. No contact with family and friends has increased their feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Economy, Employment & Skills for Future

- Early analysis of 'shutdown' sectors and roles that cannot be continued through home working (or due to childcare responsibilities) shows that the sectors most affected are businesses like retail, hospitality (restaurants, pubs, cafes and hotels) and wholesale.³⁶ In some sectors that have not shut down, workers are nevertheless exposed to furloughing or an immediate loss of income or employment due to the effect of the shutdown on demand. Many working parents are affected because they must provide full time home care for children.³⁷ One third of single parents and one fifth of couple parents work in a shutdown sector.³⁸
- Most members of the UK parliament believe taxes will be increased to fund public services in the aftermath of the coronavirus crisis, according to a research. A survey of 75 MPs across all major parties showed 72 per cent agreed taxes would increase while 83 per cent thought the state would play a greater role in the economy post-COVID-19.³⁹
- Single parents and workers from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups have experienced the hardest economic shocks as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. The earnings of single parents fell by more than double the amount experienced by households with children and more than one adult. Their average weekly household earnings fell £36, from £511 in February to £475 in April. But single parent households saw their average weekly earnings fall by £73, from £326 to £253 over the same period.⁴⁰
- The pandemic has highlighted that many key workers are overlooked and underpaid. Key workers are the individuals recognised by the government as being critical to the running of the country, ranging from NHS and care workers to childcare workers and shop workers. A sign of this recognition is that almost two-thirds of UK MPs believe pay for NHS and care workers should be higher, while 56% say the pay packets of key workers such as bus drivers should also increase.⁴¹

³⁵ <https://www.echo.co.uk/c/loneliness/#splash>

³⁶ www.resolutionfoundation.org/2019/10/Risky-business.pdf

³⁷ <https://www.ippr.org/research/publications/children-of-the-pandemic>

³⁸ www.resolutionfoundation.org/2019/10/Risky-business.pdf

³⁹ www.politicshome.com/thehouse/article/

⁴⁰ <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/single-mother-income-loss-covid-19/covid-briefing-paper.pdf>

⁴¹ www.politicshome.com/higher-taxes-more-pay-and-a-bigger-state-how-mps-see-the-postcovid-society

- Estimates produced by the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex suggest the lockdown can take more than 6.5m jobs out of the economy - around a quarter of the total.⁴²
- The pandemic has resulted in a huge experiment in homeworking for some organisations including public, private and third sector. The idea that working from home is not efficient or effective has been blown away. However, no face-to-face contact makes innovation and idea generation harder and can be a physical strain.⁴³

Brexit

- Brexit is set to impact all sectors in the UK, including the third sector. The Yellowhammer report on possibility of a no-deal Brexit says “low income groups will be disproportionately affected by any price rises in food and fuel.” The potential impact on already struggling single parent families is immense.⁴⁴

‘Building Back Better’

- The COVID-19 pandemic is having devastating effects on vulnerable communities around the world, but we are also seeing glimpses of hope, where societies are working to “build back better” by ensuring basic needs and protecting our natural environment. The Wellbeing Alliance⁴⁵ outline a set of ten principles for “building back better” toward a wellbeing economy. They showcase examples of inspiring actions around the world that are moving us towards a wellbeing economy, along with examples of actions that are moving us away from this vision.
- Many of third sector organisations now argue Scotland’s traditional ways of thinking about the economy won’t work and we need to adopt some new approaches. Engender and Close the Gap⁴⁶ advocate principles to develop Scotland’s existing commitment to inclusive growth. They are a set of ideas, challenges, and calls that are rooted in evidence. They describe features of an economy that works for women as well as men. They put care and solidarity at its heart. They will create better jobs, better decision-making, and a more adequate standard of living for us all.
- Scottish Government have said that in their next steps on COVID-19 they will “work hard to ensure that equality, human rights and social justice are at the heart” of their response and that it will also “support ...wider ambitions such as reducing child poverty. The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government has set up a Social Renewal Advisory Board which will drive the cross-portfolio working that is required. The board includes representatives from a broad range of backgrounds and sectors, including OPFS, who have experience and knowledge of areas such as poverty, equality, disability, homelessness and regeneration.⁴⁷
- ‘Towards a Robust, Resilient Wellbeing Economy for Scotland’ details the findings of the independent Advisory Group on Economic Recovery⁴⁸ which was established by the Scottish Government. Published on 22 June 2020 the report contains a series of recommendations directed at both the Scottish Government and other actors in Scotland’s economy identifying interventions to support Scotland’s economic

