



**One Parent  
Families Scotland**

*changing lives, challenging poverty*

**COVID-19**

# Single Parent Family Impact Monitoring Report



**Issue 5 July 2020**



## Parents Experiences



### Parents Experiences - Single Parent Proofing

In this new situation we are gathering information about the experiences single parents are facing through our local and national channels. We are also taking information coming from the single parents' experience to feedback into OPFS response to the needs of parents, to policy makers and those in charge of service delivery to encourage responses that are 'single parent proofed'.

To ensure we understand the impact of the crisis we have implemented a new '**COVID-19 Single Parent Family Impact Monitoring System**'. This enables us to gather in all we can from parents through our five local teams, our national advice and information service channels and website. We are now tracking and communicating key service responses and policy relevant issues arising from direct work with single parents.



## Parents Experiences



### There are five elements:



**Impact knowledge:** Data from parents is systematically collected and analysed.



**Monitoring Emerging Issues:** Arrangements are in place to monitor policy impacts and highlighting emerging issues.



**OPFS Response:** Our services respond by working to meet the needs identified.



**Dissemination and Communication:** Impact information and emerging issues communicated to key influencers.



**Policy Response:** OPFS policy response to parents experience which informs our campaign priorities.



## Parents Experiences

We have gathered feedback on some of the key issues single parents are experiencing through our local and national channels.

This report is based on feedback gathered across OPFS channels on single parent enquiries including:

- **OPFS Advice and Information services advisor daily highlights**
- **Ask an advisor a question on the website**
- **OPFS local community based services**

The report content is organised by topic headings which mirror the OPFS website topic headings [www.opfs.org.uk](http://www.opfs.org.uk). Within these headings we report back on **key themes** arising from our contact with single parents across OPFS.





## 1. Coronavirus Impact

### Lack of access to food & shops

- Overall, in July 2020, there have been fewer requests for families seeking direct help with food due to easing of restrictions, compared with the period March to June 2020. Parents now feel more comfortable going outside to shops than they did at the beginning of the pandemic.
- Nonetheless, food and fuel poverty remain a concern for many families.

### Access to healthcare and essential items (prescriptions, medication, top-ups)

- The impact of the pandemic emergency on mental health is significant. One indicator of this is that some parents have had their anti-depressant medication increased to help them cope with the current health crisis.





## 2. Health and Wellbeing

### Stress, anxiety and mental health

- Parents are not only struggling with their own mental health problems. They are also finding it challenging to care for the mental health of their children.
- Stress levels are compounded by limited family support.
- Parents coming out of shielding are fearful about going out more and catching the virus.
- For some parents, the easing of restrictions has done nothing to assuage their anxieties and depression.



Will my children be safe at school?





## 3. Your Benefits

Recurring questions include,

### Universal Credit

- How will my childcare costs affect my UC payments?
- I have had my hours reduced. Am I still eligible for UC?

### Other Benefits

- What do I do if my benefits are stopped?
- I have lost my job. What benefits can I claim?
- Can I claim any benefits for my children if my partner already claims too?
- What benefits can I claim after separating from my partner?
- How do I appeal a benefit decision?

## 4. Your Money

### Financial concerns and poverty

- Parents are looking for help with paying their energy bills.
- Parents are looking for grants for household items.
- Rising fuel poverty, parents are worried about how their fuel costs will be paid.
- Some parents are continually looking for debt advice.

Recurring questions include,

- How can I manage my money effectively?
- Can I get any financial help towards my childcare costs?
- How do I find the means to purchase a house?



- Is there money to pay for my PVG for work purposes?
- Is there any help to buy clothes for starting work?
- How do I apply for the School Clothing Grant and where can I get it?
- How will my Education Maintenance Allowance be paid?
- How do I apply for a Best Start Grant - Early Learning Payment?
- Can I get money towards my University fees?
- Can I get help in buying a laptop for starting University?

## Digital Exclusion

- Digital connectivity is still an issue for many parents. Some have Wi-Fi but no devices such as a laptop or tablet. Alternatively, some have the device, but no Wi-Fi.

## Digital Support

In Edinburgh, OPFS has been attempting to mitigate some of the more difficult aspects of being digitally excluded. As we have seen since the beginning of this pandemic this issue has significantly impacted on family life, for example, from getting essential health information, to avoiding isolation through video calls, to supporting children's learning as well as helping parents find employment. Having access to a computer at home is essential to family life.

So OPFS reacted to this increased need by adapting our work and gifting laptops to families who needed them. This comes with ongoing support in gaining basic digital skills through phone calls and opportunities to take part in 12 webinar sessions. These are themed around the things that are going to be most useful to those single parents. One mum dependent on her phone commented;

*"I have applied for college but then they sent me an email with forms to fill in and I have no way of doing it. This is brilliant, not only can I fill in my forms for childcare and a bursary, but I know I will be able to type up my college work and email it to my lecturers."*

IT support for single parent families during lockdown has been a lifeline. It has enabled parents to feel more connected with each other and the wider world. However, the findings across services indicates that inconsistencies of access remain a real issue.



