



Single Parents, Employability & Employment

Key Issues

Briefing

October 2021

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Introduction & Context

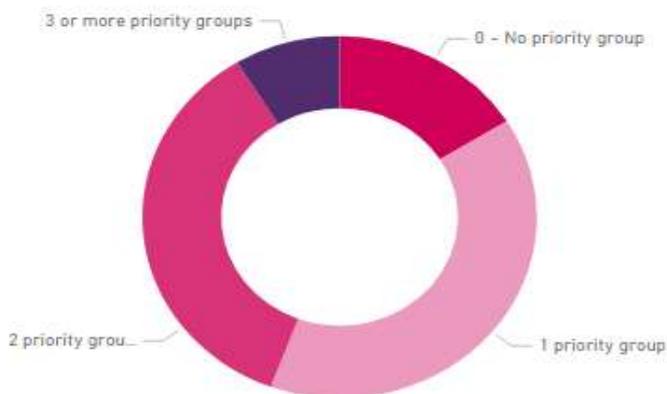
The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 sets statutory targets to reduce levels of child poverty that require the Scottish government to ensure fewer than 18% of children are living in poverty by 2023/24, with less than 10% in poverty by 2030. It also says that Scottish Ministers must, when preparing a “delivery plan”, set out what measures they propose to take in relation to children living in single-parent households.¹

The Scottish Government published a ‘Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan’ in 2018, setting out policies and programmes to support progress towards reaching the child poverty targets.² It is currently in the process of developing the next Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, which is due to be published in March 2022. The scale of the challenge is significant, and the 2022-2026 delivery plan will be vital to achieving the interim and final targets.

Single Parents are one of the six priority family types identified in the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan - where children are most likely to live in poverty: lone parents, families with a disabled adult or child, young mothers, minority ethnic families, families with a child under the age of one, and larger families (with three or more children).³ Two thirds of single parents are in more than one priority group.

4 in 5 children in Scotland are in at least 1 priority group ⁴

SCOTLAND - children in poverty by number of priority groups



66% of single parents are in more than one priority group

The Scottish Government’s ‘Programme for Government’ includes a promise to take forward work to explore the creation of both a bespoke Lone Parent offer, and a “guarantee approach” for parents to access employability services that provide holistic support.⁵

¹ [Microsoft Word - Queen's Print Cover.doc \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

² [Every child, every chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-2022 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/child-chance-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2018-22/> Pages 110/13

⁴ <https://www.irf.org.uk/report/poverty-scotland-2021>

⁵ [A Fairer, Greener Scotland: Programme for Government 2021-22 \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

This paper is a contribution to that commitment to create a single parent tailored offer which we very much applaud.

In 2021 we face a winter 'cost of living crisis', driven by rising fuel and food costs combined with the withdrawal of the £20 uplift to universal credit. To support single parents into employment we will first need to respond to this crisis and offer an integrated single parent tailored support package where family support, money & benefits advice are integrated into any single parent employability offer. The child poverty targets will not be met unless poverty in single parent families is tackled - employability and employment are key to doing this.

Key Messages

- Single Parents face the unique challenge of being both the sole carer and the main source of household income – a challenging balancing act.
- Most single parents are women, so gender inequality is a key issue.
- Four out of 10 (90,000) children in poverty in Scotland live in a single parent family
- Scottish Government child poverty targets will not be met unless poverty in single parent families is tackled. Employability and employment are key to doing this.
- Single Parents face a number of interacting issues which trap them in poverty:
 - Caring responsibilities, poor health, low level of qualifications and lack of access to private transport.
 - The gender pay gap is a key factor in single parent's higher levels of poverty.
 - A benefits system that traps families in poverty and creates barriers to single parents accessing further and higher education.
 - A lack of sufficient and effective employability support for single parents juggling childcare responsibilities with the need to secure paid work.
 - Limited availability of job opportunities that allow single parents to meet their caring responsibilities and exit poverty.
 - The lack of flexible, affordable, high-quality childcare which meets labour market demands.
- Single parents with low/no qualifications, poor health, without a current driving licence or a larger family are less likely to be in work.
- Single Parents are not a homogenous group. Some are young single parents, single dads, BME single parents, asylum seeker & refugee single parents and single parent families affected by disability.
- Elements of the current reserved social security system are more likely to move more disadvantaged lone parents further away from the labour market.⁶
- Employment should provide a decent standard of living, offer routes to progress and allow parents to balance work and home life.
- Scottish Government should introduce bespoke employment support for single parents – particularly improving access to higher level training courses, further education and adult apprenticeships / ILMs.
- 'No One Left Behind', the Scottish Governments' employability strategy aims to be person centred and responsive to individual needs⁷. However, we are concerned a very individualised model risks losing sight of the structural and systemic barriers particular groups, including single parents, encounter in the labour market.
- Ultimately, a universal concept of a **worker/carer model**, rather than a labour market based seeing people solely as 'workers', should inform current employment and child poverty strategies.