⁴² <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/2020/04/18/new-analysis-of-the-impact-of-lockdown-on-uk-jobs>

⁴³ www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/the-highs-and-lows-of-working-from-home

⁴⁴ https://opfs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/OPFS_Brexit_-_briefing.pdf

⁴⁵ www.wellbeingeconomy.org/wp-content

⁴⁶ www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Gender--Economic-Recovery

⁴⁷ <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/sp/?id=2020-06-09.7.0&s=Racism>

⁴⁸ www.gov.scot/scotland-report-advisory-group-economic-recovery/

recovery and facilitate the transition towards a greener, fairer and more inclusive economy with wellbeing at its heart. The Wellbeing Alliance says that there are parts to praise and parts that fall short in recognising the type of transformation that could truly transform Scotland into a wellbeing economy.⁴⁹ The Scottish Government will issue its response in July 2020.

Equality Framing

- Research shows BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) women are hardest hit by the financial impact of coronavirus. Nearly a quarter of BAME mothers reported that they were struggling to feed their children during the pandemic, compared to less than a fifth of white mothers.⁵⁰
- There is increasing recognition that without a full understanding of intersectionality such as race, class, and gender, and how different groups of people experience poverty and inequality differently, we might fail to recognise or to understand significant forms of disadvantage, or indeed to develop effective approaches to tackling them.⁵¹

All these trends and issues are the elements of our external environment and OPFS has no control over how most of these elements will shape up. However, we have to continuously read signals from the external environment to spot emerging opportunities and challenges. The next section looks ahead at some of the challenges and opportunities that the future may hold for OPFS and single parent families in Scotland.

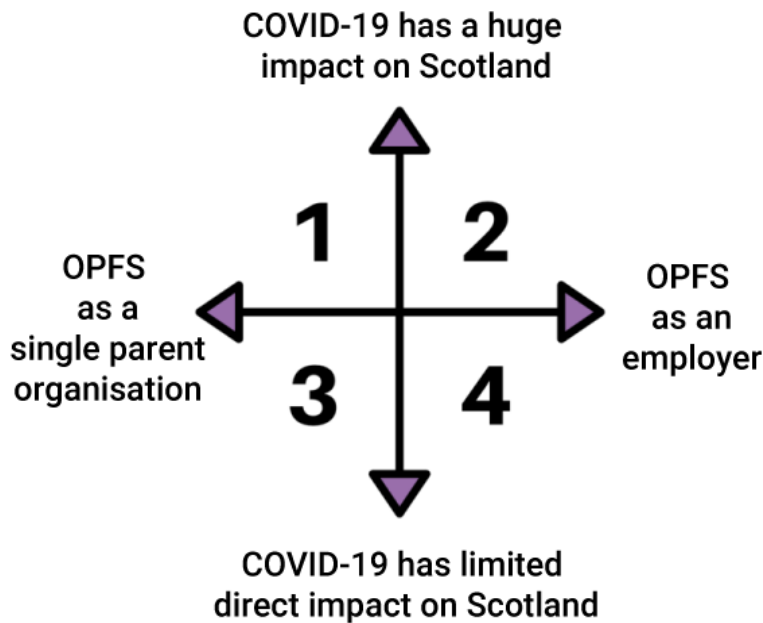
Coronavirus Impact - Scenario Planning

Below is a Coronavirus Scenario Planning Tool. OPFS is using this model to look at the way forward in a strategic way taking account of how coronavirus might impact OPFS itself and the single parent families we work with.

⁴⁹ <https://wellbeingeconomy.org/weall-scotlands-initial-response-to-economic-recovery-report>

⁵⁰ www.fawcettsociety.org.uk

⁵¹ http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advisory_group_on_economic_recovery_ehrc_submission.docx



The model has 4 quarters within which we are looking at opportunities and challenges. The analysis below is based on feedback from single parents, OPFS Managers and staff. This is a living document and will develop as the implications post lockdown become clearer.