## 5. Support For You

### **Loneliness, social isolation and access to essential services**

- Families have no guarantees that things will be the same. We all must now adapt to the 'new normal' as we take additional infection control precautions and try to avoid a spike in COVID-19 cases. Consequently, the feelings of isolation and anxiety which families have experienced during the last four months will not simply disappear as we move through the phases out of lockdown.

### **Increased stresses on family relationships**

- Parents report not coping with their children during lockdown i.e. discipline issues.
- Parents looking for advice on separation and legal.
- Domestic or verbal abuse / coercive control and controlling behaviours from a previous partner.



## 6. Separating/Being a Single Parent

### Children - sole care responsibilities

- The lockdown has impacted on children's opportunities for meeting up with friends and getting out and about. In response, parents have been engaging with services for support and help with activities during the summer period. Local services have offered financial and material provisions to help families. For instance,

**“ We have shared over £2000 worth of activities from swing ball, paddling pools, outdoor resources, picnic blankets and cool bags with families. This was to encourage families to get outside with their children. (Falkirk manager) ”**

**“ The school holidays have been difficult for children and parents and we have tried to help families by giving activity grants... it is very difficult for families just now. (Edinburgh manager) ”**

## 7. Work, Education and Training

### Employment rights

- Concerns over furloughing schemes ending and parents fear losing their jobs in August.

Recurring questions,

- How does student funding affect postgraduate and undergraduate studying while receiving Tax Credits and UC?
- I will be studying my course part-time at University. Can I get a lone parent Grant as I am getting no money from SAAS?





## 8. Your Children

### Child contact and child maintenance

Key concerns,

- Child maintenance
- Contact arrangements and court orders
- Problems with child contact arrangements.
- Legal aid
- Divorce and legal issues

A recurring question is,

- How much are the legal costs for a divorce?





## Spotlight Issue: The Return to School

OPFS Services have continued to support parents throughout this pandemic and although advice and information is evolving and restrictions are easing, the advice is continually adapting. When schoolwork finished for the summer, families could take a break from the stress of home schooling. The focus now is on the imminent return to schools on the 11 August.



As the summer holidays come to an end, parents' concerns include,

- Schools returning in August and getting children back into a normal routine. There are real concerns over what the school day will look like given the risk from the coronavirus.
- Worries about 'blended' learning as many parents have struggled to home school children during lockdown.
- It is too soon to send their children back. They are anxious about the lack of clear information available and too many mixed messages.
- Some parents of nursery age children are worried if their child will be given a place in a nursery and if so, when will the nursery term commence and what hours will be offered.
- Finding the right childcare provision and how they will pay for it.
- What will happen if schools need to close again?
- What precautions will be put in place to limit the spread of the virus?





Our services have been working with parents to help allay any worries concerning their children starting back to school. For example, our Falkirk service has provided families with school uniforms and resources for schoolwork.

Many parents report that the advice and information from the Scottish Government and Local Authorities has been unclear. Consequently, this lack of clarity has meant that some families are confused and worried on how best to prepare for the re-opening of schools.

*"I have parents who have real concerns about sending their children back to school, worried it is too soon because there are so many mixed messages especially with the possibility of children going back to school full time in full classes as opposed to the part time timetable in smaller classes. And at the opposite end, I have parents who want them back as they feel that they need the structure and routine."*

*(Family support worker, Falkirk)*

*"Parents are dealing with a high level of stress and anxiety in virtually all the families that we are in contact with the uncertainty over what the new school term will look like, this has been challenging".*

*(Manager, Edinburgh)*

*"Childcare has been an issue as many of the private nurseries have not re opened yet, and parents are having to rely on family members which is causing a strain on relationships. Although, this is changing as nurseries are about to re-open and are starting to talk to parents about setting up trial days. However, there is also a lot of concern that the situation can change at any time and that there is a high risk that schools/nurseries will close again."*

*(Family support worker, Dundee)*





## Observations

After four months in lockdown the return to school is a significant milestone. It will require careful consideration to ensure the safety of children and teachers is prioritised so that, children can get back to where they are best placed to learn and develop. Returning to full time education will also provide vulnerable and deprived children access to free school meals. All children will benefit from being back at school and socially interacting with their peers, accessing IT equipment and other vital support. If the re-opening of schools is to be successful, it is important that all interested parties work together. OPFS will continue to play its part in facilitating the transition back to school routines through its commitment to families through socially distanced meetings, online hubs and groups and providing access to essential resources whether they be emotional, physical or financial.



# One Parent Families Scotland

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**If you have any questions about anything in this report, please contact us at:**

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