



**One Parent  
Families Scotland**

*changing lives, challenging poverty*

**COVID-19**

# **Single Parent Family Impact Monitoring Report**



**Issue 10 December 2020 - January 2021**



## 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

- Poor mental health remains inextricably linked with the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting government measures.
- Isolation, anxiety, and loneliness are at the forefront of people's experiences.
- Parents continue to feel overwhelmed by the constant lockdown limitations impacting their daily lives. Every day is 'groundhog' day.

**I am feeling lonely and anxious with everything that is going on just now.**

**I feel anxious that I am not coping with the new restrictions.**





## 2. Your Benefits

### Universal Credit (UC)

While UC remains a key concern for many families, the issues emerging in December focussed on other matters such as, child maintenance, the cost of Christmas and domestic violence. However, in January UC returned to the fore. Recurring questions highlighted in the post festive period included the following familiar themes.

- How much help can I get through UC?
- How much help can I get with childcare costs and UC?
- How do I move from legacy benefits to UC?
- How do I apply, and can I get a calculation?

“ Will changing jobs mean I’ll now need to claim UC instead of Working Tax Credits. Which one am I better off on? ”

“ I am starting Higher Education and worried about how this will affect my Universal Credit and work-related activity? ”

### Other Benefits:

- Benefit entitlement in general and employment issues weigh heavily on single parents’ minds as we moved into this new new year.





## 3. Your Money

### Financial Concerns & Poverty

- No money to buy food, to pay for bills, to buy clothes, to pay rent and to buy digital devices
- Rising debt arrears
- Parents anxious and worried about the rising energy costs over the winter months.

### Recurring questions include:

- Is the Scottish Child Payment the same as the Best Start Grant?
- When does the Scottish Child payment start?
- Home schooling on a very low income. Can I still claim free school meals?
- Best Start Payments - how do I apply and how much is the payment?
- When will carers supplement be paid?
- How can I apply for the Self Isolation grant?
- Can I get help with school meal payments?
- How can I get help with buying household items?





## 4. Support For You

### Increased stresses on family relationships

- It is worrying that a growing number of parents are experiencing different forms of domestic abuse including, physical, mental, controlling behavior and coercive control from their ex-partners. The unintended consequences of lockdown are significant in terms of their safety, risk of harm and general wellbeing. The irony that lockdown is presented as a way of keeping us protected and safe is not lost on those single parents raising these concerns.

### A recurring question:

- How can I get court cases, interdicts, and non-harassment orders in place?

I did not realise my ex-partner was controlling me.

The coercive control is really having a negative impact on my mental health.

I have recently fled domestic abuse from my ex-partner, but I am now struggling with severe anxiety and problems with housing. I need help with this.

My ex-partner stalked and coercively controlled me, and this has left me with severe anxiety.





## 5. Separating / Being a single parent

### Children - Sole Care responsibilities

- Some parents are reporting problems accessing services, for example, challenges contacting the council or getting in touch with their solicitor.
- Lack of available childcare for essential or non-essential workers: inevitably placing strain on the whole family unit.
- Parents continue to face difficulties balancing work, childcare and home schooling.
- Parents are requiring more emotional and practical support to help deal with the impact of home schooling and the stress of living through another lockdown.

### Recurring questions include:

- How can I find childcare?
- Do you need childcare for a 13-year-old, or can they be left alone at home after school?
- How do I talk to the children if they are worried about the latest restrictions and anxious at not being able to attend school?

**I am very stressed my husband left suddenly.  
How do I start with everything?**

**I am finding home-schooling challenging especially with no access to laptops or tablets for my children. Where can I get help?**

**I am a key worker and there is no childcare available to me. I was told by my local council to arrange childcare with my ex-partner instead.**

**"I am pregnant, and my partner left suddenly. I am very scared and lonely. Is there any support I can access?"**



## 6. Your home

- The reality of homelessness is stark. Some parents worry they may lose their homes as a direct result of lack of employment and reduced income due to the pandemic.
- Parents continue to report problems with social housing.

### A recurring question:

- Can I get help with my housing?