OPFS as an Employer

COVID-19 has had a huge impact on all employers across Scotland, including the third sector.

Key Challenges over the next year include:

- It has been announced that early learning and childcare services' can reopen on the 15 June 2020.⁵² This guidance applies to all providers of registered day care of children's services, including nurseries, playgroups, family centres and crèches who provide care to children under school age. However, concerns have been expressed by childcare staff about nursery sessions being able to be given safely for all children and families involved.
- Some staff will need to remote work as social distancing is encouraged and some have underlying health issues.
- Demonstrate how our organisation can work together on a unified mission and vision during the ongoing economic & social crisis.
- OPFS is on a steep learning curve with digital and has had to make decisions rapidly. We should expect this to continue at every level of the organisation. This could change the culture of OPFS as we know it.

Opportunities - some examples for this quadrant might be:

- Remote working is here to stay. The organisation will develop universal rules about remote work that could strengthen colleagues work satisfaction in the future.
- Organisation will develop emergency response protocols that are useful for a variety of emergencies.

⁵² www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-on-reopening-early-learning-and-childcare-services

- Funders un-restricting previous grants so grantees can be agile and address community needs.
- Digital service delivery will expand. For example, developing virtual events on Facebook with the potential to increase numbers using face to face group sessions with 12 parents to reaching hundreds on Facebook live broadcasts and increasing followers on the platform. However, when it becomes safe, face to face services will still be a central and crucial part of the 'new normal'. We will not innovate for its own sake but will build on what we know works with single parents because they tell us.
- There is a strong possibility of large-scale unemployment. Family support can, and does, keep families from falling into mental health issues. This is key area where OPFS has skilled staff with the required expertise.

OPFS as a single parent organisation

Many single parents find themselves in debt to pay for necessities like food, clothing and housing because their income, often from low wages, doesn't meet their basic living costs. COVID-19 and lock-down has intensified this situation, as single parents face increased living costs and further cuts to their income.

Single parents in paid work, are often in the low paid jobs which are furloughed and so they have lost 20% of their income. At the same time, they have had to cover the costs of having children at home who are not attending school (food, energy costs, home-schooling resources). As well as this, some single parents are receiving reduced or no child maintenance payments from the non-resident parent because they have lost their job, or they are on a reduced 80% wage. Moreover, the Child Maintenance Service is running a reduced service which means it won't be chasing non-payment or taking enforcement action. Taking this context into account, what are the **challenges** facing single parents as we emerge from lockdown?

Key Challenges for Single Parents

Short to Medium-Term

- Higher unemployment when employers are asked to contribute to furlough pay in August.
- Conditionality reintroduced so pressure on some single parents to return to work while childcare not available and worries about children's health and safety.
- The ending of measures put in place to alleviate lock-down i.e. court action for housing arrears suspended - no indication that these measures will be extended.
- Quarterly fuel bills coming in much higher due to lock-down and existing grant opportunities drying up.
- Children with learning difficulties and disabilities being affected by the move from nursery/ primary school to primary/ secondary school as children with conditions like autism often can't cope with change.
- Ensuring parents whose child starts school are able to apply for best start grant/ free school meals / school uniform and supported to move onto U.C.
- Many single parents have been unable to do home schooling at all and the children are not in any form of routine. Some parents (Falkirk) struggled to get their children to school before this so there is likely to be difficulties when schools do start to open again. As this is a known issue, preparatory work will be needed with families.
- Parents worried about what the future will hold for them as they feel they are living on the edge anyway and are aware of the state of the economy. Those single parents who were planning to get back to work when the 1140hrs came in are unsure now because the government have advised that this can be put on hold with individual councils deciding whether they can fulfil any of it or not.