⁶ [lone-parent-obligations-impact-assessment.pdf \(policyexchange.org.uk\)](https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/lone-parent-obligations-impact-assessment.pdf).

⁷ [No One Left Behind: Delivery Plan \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/no-one-left-behind-delivery-plan/pages/100-to-150.aspx)

One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS)

One Parent Families Scotland⁸ is the leading organisation working with single parent families in Scotland. Building on seventy-five years of advocacy and service delivery expertise, OPFS provides single parent tailored information, advice, and family support, along with training activities, employability programmes and flexible childcare.

OPFS campaigns with parents to make their voices heard to change the systems, policies and attitudes that cause child poverty. Our vision is of a Scotland in which single parents and their children are valued and treated equally and fairly. Single parents are involved at various levels in OPFS. In this submission we have used the experiences and input of single parents, experts by experience, to inform our evidence.

Profile of Single Parent Families in Scotland

Single Parents face the unique challenge of being both the sole carer and the main source of household income - often a challenging balancing act. They must fulfil the responsibilities of both parents and do household chores, help children with assignments and spend quality time with them.

Children in single parent families in Scotland are more likely to live in poverty, and for longer, than couple families. Most children in poverty in single parent families live with a parent who is not in work, in a family where there are young children, or where adults are also disadvantaged by health problems, lack of private transport or low qualifications. Where children in poverty in single parent families also live in a household where someone is disabled, or where there are three or more children, they are likely to be even more disadvantaged: this is important as many do so.

A recent briefing from Public Health Scotland⁹ shows:

- Single Parent Families make up 25% of all families, and 92% are headed by women. Around 80% of single parents are aged between 25 and 50 years old and less than 1% are teenagers.¹⁰
- Most (65%) single parents with dependent children in Scotland are in paid employment
- Four in ten (90,000) children in poverty in Scotland live in a single parent family and 39% of children in single parent families live in poverty.
- Two thirds of children in poverty in single parent families (66%) live in families where no one was in paid employment. A quarter (23%) live in families where the parent works part-time.
- Families often belong to more than one priority group. For example, among children in poverty: 40% of children in single parent families also have a disabled person at home; over half (54%) of children in a family with a younger mother are also in a single parent household.
- Single parent families are more likely to live in 'deprived areas'. In the 'most deprived' decile, more than five in 10 (53%) of families are single parent families, while in the 'least deprived' decile, this is one in ten.
- Single parents not in paid work often face additional barriers to work, over and above their caring responsibilities. Compared to single parents in paid employment, single parents not in work were:

⁸ <https://opfs.org.uk/>

⁹ [Child Poverty in Scotland: priority groups - lone-parent families \(publichealthscotland.scot\)](https://publichealthscotland.scot.nhs.uk/child-poverty-in-scotland-priority-groups-lone-parent-families/)

¹⁰ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/what-we-do/media-centre/single-parents-facts-figures/>

- more likely to have low or no qualifications (65% vs 31%)
- less likely to hold a current driving licence (31% vs 68%)
- less likely to report their health as good or very good (58% vs 80%)
- more likely to live in a household with three or more children (14% vs 6%)

This is important because single parent families with these characteristics are less likely to have a parent in work than single parent families with better qualifications, good or very good health, a current driving licence or a smaller family.

- A survey of 1083 single parents across the UK found that 80% of single parents experienced discrimination and 96% wanted single parents added as a protected characteristic in the Equality Act.¹¹
- Many single parent families face the potential for financial problems stretching beyond the immediate pandemic period. The crisis in employment brought about by COVID-19 is experienced differently based on class, gender and ethnicity with these factors contributing to who performs 'key work' and who is able to work from home.¹² Research shows the COVID-19 pandemic will affect women adversely as they are 47% more likely to have lost their job.¹³ Analysis by IPPR shows that, coming into the COVID-19 crisis, single parent families in Scotland were more exposed to financial insecurity than other family types.¹⁴

Why single parent families are more likely to be in poverty

Single parent families are predominately single mothers with dependent children, which means there is just one potential earner in the family; their hourly earnings are likely to be lower because of the gender pay gap and the parent is limited in the hours they can work by caring responsibilities. Single parents face several, often interacting, issues which trap them in poverty:

- **Personal Circumstances:** including caring responsibilities linked to the age of their youngest child, poor health, low level of qualifications and lack of access to private transport.
- **Gender:** The majority of single parents are women, so gender inequality is a key issue. Women comprise the majority of low paid workers in Scotland and the gender pay gap is a key factor in women's higher levels of poverty. Women are more likely to be in poverty than men; are more likely to experience in-work poverty; find it harder to escape poverty and are more likely to experience persistent poverty than men. These trends have been intensified by the impact of COVID-19. Tackling women's inequality at work is therefore a critical aspect of tackling single parent poverty, and child poverty.¹⁵
- **UK Social Security System:** the design and delivery of a benefits system which creates barriers to single parents accessing further and higher education and boosting their earnings.
- **Employability:** Research funded Oxfam¹⁶ shows current 'support into employment' provision in Scotland is not fit for purpose. There is a lack of sufficient and effective employability support for single parents juggling childcare responsibilities with the need to secure paid work.

