



**One Parent  
Families Scotland**

*changing lives, challenging poverty*

**COVID-19**

# Single Parent Family Impact Monitoring Report



**Issue 8 October 2020**



## Parents Experiences



### Parents Experiences - Single Parent Proofing

COVID-19 is a global public health crisis which has also resulted in 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.

The majority of single parents are women in their mid-30's, so gender inequality is a key issue. Single parent families face twice the risk of poverty as couples - 48% compared to 26%<sup>1</sup>. A third (36%) of all children in poverty in Scotland live in a single parent family<sup>2</sup>.

We are extremely troubled about the impact of this crisis on every child affected by poverty. As a society, we should all be 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.

<sup>1</sup> <https://socialmetricscommission.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Measuring-Poverty-2020-1.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://povertyinequality.scot/Poverty-Delivery-Plan-advice p41 table 2>



## Parents Experiences

OPFS has developed a model of gathering the experiences of single parents through our local and national channels to capture key areas of concern. We use parents' experiences 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 that we understand the impact of the crisis we have implemented a '**COVID-19 Single Parent Family Impact Monitoring System**'. OPFS gathers parents' experiences through our 5 local teams, our national advice and information service channels and website. We track and communicate key service responses and policy relevant issues arising from direct work with single parents.

### There are five elements:



**Impact knowledge:** Parents experience is systematically collected and analysed



**Monitoring Emerging Issues:** Emerging issues are drawn out and highlighted



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



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



**Single Parent Proofing:** Using single parent feedback to inform the development, implementation and evaluation of policy and practice so that they respond effectively to the needs of single parents.





## Parents Experiences

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 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. Health and Wellbeing

### Stress, Anxiety and Mental Health

- Some parents feel increased levels of stress and anxiety due to the persistence of COVID-19 and the introduction of the tier system to tackle the pandemic.
- Parents are reporting fatigue and confusion.
- Parents fear becoming sick and concerns about care arrangements for their children if that happened.
- Frustration as services such as OPFS Glasgow are having to limit their support when it is most needed due, to lack of funding from the Local Authority.
- Ongoing housing issues which COVID-19 has exacerbated. Councils are slower now than pre-COVID-19 with regards to moving families out of temporary accommodation and attending to necessary repairs.
- Parents are continuing to feel isolated and depressed.

#### A recurring question:

- How can I access counselling services in my local area?





## 2. Your Benefits

### Universal Credit (UC)

- Contacting the DWP remains an issue for parents. Working out Capital Limits and applying for UC is still a challenge.
- Parents continue to have concerns over UC calculations.

“ I am furloughed just now and going to be made redundant soon but will have a small redundancy payment. What can I do and how much might I get on UC? ”

“ I’ve lost my job due to COVID-19 and on UC but have spent it and the next payment is awhile away. Where can I get help? ”

### A recurring question:

- How much UC can I claim?

### Other Benefits

- Parents continue to require help with benefit calculations.

### Recurring questions include:

- How do I claim for benefits?
- Will I lose my benefits if my son does not stay in college?
- I am self-isolating due to COVID-19. What can I apply for to live on?
- I have just lost my job – what benefits can I claim?



### 3. Your Money



#### Financial Concerns & Poverty

- Food and fuel poverty are a huge issue.
- Parents continue to experience rising debt levels.
- Parents are requesting help with Christmas presents.
- Families basic needs: for example, needing help to buy furniture and clothing for their children.
- Parents' dependency on foodbanks prevails.
- Parents continue to request financial assistance towards their energy costs such as through the Warm Home Discount Scheme and other available grants.
- Some parents are self-isolating due to coronavirus and need financial assistance with buying food.
- Some parents are requesting help to pay for taxis to take their children to school, for instance, due to a child's disability.

**“I’m very stressed out about everything and it just seems one thing after another just now. Christmas is around the corner and I won’t be able to give my daughter what she needs.”**

**“I’m going to be studying a Postgraduate Degree, where will I get financial help with that?”**

**“I cannot afford a landline and struggling to pay day to day living expenses.”**



“ I have to self-isolate, is there now a grant that I can apply for? ”

“ I am a single parent with a son under the age of one and have heard of cold weather payments – can I get one? I don't get any child maintenance either I am struggling financially, can I get help with this? ”

### Recurring questions include:

- Can I get financial support towards Higher Education, SAAS and student loans?
- Can I get financial support towards my childcare costs?
- Can I get help with my legal costs?
- Where can I get financial grants?
- How much does a divorce cost?





## 4. Support For You

### Increased stresses on family relationships

- Domestic abuse and coercive control from ex-partners have been and continues to be a significant concern. Those affected are left feeling very anxious and struggling to cope.