Medium to Long-Term

- Effect of recession on employment, income and increased costs.
- Worries about potentially reduced day care and out of school care caused by pandemic.
- Digital exclusion faced by so many single parent families will impact on children's education and closing the opportunity gap.
- The impact on the mental health and wellbeing of parents and children caused by lock down coming to the fore. Without support /interventions some single parents mental health will have deteriorated to a concerning level.
- Real concerns that many single parents we support will have taken backward steps in areas they were progressing in. They will continue to need quite intense support to help them regain what has been lost during this very difficult time.
- Aside from the structural/benefit/policy barriers that single parents face (benefit cap/ 2 child policy / universal credit (UC) conditionality) concerns about what the job market is going to look like and what kind of support there will be for single parents to enter it. Across Scotland there was minimal dedicated support for single parents seeking employment before this, so it is a worry what will exist after. Single parents are mentioned in policy documents, but we have not seen much proof on the ground (at Job Centres or from Fair Start).
- The delay in the introduction of Disability Assistance for children and other devolved benefits which were also pushed back.
- Delay in the introduction of Scottish Child Payment.
- Temp £500 free overdraft being ended at a time when in-work poverty will be on the rise and other support measures being paired back or stopped.

Long-Term

- Many single parents will be exposed to housing insecurity, depressed living standards and hardship, an increase in health problems, and higher levels of unemployment. In addition to the cost to individuals and families, prolonged financial difficulty will have public costs and slow economic recovery.
- 52 week increase to UC and Working Tax Credits stop and UC and Working Tax Credit returns to basic level will cause parents to struggle with budgeting and will lead to increased level of debt.
- Scottish Child Payment (SCP) reduction: The SCP will be phased in firstly for children under 6yrs by Dec 2020, then for children 6yrs and over at the end of 2022. For parents whose child turns 6yrs before the end of 2022 there will be a gap in payments, and they will find themselves with reduced income after getting used to an extra £10 per week.
- Single Parents who were already isolated and suffering from mental health and wellbeing issues will be more vulnerable in 9/12 months' time. Our OPFS frontline workers are anticipating a 'mental health storm' as a result of the COVID-19 crisis and lockdown.
As well as families who are currently engaging with our services, practitioners are concerned about families who in the past were just about coping but are now struggling to access food and are suffering financial hardship as a result of the current crisis. With the lockdown they may have lost family support with childcare. Continued support in this area will be a high priority. Access to more mental health services - many of which were being cut before this pandemic took place - will be needed for both adults and children.
- If our future is economic uncertainty and rolling lockdowns employers may rely even more heavily on short-term contracts to manage risk. Single parents could move in and out of employment more frequently or find their hours cut.

- Women, including single mothers, shouldering disproportionately unpaid work as a result of COVID-19 is acknowledged but potentially then then ignored in policy options pursued.
- Single parents will be at higher risk of isolation, experience greater financial stress and find it harder to access overstretched mental health services. The need for a high-quality employment service which includes single parent tailored provision will be massive.

In the longer term if government continues with an approach building on neoliberal economic systems and ideologies and prioritises economic growth, reduces market regulations and imposes strict austerity measures to curtail public debt, single parents will be one group facing increased poverty and inequality, declining family wellbeing and decreased life expectancy.⁵³

Opportunities for Single Parents over next 12 months

It is very challenging to see positive opportunities over the coming period.

- Single parent families would benefit from the policy agenda proposed by the Wellbeing Economy Alliance.⁵⁴ They offer 10 principles for responding to COVID-19 of which the following would specifically offer hope for single parents:
 - Policies to ‘build back better’ in response to COVID-19 by prioritising human health, wellbeing, and ecological stability in the long term.
 - Universal basic services which ‘guarantee needs satisfaction for everyone, including through health care coverage for the whole population free of charge at point of access; universal free provision or vouchers for basic levels of water, electricity, gas, housing, food, mobility, education.’
 - Guaranteed livelihoods which ‘ensures everyone has the means for decent living, for instance through income and/or job guarantees, redistribution of employment through working-time reduction’
 - Fair distribution which ‘creates more equal societies nationally and globally through a fair distribution of resources and opportunities. For example, more progressive and environmentally orientated income and wealth taxation; public/common ownership of key resources and infrastructure.’
- If government interventions to create new jobs over the short term are inclusive, gender-balanced, and contribute to labour participation of women, people with disability, and excluded groups, then single parents would benefit.
- If care work, whether paid or unpaid, is central to any recovery plan and women’s economic justice is a key objective, then single parents would gain.
- Single parents would benefit if more flexible modes of working are pursued for example through a “Centre for Workplace Transformation” and gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data being used in (future) economic policymaking as recommended by the independent Advisory Group on Economic Recovery⁵⁵
- An Equalities Impact Assessment of government recovery plans would add, among other things, a more precise accounting for the multiple disadvantages, and risks, faced by women, single parents, people with health conditions or disabilities and from BAME Communities. As the government relaxes the lockdown, a consideration of the impacts on different ethnic groups and a gendered approach would shine a light on the unequal