“ I am moving out of parent’s house and need help to pay rent. ”

## 7. Work / Education and Training

### Employment Rights

- Parents with no childcare are prevented from home working.
- Many parents are not coping with working at home and home schooling their children. This is causing a lot of stress and anxiety.

### Recurring questions include:

- What can I claim from the Student Awards Agency (SAAS)?
- I am a single parent and a student. Can I get help to borrow a laptop for course work?
- What are my rights when it comes to furlough?



## 8. Your Children

### Child contact & Child Maintenance

- Child contact concerns, for example, mother concerned about the safety of her son when he spends time with his father.

“My ex-partner continues to deny me contact. I am worried about my child’s safety.”

- Parents continue to report child maintenance concerns.

“My ex-partner is self-employed, and he is not giving me the correct child maintenance payments. What can I do?”

“How can I appeal a decision and complain to the Child Maintenance Services?”

### Recurring questions include:

- Can you claim child maintenance if the father has no contact with your child?
- How do you complain to the Child Maintenance Service if you disagree with the case outcome?
- How can I get help with child maintenance if the paying parent dies?
- Child contact problems - How do you introduce a new partner to your children in a sensitive manner?



## Spotlight: Single parent hardship and OPFS response in the run up to Christmas

Christmas 2020 has been particularly challenging for single parents. Consequently, OPFS has had to adapt its support to families in response. The following is a summary of our collective achievements with case studies that show the difficulties faced and the positive outcomes resulting from our successful interventions. The latter include,

- The rolling out of Scottish Government Winter Protection Payments
- OPFS Scottish wide Christmas Appeal
- 'The Glasgow 12 Weans of Christmas'
- Christmas food, fuel, and voucher distribution

The following is an extract from our 2020 Winter Protection Payments report:

*OPFS have been able to set up and approve payments to over 400 families, supporting over 800 children and distributing almost £32,000 of funds through our Winter Protection Payments programme. These payments are made up of OPFS Christmas Appeal funds and the Scottish Government Winter Protection Payment.*





*The Winter Protection Payments has enabled us to provide support to single parent families across Scotland, as detailed below:*

- *Dundee - 72 payments supporting 150 children, 41 of whom are pre-school aged.*
- *Edinburgh - 44 payments supporting 74 children, 20 of whom are pre-school aged.*
- *Falkirk - 40 payments supporting 90 children, 38 of whom are pre-school aged.*
- *Glasgow - 157 payments supporting 295 children, 76 of whom are pre-school aged.*
- *North Lanarkshire - 100 payments supporting 202 children, 66 of whom are pre-school aged.*

These payments helped ease the financial burden for many single parent families in the run up to Christmas. OPFS worked well to allocate these payments to where the need was most acute.

### **Case Study 1 – The Family Support Worker perspective**

*L would struggle to make ends meet over the winter months as she lives in a council property that costs her a lot of money to heat. This is especially problematic as everyone needs to be indoors so much during the pandemic and as we come into the coldest months of the year. During conversations with OPFS family support staff it became apparent that there would be a choice to make at Christmas between being able to have a small Christmas celebration with her young daughter/keeping them appropriately fed and keeping them warm. The winter payment has been invaluable to them, L was extremely grateful and became quite emotional when she contacted her family support worker to say she had received the payment. She had already very sensibly portioned it out to ensure that they would be suitably covered for heating and food and thanked OPFS very much for the difference it would make to their festive season.*



## Case Study 2

*M has two children; an adult son and a six-year-old daughter who has gone through dozens of operations to treat ongoing health conditions. M works part time but has been receiving support from OPFS to either progress within her current employment or gain further qualifications to change careers. When sent a Winter Protection Payment before Christmas she feedbacks; 'you're like guardian angels at OPFS!'*

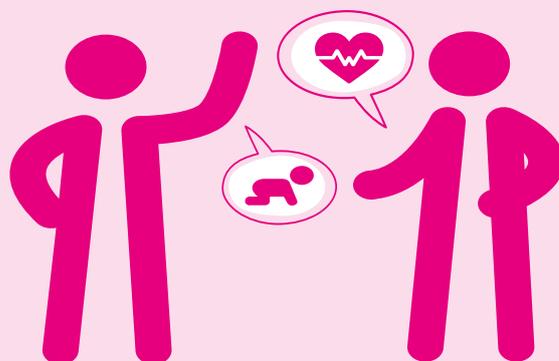
### Quotes:

The winter protection payment saved my Christmas along with the gifts, gift vouchers and the Wi-Fi box for the children to get online.