¹¹ [Single Parent Discrimination Research & Lobbying — Single Parent Rights](#)

¹² [Covid-19-and-inequalities-IFS.pdf](#)

¹³ [Coronavirus Crossroads: Equal Pay Day 2020 report | The Fawcett Society](#)

¹⁴ <https://www.ippr.org/files/2020-10/weathering-the-winter-storm-oct20.pdf>

¹⁵ [ctgmanifesto2020 \(closethegap.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁶ [One Parent Families Scotland \(opfs.org.uk\)](#)

- **Labour Market:** Scotland's labour market is not working for single parents according to research commissioned by JRF.¹⁷ We are missing out on single parents' economic contributions and skills, and single parents are missing out on opportunities they deserve to build a better life for their families. There is limited availability of job opportunities that would allow single parents to meet their caring responsibilities and exit poverty, especially in regions where single parents are more likely to live.
- **Childcare:** limited availability of flexible, affordable childcare, both early years & school age, that would allow single parents to manage caring responsibilities with earning and learning, again in those places where single parents are most likely to live.

It is worth noting that not all single parents in poverty face the same challenges. Policies must be responsive to the different needs of single parents, who are not a homogenous group. Single Parent Families include:

- Young Single Parents
- Single Dads
- BME Single Parents
- Asylum seeker & refugee single parents
- Single parent families affected by disability

Inequalities are also intersecting. Most single parents are women. However, viewing single parents through an intersectional lens highlights multiple factors of disadvantage facing women who are single parents. Not all single mothers share the same level of disadvantage purely because they are women: single mothers from the black, Asian, minority ethnic community for example experience the discriminations they face as women, but in addition they must deal with those that come with being women of colour. They are faced with two overlapping or intersecting areas of injustice and discrimination resulting in multiple disadvantages.

Additionally, single parents are more likely to have a disability - around one in four single parent households have a disabled adult, compared with around a fifth of couple parent households and 16% have at least one child with a disability.

We need to capture the diversity of single parents and ensure what we develop will be inclusive of experiences of single parents facing multiple inequalities and poverty. Outcomes should be on a personal, community and structural level i.e., supporting individuals with training/qualifications; supporting single parents as a community through specialist, tailored service provision being mainstreamed and tackling issues and barriers at organisational, structural and systemic levels.

Single Parents Employability & Employment

Almost all single parents are in employment or want to take up paid work, if it is in the best interests of their children. Single parent employment is at a record high, particularly due to the pressure to take up paid work caused by strict benefit conditionality and increased support with childcare costs and the expansion of early years provision.

However, important barriers to enter, or re-enter, paid work remain for single parents. Having sole responsibility for the care of their children as well as being the only breadwinner means single parents face considerable challenges. It is also important to remember most single parents are women in their 30's, many of whom have low levels of qualifications and little recent work experience. Local childcare, which is key to sustainable employment is often

¹⁷ [Freeing low-income single parents from in-work poverty's grip | JRF](#)

unaffordable and inflexible when compared with the demands of jobs. Equally, the lack of flexible work makes it hard to combine work and caring including parenting.

Once in employment, many single parents face in-work poverty and barriers to progression into higher paid roles. They are more likely than the average employee to enter and get trapped in low-paid work. Precarious and insecure work also means some cycle between low pay and no pay.

- Almost seven in ten (65.4%) single parents are in work. However, single parent employment drops when children are young and childcare costs are highest. In 2020, 47.7% of single parents with a child aged three to four years were in employment, compared with 77.6% where the youngest dependent child was aged 11-15 years. See table below¹⁸.

The employment rate of parents living with dependent children by family type and age of the youngest child, April to June 2021, Scotland

	Fathers in a couple	Single fathers	Mothers in a couple	Single mothers	Parents in a couple	Single parents
0 to 2	90.9	#	76.8	36.7	83.9	52.4
3 to 4	98.9	#	73.8	54.6	86.2	47.7
5 to 10	91.3	#	79.8	64.2	85.5	64.8
11 to 15	87.3	66.8	83.1	80.5	85.2	77.6
16 to 18	88.4	#	81.9	66.3	85.1	66.3
Total	91.1	68.3	79.1	65.0	85.1	65.4