“ I had to flee from domestic violence from my ex-partner. I am short of clothes for the children and worried about Christmas. ”

“ I am still living with my partner, but I feel I need to leave soon because of all the mental abuse. I have a 3-year-old and not in work now. How can I get another place to live with no job? ”

“ My ex-partner has been stalking me and I feel really anxious and depressed. ”

“ My ex-partner is making false allegations against me. What can I do? ”

- Parents , primarily women, are turning to the courts for Interdicts and non- harassment orders.



## 5. Separating / Being a single parent

### Children - Sole Care responsibilities

- Childcare support throughout lockdown and thereafter has been greatly welcomed. For instance, families who received activity packs were very grateful. Additional parental support given by local services to help with creating routines, meal plans and helping parents cope with disciplining children and teenagers through this period were also noteworthy.
- Some parents are looking for maternity advice and information

### Recurring questions include

- Where can I find parenting classes?
- 30 hours of free childcare - does it stop your tax credits childcare element?
- Where can I find my local childcare centre?
- How can I change my child's name on her birth certificate?





## 6. Your Children

### Child contact & Child Maintenance

- Parents continue to report child maintenance concerns.

“ My ex-partner isn't paying what he should. He is earning more than he says to the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) and our child has stopped seeing him because of domestic abuse, so he shouldn't be getting a reduction for overnights. The CMS are not sorting this. What can I do? ”

“ My ex-partner was paying for our daughter but then stopped and said he was told he doesn't have to pay me at all now as he has been made redundant. What happens now and what can I do? ”

“ Do I need to pay child maintenance if I have my son 50% of the week? ”

### Recurring questions:

- Child Maintenance and shared care - how does this work?
- How can I get help with my Child Maintenance tribunal?
- How do I start child contact arrangements?
- What options are available to me after separating from my ex-partner so that I can receive Child Maintenance?
- How can my daughter get maintenance from her ex-partner for their child?
- Where do I get advice and help regarding getting child maintenance from my ex-partner?
- Where can I get advice on how to sort child maintenance given the history of domestic abuse?





## Spotlight: Child Poverty - Glasgow Services

Four in ten families in Glasgow are **single parent families**, the highest rate in Scotland. Children living in a lone parent family are twice as likely to be living in a household with an income well below children in a two-parent household. Single parents stand to lose nearly £1,800 a year on average as a result of welfare reform.<sup>3</sup>

Despite unprecedented financial support from Local and National Government such as through the furlough scheme, social deprivation has risen during this pandemic crisis. The levels of child poverty have increased in almost every local authority in Scotland according to the End Child Poverty Coalition: 30% of children in the UK are currently living in high levels of deprivation<sup>4</sup>. Recent UK research also concludes that the levels of child poverty in Scotland varies from one to seven children in the Shetland islands to nearly one in three in Glasgow, once housing costs are considered<sup>5</sup>.

In Glasgow child poverty is expected to rise further as a result of economic and welfare changes affecting families, with Glasgow's high proportion of single parent households disproportionately being affected by Welfare Reform and the pandemic. By 2021, without any additional intervention (locally or nationally) it is forecast that around 50,000 children in Glasgow (42%) will live in poverty<sup>6</sup>. Reducing child poverty in single parent families is essential to reducing child poverty in Glasgow.

The Scottish Government's tackling child poverty delivery plan, 'Every Child, Every Chance' identifies families most at risk of child poverty - specifically lone parents, families where a member of the household

3 <https://www.glasgowcpp.org.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=42691&p=0>

4 End Child Poverty, NK. Key Facts. Available online at: <https://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/key-facts/>

5 Hirsch, D., Stone, J. 2020. Local Indicators of Child Poverty after housing costs 2018/19: Summary of Estimates of Child Poverty after housing costs in local authorities and parliamentary constituencies, 2014/15 -2018/19. Available online at: <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/child-pov-erty-in-your-area-201415-201819/>

6 <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/councillorsandcommittees>



is disabled, larger families, minority ethnic families, families where the youngest child is under 1 years, and families where mothers are aged under 25 years<sup>7</sup>.

Glasgow has higher proportions of some of these groups than the rest of Scotland, for example, single parent households make up 40% of all households with dependent children in Glasgow - the highest local authority rate in Scotland, with the Scottish figure being nearly 25%. Glasgow neighbourhoods that experience high rates of child poverty have some of the highest numbers of single parent families. In Parkhead & Dalmarnock for example nearly 60% of children live in poverty, where 6 out of 10 households are single parent families.

Each of our area based services are embedded in the local community. Our Glasgow service team all live in Glasgow, our local single parent hubs involve and support local single parents. Through our work we serve single parents who together form an important 'community of interest.' Single parents are not a homogenous group, but most are mothers in their mid-30's and they share the unique challenge of being sole carers and breadwinners, many living in poverty. This is what binds them together in calling for recognition that they are an important part of Glasgow and need to be central to the city's plans to tackle child poverty. OPFS in Glasgow ensures that single parent families, with lived experience have a platform to share their voice and influence services.