⁵³ <https://wellbeingeconomy.org/wp>

⁵⁴ https://wellbeingeconomy.org/Wellbeing_Economics_for_the_COVID-19_recovery_10Principles.pdf

⁵⁵ www.gov.scot/scotland-report-advisory-group-economic-recovery/

impact of this crisis driven by existing structural inequalities and discrimination in our society.

- An investment in human capital programmes that support single parents to access training and further education and to find and retain fulfilling work. Newly unemployed people should get the quickest and best support available. However, we cannot forget single parents already facing disadvantages that are multiplying all the time. A 'Fair Start for Single Parents' employability programme tailored to meet the unique needs of single parents would be evidence of Scottish Government taking a crosscutting policy approach to child poverty.

OPFS - Planning Ahead

Single parent family poverty and the impact of isolation and loneliness has been heightened by the pandemic and lockdown. As we move to easing of the COVID-19 restrictions, transitioning out of the current lockdown arrangements, this will also mean for some single parents a transition into a deeper crisis. The key emerging issues for single parents and children include poverty and low income; digital exclusion; early years and school age education and childcare; stress, isolation and the impact on family wellbeing including mental health. We must continue to listen and understand the key inequalities and human rights issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and responses to it. This will then inform decision making and action plans.

Children and young people are not the face of this pandemic. But what is becoming clear is that they risk being among its biggest victims. While they have fortunately been largely spared from the direct health effects of COVID-19 - at least to date - the crisis is having an acute effect on their wellbeing. All children, of all ages, are being affected, in particular by the socio-economic impacts and, in some cases, by mitigation measures that inadvertently are doing grave harm. Moreover, the harmful effects of this pandemic will not be distributed equally. They are expected to be most damaging for children in the poorest neighbourhoods, and for those in already disadvantaged or vulnerable situations. This is a universal crisis, and, for some children, the impact will be lifelong. The Scottish Government's child poverty targets, delivery plan and new Scottish social security system must inform every aspect of Scotland's approach to renewal.

The majority of single parents are women - the COVID-19 pandemic is threatening fragile gains on gender equality and women's rights. As Scotland responds to the crisis, disaggregated data is critical to examine the differential impact on women and men towards evidence-based decision-making. We need gender sensitive macroeconomic policies, for inclusive and socially sustainable development and for alternative scenarios to demonstrate the effectiveness of investment in social infrastructure, such as child and elder care, as well as physical infrastructure.

Our future cannot just be a return to the "normal" we were in before the virus. The approach then was of government finance-led and debt-led growth; the undervaluing of the contribution of "key" workers and unpaid carers such as single parents; the dramatic and growing inequality between those in poverty and the wealthy and austerity with damaging cuts to the social security system and local authority funding and increasing child poverty. We now know that austerity does not work and, at the same time as a society we realise that we are all now heavily dependent upon the services that the government supplies.

We will focus on the key impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on single parents and OPFS as an organisation and amend our strategic and operational plans accordingly. We need to know more about parents' experiences of accessing services (be that childcare, employment support, housing, social security) and how those services might not recognise the reality of their lives or particular barriers they are dealing with. We want to find out how to support

single parents in communities to move towards recovery and renewal after the impact of COVID-19 and draw on all the creativity we've seen from single parents and their families. The pandemic has caused a great deal of hardship and presented new challenges to single parent families across Scotland. It has also created space for changes and new ways of doing things that we might not have thought of before.

At OPFS we will aim to amplify the voices of families through their stories and narratives which can lead to new ideas, questions and visions of the future as well as practical ways that can help us move toward recovery and renewal. This work will draw explicitly on the feedback from single parents themselves, their experiences during the crisis as well their views on how OPFS can improve the design and delivery of support and our policy priorities.

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