- data unreliable shaded - small sample

- Single parents have the highest in-work poverty level of all family types. They are disproportionately affected by barriers that prevent them escaping in-work poverty. They are more likely to be women, working in a low wage sector, working fewer hours, and restricted by childcare and transport.¹⁹
- There is a higher proportion of single parents living in the older industrial regions of Scotland, especially in Dundee City, North Ayrshire, Inverclyde, West Dunbartonshire, and Glasgow City. Single parent families are more likely to live in deprived areas. In the most deprived decile, more than five in 10 (53%) of families are single parent families, while in the least deprived decile, this is one in 10.²⁰
- Single parents not in paid employment often face additional barriers to work, over and above their caring responsibilities. Compared to single parents in employment, single parents not in paid work are:
 - more likely to have low or no qualifications (65% vs 31%),
 - be less likely to hold a current driving licence (31% vs 68%),
 - are more likely to live in a household with three or more children (14% vs 6%)

¹⁸ [Employment rate of parents living with dependent children by family type and age of the youngest child](#)

¹⁹ [UK Poverty 2020/21 | JRF](#)

²⁰ [Child Poverty in Scotland: priority groups - lone-parent families \(publichealthscotland.scot\)](#)

- less likely to report their health as good or very good (58% vs 80%)

This is very important because single parent households with these characteristics are less likely to have a parent in work than single parent households with better qualifications, good or very good health, a current driving licence or a smaller family²¹.

Barriers to fair and sustainable employment for single parents

Single parents in paid work often face a cycle of low pay and financial insecurity. They face a number of, often interacting, issues which prevent them gaining good employment, such as: personal circumstances (including caring responsibilities linked to the age of the child, poor health, low educational attainment and lack of access to private transport) ; the design and delivery of a benefit system that discourages single parents from investing in education and boosting their earnings; limited availability of job opportunities that would allow single parents to meet their caring responsibilities and exit poverty, especially in regions where single parents are more likely to live and limited availability of flexible, affordable childcare that would allow single parents to manage caring responsibilities with earning and learning.

The reserved social security system, if it is to successfully support single parent families to get and stay in work, also needs to recognise the additional and distinct barriers faced by single parents in finding and keeping work²². Evidence suggests this is not currently recognised, and that elements of the current reserved social security system are more likely to move more disadvantaged single parents further away from the labour market.²³ The conditionality including the threat, as well as the application of benefit sanctions of the current benefits system can undermine single parents' mental health, making it less likely that they will get and keep work, as well as risking trapping single parents in poverty.²⁴ Barriers include:

1. Universal Credit - problems with 5 weeks wait and process for claiming the childcare payment in particular

Universal Credit is failing to meet the UK Government's objectives. One of the most damaging effects of Universal Credit to the single parent families we work with has been the instability it causes. After the early financial and emotional shocks of moving onto Universal Credit, debt, housing insecurity and job uncertainty is the norm for most families. Many parents are struggling to pay childcare costs which make returning to work a poor financial decision. The UK Government's key principles of having a system that was easy to use and make work pay does not apply to most of the single parents we work with.

2. The impact of the benefits freeze, the two child policy and the Benefit Cap

These policies penalise single parent families and mean whether in or out of work single parent families are poorer.

3. Employability - Action is needed from skills/training providers for enhanced single parent friendly training programmes and work placements, with the opportunity to take up permanent job roles.

The most recent evaluation of the Scottish Government multi-million funded programme "Fair Start Scotland"(FSS) shows that the single parent performance stats are

²¹ [Child Poverty in Scotland: priority groups - lone-parent families \(publichealthscotland.scot\)](http://publichealthscotland.scot)

²² [Can't work or won't work:work search requirements for single parents](#) p63

²³ [lone-parent-obligations-impact-assessment.pdf \(policyexchange.org.uk\)](#).

²⁴ <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/163237/1/163237.pdf> ; [Single Parent Families, Benefit Conditionality and Wellbeing](#)

disappointing.²⁵ Over the three year period since the start of the programme single parents accounted for 9% of starts. (See Appendix1 for the analysis). Over years 1-3 the stats show:

- 2,700 single parents started with FSS
- 1170 were early leavers
- 1530 continued on the programme
- 980 took up employment
- 475 were in a job after 3mths
- 335 were in a job after 6mths
- 200 were in a job after 12 mths

We believe the high numbers of single parent who do not sustain employment may have unintended consequences for parents and children - disruption to benefits and increasing the impact of debt repayments thereby increasing poverty; having to give up childcare arrangements, put in place and paid for by UC, with impacts on children; and the effect on the parents confidence levels/ mental health and wellbeing, having made the move into paid work which was not sustained.