OPFS Glasgow works tirelessly to prevent and alleviate the impact of poverty and inequalities on the wellbeing of single parent families living in the City of Glasgow. We achieve this through the provision of an integrated, package of holistic support. We believe that when services and policy priorities are genuinely co-produced, they work better and provide a greater impact, because they make the most of the shared expertise of single parents who are 'experts through experience' along with our staff, many of whom, are or have been single parents.

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7 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/child-chance-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2018-22/>



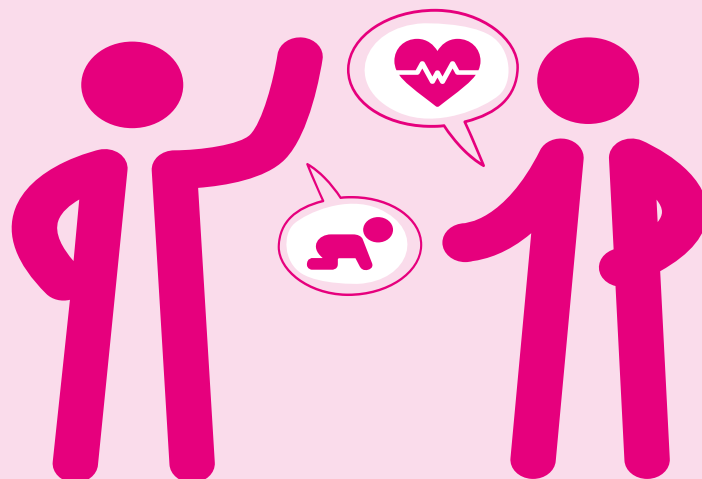
These specialist support services include:

- Crisis Support,
- Financial Inclusion,
- Young Single Parents Employability Programme,
- Family Health and Well-being Project,
- Family Support,
- On-line advice and wellbeing support tailored for single parents,
- Freephone Lone Parent Helpline.

OPFS Glasgow services will contribute to tackling poverty and inequality in Glasgow through building the skills, capacity and resilience of single parents and their children and to support and empower these families to become involved in the social, economic and cultural life of the city. Services will be targeted at Single Parents who are:

- Living in Poverty
- Living in areas of high deprivation
- Young parents under the age of 25
- From ethnic minority backgrounds
- With larger families affected by the benefit cap
- Living with disabilities / who have children who live with disabilities.

We work to release the power of parents to support each other as we know that parental involvement is the key to better services & policies. Our model of family support harnesses the skills, experiences, and knowledge of parents, carers, and partners to better support families and ultimately reduce family poverty and improve the life chances of children.





Children living in a single parent family are twice as likely to be living in poverty and the impact of the virus pandemic and lockdown has increased poverty, anxiety and distress. Over the last 6 months, OPFS Glasgow have extended a range of support to 1,423 single parent families single parent families and made financial gains for those families **in excess of £582K.**

OPFS Glasgow:

- Delivered 4,949 lunch packs and food parcels, food vouchers & essentials to 1,260 children and babies during lockdown crisis worth £40,000.
- Gave benefits & debt advice to 372 single parent families putting almost £500,000 into family's income.
- Assisted 837 families with energy costs amounting to £41,614 for families who couldn't afford the cost of heating their home or cooking.
- Provided crisis support to ensure the health and wellbeing of 833 parents and 1,333 children.
- Gave 590 single parents free helpline and on-line advice on issues such as child maintenance, separating from your partner and child contact & residence issues.

We are active partners in several Glasgow strategic groups which shows a huge commitment to contributing to the alignment of services with the aims of Glasgow City Council and Scottish Governments' Child Poverty Strategy.

You can [read here](#) about a series of stories from black single mothers with experience of the immigration and asylum system. Each of the women featured in these stories are supported through One Parent Families Scotland's Glasgow and Lanarkshire services.



## Observations

Single parents continue to worry about the future. Winter is upon us and Christmas is on the horizon. There are more demands on individual household's budgets and the effect of ongoing restrictions being introduced to reduce the spread of the virus. Hard choices will need to be made, for example, on how to manage money effectively to include Christmas presents and festive treats. Consequently, the cuts to core funding in Glasgow will affect how well OPFS can support family needs specific to this time of the year. Individuals and community groups as noted above are leading by example, in trying to mitigate against child poverty and the economic fallout from this health crisis. Now more than ever, OPFS needs to continue to do what we do best, along with our stakeholders, by supporting one parent families within our community.





# One Parent Families Scotland

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

One Parent Families Scotland,  
2 York Place, Edinburgh EH1 3EP

**Tel: 0131 556 3899**

**info@opfs.org.uk**

**www.opfs.org.uk**

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