Thanks very much, really appreciate all OPFS do for me and my kids.

Speaking as someone who has felt deeply depressed as of late with COVID-19, the help I received has overwhelmed me with great joy, so thank you and your team for making Christmas for me and my little boy.

I received the Asda voucher, thank you so much for this I can't express how much I appreciate all of your help.





This extract from the winter protection payments report demonstrates the invaluable role that OPFS has in distributing funds to those who need it the most. Specific regions came up with local solutions over Christmas depending on the types of donations received and the specific requirement of individuals.

### **Glasgow and Lanarkshire:**

*OPFS Glasgow and Lanarkshire services delivered support through the 'Twelve Weans of Christmas Appeal 2020'.*

#### ***"Twelve Weans of Christmas Appeal 2020"***

- 1472 children provided with toys / Gifts / Baby essentials - (each parcel between £30-£50 per child)*
- 362 families provided with supermarket vouchers (£20 - £40 per family's dependant on size)*
- £4,600 high street vouchers provided to families for gifts / toys etc*
- 49 mobile phones delivered to families to reduce isolation*
- 20 food parcels and 50 Christmas day food hampers (being delivered on 23rd Dec)*
- 48 referrals made to external agencies for Christmas food hampers*

### **Edinburgh Services:**

OPFS Edinburgh distributed the following support:

#### ***Key supports included.***

- 45 Winter Protection Payment grants (for 74 children) totalling £1600*
- We provided gifts for 15 families worth approximately £50 (£750)*
- In December we provided 6 computers or tablets to families (including WI-FI when needed)*
- We made 6 referrals to food agencies for holiday meals*
- We facilitated a Christmas Magic show on Zoom for all OPFS families on 19/12*



## Falkirk Services:

OPFS Falkirk distributed the following support:

- *One parent was given a heater. A saving to the parent of £20.00.*
- *One child was given a hoodie gift at a cost of £24.99.*
- *Two families were helped with clothing from the clothing store saving them around £100.00.*
- *5 families were provided with food/toiletries from the Family Centre Food store, saving them £100.00.*
- *19 parents were given technology/mobile WIFI to assist with staying connected and children's education.*
- *20 referrals were made to the Salvation Army and Braes Storehouse Foodbank for a Christmas Day parcel which benefited 25 parents and 44 children.*
- *6 families were referred for 2 weeks support from Braes Storehouse Foodbank which benefitted 11 parents and 14 children.*
- *2 families were referred for 6 weeks support from Braes Storehouse Foodbank which benefited 2 parents and 4 children.*
- *1 family was helped with period poverty saving approx. £40.*





## Observations

This report covers the period, December 2020 - January 2021. At this time, the demands on people's finances are always substantial but more so on this occasion at the peak of the Coronavirus second wave. As a charity, OPFS has therefore had to adjust to managing the unprecedented demands placed on our client group.

Our organisation's guiding principles are equality, fairness, and inclusion. Now more than ever, we have endeavoured to put these principles into action. In so doing, OPFS has given families hope as well as material assistance. We have helped to mitigate against some of the more challenging aspects of being a single parent during a pandemic. By offering a helping hand, as demonstrated in the examples featured in this report's spotlight, OPFS has also enabled families to begin the new year with a greater sense of optimism for the future.

Perhaps we should consider the timely words of a new world leader expressed in his recent inaugural speech. His sentiments resonate with single parents' circumstances across Scotland and with other likeminded charities who are tirelessly working to tackle inequality, unfairness and the issues facing those marginalised in our society:

**“Because here's the thing about life. There's no accounting for what fate will deal you. Some days you need a hand. There are other days when we're called to lend a hand. That's how it has to be, that's what we do for one another. And if we are that way our country will be stronger, more prosperous, more ready for the future...”<sup>3</sup> (President Joseph Biden, 2021).**

<sup>3</sup> [President Biden 2021 Inauguration Speech. Available online at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-55656824](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-55656824)



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