FSS should provide programmes tailored to single parents needs to take account of the unique challenges they face. This devolved responsibility offers an opportunity to develop an employment support service that reduces child poverty. Research carried out for OPFS, funded by Oxfam Scotland, shows that a new approach to employability for single parents and carers is needed. This approach would put access to good-quality, sustainable and rewarding employment at the heart of its design and operations.²⁶ Key points are:

- Given the consistent undervaluation of unpaid care and women's work more generally, and the fact that 58% of unpaid carers and 91% of single parents are women, an intersectional and gendered lens should inform Scotland's employability framework. This approach would support women who are single parents and carers into decent paid work and, crucially, to progress within it – thereby supporting them to increase their incomes.
- Fair Start Scotland has taken several welcome and important steps towards a more effective and fairer model. However, there is more to do to establish a distinct Scottish approach to employability. Furthermore, there is evidence that some positive elements are not being routinely implemented, and qualitative research has found a reluctance to invest in more intensive interventions owing to the programme's payment structures.
- The Scottish Government should continue to use its powers to significantly accelerate delivery of a distinctive Scottish approach to employability, drawing on the effective and innovative approaches considered within this report.
- There are numerous models for effective employability support. The research has identified a 10-point framework of key criteria that best meet the needs of single parents and carers.²⁷

4.Support into and in Paid Work - OPFS recently collaborated with Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) on research around "Freeing Low Income Single Parents from In-Work Poverty Grip".²⁸ This report, co-produced with single parents, highlights additional challenges which parents experience and how the labour market, housing, poor childcare is leaving them disadvantaged. Single Parents told us work should provide a decent standard of living, offer routes to progress and allow parents to balance work and home life.

²⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fair-start-scotland-evaluation-report-4-overview-year-3/>

²⁶ <https://opfs.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/policy-research/thriving-not-just-surviving/>

²⁷ https://opfs.org.uk/ResearchExploringEmployabilitySupportforSingleParentsandCarers_ExecSummary.pdf

²⁸ [Freeing low-income single parents from in-work poverty's grip - One Parent Families Scotland \(opfs.org.uk\)](https://www.opfs.org.uk/research/freeing-low-income-single-parents-from-in-work-poverty-s-grip)

There is no easy fix which can stem the tide of growing poverty levels. Without addressing the underlying issues, Scotland is unlikely to be able to reach its child poverty targets for 2030. The unlocking of families from poverty means improving the availability and affordability of housing, bolstering social security, and ensuring work can become a real route out of poverty for people who are able to work. It requires further financial investment by UK and Scottish Governments and the maintaining of the £20 Universal Credit uplift payments, which is a financial lifeline for many and the continuation of the furlough scheme. Employers should be encouraged by Scottish Government to embed family-friendly practices, including adequate pay and flexible working, to make sure work is accessible and sustainable for single parents. The JRF report recommends:

- High-quality affordable and flexible childcare, which considers the need for support for older children and children with additional needs.
- Investment in single parents/carer specific employability programmes delivered with employers which combines flexibility, high-quality paid work, and in-work training.
- Back-to-work specialist mental health support for single parents and carers.
- Scottish Government fully funded qualifications pathway focused on single parents accessing high-quality jobs particularly vocational skills or courses focused on growing sectors such as technology.
- Addition of 'single-parent supporter' to the Scottish Business Pledge.
- Encouragement of more part-time roles across the labour market to enable access to higher-paid roles for single parents.
- Programme of activity and training for employers to be able to better respond to, value and understand single parents' lived experiences.
- Flexible working as standard across the public sector and the private sector.
- Advance support fund for single parents entering the labour market to assist with advance payment for childcare and other requirements.
- Policy and delivery coherence across employability, childcare, and social security so that single parents' needs are met across the policy portfolios.

5. Lack of flexibility in the labour market - A lack of flexibility forces many single parents to work fixed hours to balance work and childcare commitments. This lack of flexibility means single parents are not only unable to work additional hours, but they are also prevented from taking up skills training - key factors associated with limiting opportunities for progression.

- **Many single parents work part-time** - Single parents are more likely to be working part-time to balance their caring responsibilities. Working part-time is often seen to be incompatible with higher paid roles and means that single parents are frequently forced to work below their skill level to achieve the flexibility they need.
- **Relationship between education and job roles** - Single parents tend to have fewer qualifications than the average. For some single parents' lower levels of education limit their access to higher paid work but other parents are over-qualified for the work they are doing.
- **Shortage of affordable, flexible childcare** - research shows 41% of single parents struggle to afford childcare, compared with 14% of parents in couples²⁹. A lack of affordable, flexible childcare prevents many single parents from seeking better paid roles and blocks in-work progression.

²⁹ <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/policy-campaigns/publications-index/held-back/>

- **Time out of the labour market** - Being consistently in work helps people to escape low pay, single parents are more likely to have 'work gaps'.

Policy Options - Feedback from Single Parents

Parents say they should be able to make their own decisions about how best to combine work with family life, rather than pushed into work that does not meet their family's needs. Parents told us that they need improved single parents tailored employment support - particularly improving access to higher level training courses and apprenticeships, to increase routes into more secure and longer-term work.

OPFS supports IPPR's call for a living income for all, delivered through a minimum income guarantee, alongside action to deliver fair work for more people and to reduce costs through stronger collective services.³⁰ We believe fair work should:

- Provide a decent standard of living which contributes to eradicating child poverty.
- Offer paths to progress in work to better paid roles.
- Allow parents and others to balance work and home life so supporting family wellbeing.

Employers and childcare providers have a role to play, but the government can do much more to ensure single parents access sustainable paid work – through support from the social security system, access to skills training and education, investment in childcare (50 hrs a week) and working with employers to encourage family-friendly work.

Single parents, not in paid work, are more likely to have low or no qualifications, be less likely to hold a current driving licence, have more than one child, and are less likely to report their health as good. To remove the barriers to better paid work and in-work progression single parent bespoke services should offer a holistic model which integrates crisis interventions, family support, benefits & money advice, and employability. (See *appendix 2 for OPFS model using a case study.*)

Westminster Government

Address key problems with the benefits system

- Universal credit should be reviewed, and problems resolved.
- Punitive conditions on single parents to look for work or face a cut to benefit ended.
- Reverse the benefit cap and two child policy which traps single parent in poverty whether in or out of work.

Increase the availability of part-time and flexible work and at senior levels

- Greater collaboration between employers and government to encourage flexible work and progression in work across pay grades and sectors.
- There should be a duty on employers to publish flexible working options in job adverts and give workers the right to take up the advertised flexibility from day one.
- Employers should open more senior level roles with part-time and flexible hours. By offering access to progression within part-time and flexible roles, employers will be

³⁰ [Securing a living income in Scotland \(ippr.org\)](https://www.ippr.org)

able to access an untapped pool of single parents who have previously been unable to move out of low-paid work.

Affordable and more accessible childcare

- The DWP should cover the upfront costs of childcare for single parents (not through the Flexible Support Fund which is discretionary) including deposits and the first month advance payment.
- DWP should address problems with the operation of childcare payments under universal credit around evidence of payment and the monthly payments being made in arrears.

Scottish Government

- Scottish Government, through Fair Start Scotland & PESF, should introduce bespoke employment support for single parents – particularly improving access to higher level training courses, further education and adult apprenticeships / ILMs, to increase routes into more secure and longer-term work.
- ‘No One Left Behind’, Scottish Governments’ strategy for placing people at the centre of the design and delivery of employability services aims to be person centred and responsive to individual needs³¹. However, we fear that a very individualised model risks losing sight of the structural and systemic barriers particular groups, including single parents encounter in the labour market.
- Single Parents should be offered career support and advice at key stages of their children’s lives, when their youngest child begins primary school.
- Support working single parents, and focus on reducing in-work poverty, support to retain employment and advance in their career and have a work-life balance that avoids time-poverty.
- Increasing the income of families identified in the Child Poverty Act through newly devolved social security powers have a key contribution to supporting single parents to move into and sustain paid work.
- Scottish Government also has an important role to play in reducing living costs associated with in - work poverty, particularly in relation to:
 - the cost of the school day and school holidays,
 - housing costs,
 - flexible, affordable high-quality childcare and
 - public transport costs and availability.

Employers

- Anchor institutions, such as local authorities and Health Boards, should be supported to provide quality, flexible vacancies, directly as employers and through procurement.
- A requirement for all employers to give workers four weeks’ notice of shifts, with guaranteed full payment if shifts are cancelled.
- A guaranteed right to a 16 hour per week minimum contract for all workers – except in cases where employers can evidence genuine need for contracts of less than 16 hours - which can only be reduced at the request of the worker.
- A guaranteed right for all workers to a contract that accurately reflects their average hours worked.

³¹ [No One Left Behind: Delivery Plan \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

- Employers should use their appraisal system to encourage single parents within their workforce to consider progression and offer coaching to build the confidence of single parents to progress.
- Employers and public sector institutions should proof policies and practices to ensure they do not unfairly penalise single parent in keeping with the 'Vision & Framework for Fair Work in Scotland'.³²
- Employers, Scottish Government and third sector should jointly implement an employment engagement strategy tailored for single parents.

The Child Poverty Act has challenging targets to reduce child poverty and we know that unless single parent families are at the heart of delivery plans these will not be achieved. We are not yet at a stage where policy makers at all levels recognise that single parents have the unique challenge of being sole carers and breadwinners and therefore require a tailored single parent proofed response.

We want to embed policies which support single parents, whether in paid work or not, to be at the heart of Scottish and local government policy to ensure Scotland's child poverty reduction targets are achieved.

Conclusion

Single parents' insight and personal experiences indicate that current policies are not informed by an understanding of the specific needs of those who single handedly juggle employment with childrearing. This is particularly the case in the context of a flexible labour market, characterised by high job insecurity and demands for long or atypical working hours. Retention, never mind advancement, has become almost impossible for single parents, particularly those with low skills, who constitute the majority.

The challenges that these single parents encounter in their everyday lives illustrate that without this understanding and the creation of policies that address single parents' higher risk of financial and time poverty, the employment and child poverty targets are unlikely to be met. These policy solutions would enable a single parent, to escape poverty, create a work-life balance and sustain employment. Ultimately, they show that a universal concept of a **worker/carer model**, rather than a labour market based seeing people solely as 'workers', should inform current employment and child poverty strategies.

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³² [The Fair Work Framework - The Fair Work Convention](#)

Appendix 1 – Fair Start Scotland: Evaluation report – year 3 - Analysis

The most recent evaluation³³ of Fair Start Scotland is for year 3 of the programme. Analysis by OPFS shows that the single parent performance stats are disappointing . This will also have unforeseen / under-reported impacts on single parents and their children highlighted below. However, we don't yet have the Parental Employment Support Fund (PESF)³⁴ stats so perhaps they may offer an additional insight.

This report sets out findings from an evaluation of the Fair Start Scotland service. The findings are drawn from a range of research activities involving participants, service providers and key delivery partners, undertaken during the third year of delivery, covering April 2020 to March 2021.

For performance management purposes, Fair Start Scotland put the service groups participants into three categories: Core, Advanced, and Intense. The outcome payments associated with each category are designed to provide an incentive for providers to activity engage with those who need more intensive support, by making a higher payment available for their successful sustainment of a 13, 26 and 52 week job outcome. **However it is notable that providers are paid a lot less for 'Income Support Single Parents' than disabled people for example.**

- The payment for each service group is
 - **Intense** : Disabled and in need of specialist support services - **£10,422** per client
 - **Advanced**: Unemployed for more than 2 years, and in Early Entry Groups - single parents, disabled, ESA, (JSA) 24+, JSA etc - **£7,083** per client
 - **Core**: Unemployed for less than 2 years and/or JSA Early Entry UC (All work related requirements group) IS (single parents) - **£4,626** per client
- There are some groups for whom starting and sustaining paid work is more difficult. For example Year 3 stats for single parents show:
 - Job starts for Single Parent FSS participants was 29%
 - The three month job outcomes for Single Parent FSS participants was 20%
 - The six month job outcomes for Single Parent FSS participants was 17%
 - The twelve months outcome for Single Parent FSS participants was 15%

Statistics supporting the year three evaluation and annual reports of Fair Start Scotland employability services.

Statistics have been published which supporting the Year 3 Evaluation and Annual Reports of Fair Start Scotland employability services. An excel workbook contains one data table in the Fair Start Scotland Y1 to Y3 worksheet with some cells in the table referring to notes which can be found in the Notes worksheet.³⁵ The background statistics show:

FSS Statistics - Year 3 (April 2020 to March 2021), with early leavers, job starts, and 3, 6 and 12 month job outcomes recorded up to June 2021

In year 3 -10,357 people started on the FSS service.

It should be noted that this year's evaluation report includes analysis by participant group for the first time. Around a fifth (19%) of Year 3 FSS participants were members of a priority

³³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fair-start-scotland-evaluation-report-4-overview-year-3/>

³⁴ <https://www.employabilityinscotland.com/employability-services/parental-employability-support-fund/>

³⁵ [Fair Start Scotland year three evaluation and annual reports: accompanying statistics](#)

family group, most were parents with a disability or a health condition (12%). Single Parents were 9% of those who joined FSS in the third year. The stats show:

- 945 single parents started with FSS
- 340 were early leavers
- 605 continued on the programme
- 290 took up employment
- 120 were in a job after 3mths
- 50 were in a job after 6mths
- Figures for 12 mths were not yet available
- For SP FSS participants 31% were in full-time and 69% were in part-time jobs

FSS Statistics – Totals for years 1 to 3 (April 2018 - March 2021), with early leavers, job starts, and 3, 6 and 12 month job outcomes recorded up to June 2021

Over years 1-3 there were 32,505 people starting the service. The stats show:

- 2,700 single parents started with FSS
- 1170 were early leavers
- 1530 continued on the programme
- 980 took up employment
- 475 were in a job after 3mths
- 335 were in a job after 6mths
- 200 were in a job after 12 mths

Scot Gov Survey of early leavers

The results of a survey conducted with a proportion of early leavers showed the three most commonly mentioned recommendations to prevent participants from leaving early included:

- improving communication between the service providers and FSS participants.
- suggesting more tailored job opportunities.
- and being better at taking participants' specific needs into account when providing the service.

These are key issues for single parents and would be addressed by the introduction of a bespoke single parent employability model.

Actions & OPFS Response

The evaluation says that employability officials are engaging with other Scottish Government teams including Health and Social Care, responsible for supporting those at highest risk from COVID-19 to better understand how Fair Start Scotland can best provide employment support to these citizens. It says ' as part of their Continuous Improvement activity, service providers are implementing Action Plans and they are introducing "test and learn" pilots to improve engagement with underrepresented groups, including people with convictions, vulnerable women, minority ethnic groups and those with health conditions and disabilities who would benefit from specialist support. Many of these pilots are already underway and they will report on our learning once complete. ***The list unfortunately doesn't mention single parents – a key group requiring a tailored intervention if the child poverty reduction targets are to be met .***

The other worrying aspect is high percentage of single parents who start FSS but are no longer involved or able to sustain paid work after a year. So 2,700 single parents started with FSS over the 3 year period but only 200 were in paid work after 12 mths. ***This may have unintended consequences for parents and children - disruption to benefits and increasing the impact of debt repayments thereby increasing poverty; having to give***

up childcare arrangements, put in place and paid for by UC with impact on children; impact on the parents confidence levels/ mental health and wellbeing having made the move into paid work which was not sustained.

Appendix 2- OPFS Holistic Support & Progression Model in Glasgow

Karen's Story

Having fled a long-term abusive relationship Karen became a single parent in April 2019, living in the North-East of Glasgow, Karen has the sole care and responsibility of her two dependent children aged 13 & 15 years.

The difficult transitions of becoming a single parent and being unemployed have weighed heavily on Karen's ability to navigate her way through single parenthood, looking for a job and the benefits system. Her mental health was affected by the daily challenges she faced which were compounded by feelings of isolation, depression, and anxiety.

Presenting Issues

COVID-19 lockdown restrictions had a drastic impact on the family income due to Karen having to give up her working role as a self-employed fundraiser. She was:

- Unable to access furlough support as she did not fit the eligibility criteria.
- Unfamiliar with the current benefit system as the family had previously earned an above average wage
- Unaware of the support and services available to help her as she had felt able to deal with her personal issues alone for so many years.
- Concerned about debts and paying her self-employment tax bill.
- Worried about the impact of having previous criminal convictions and the affect this would have on her ability to find alternative employment.
- Concerned about living with dyslexia and worried about making mistakes or providing the wrong information.
- Lacking in confidence, and self-esteem due to years of living in an abusive relationship, the stress, worry and anxiety of her new circumstances and not being able to provide for her children.
- With no close friends or family support.

Barrier Removal and Next Steps Assessment

Through discussion and agreement with an OPFS advisor, Karen was able to gain help, advice, support, and information to address her immediate challenges, make informed decisions and choices on the types of support that would best meet the needs of herself and her children. These included, Welfare Rights, Money & Debt Advise, Crisis Support, Family Support, One-to-One and Peer Support, and Employability Services with priority access to OPFS Holiday Food Programme and Christmas Appeal.

OPFS Financial Inclusion Service

- Completion of a Family Financial Review to assess the benefits that Karen was entitled to apply for as an unemployed single parent with 2 teenage children.
- Specialist help, advice, and support to make her online claim to Universal Credit.
- Provision of crisis support from OPFS 'Family Essentials Bank' to enable her to provide the basics for herself and her children during the UC assessment period i.e. Heating, Hot

water, Food etc. This included provision of OPFS Fuel Crisis Voucher, completion of small Charitable Applications, Pantry Parcels and Toiletries, referral to local foodbank.

- Realistic payment plans negotiated, agreed, and put in place with HMRC and creditors.
- Support with building family budgeting skills.
- Completion of potential in-work income calculations at 16, 21, 35 and 40 hours.

Impact

- In receipt of all benefit entitlements and aware of the conditions and conditionality that she must adhere to regarding her UC claim, to prevent any threat of sanction.
- Able to better manage her family finances.
- Aware of where and how to access help to prevent further future crisis.
- Less stressed, worried and anxious.
- More in control of her life and better able to manage the transition of her life as a single parent.

OPFS Family Support Service

- Regular one-to-one meetings helped Karen build her confidence and self-esteem, improve her sense of well-being and continue to address the issues and barriers she faces in relation to relationship breakdown, mental health and unemployment caused and compounded by COVID-19 Lockdown restrictions.
- Participation in OPFS:
 - Local Single Parent Community Well-being Hub: reducing her sense of isolation, access to peer support and raised awareness and access to local resources and services.
 - Holiday Food Programme: ensuring Karen and her children had access to healthy, nutritious meals and fun, family activities during the school holidays.
 - Christmas Appeal: alleviating the stress and costs associated with Christmas.
- External referrals to mental health services: Life-link, SAMH and Breathing Space.

Impact

- An improved sense of confidence, self-esteem and more optimistic about what the future holds for herself and her children.
- A good network of information and peers.
- New friendships.
- A sense of being a part of a community project that is healthy and nurturing.
- Finding her way to receiving and providing support with others who face similar circumstances.
- Gaining the understanding and tools that she needs to better manage her issues with mental health.
- Able to access the right support at the right time; through OPFS, local, online and telephone services.
- A positive reference point for building healthy relationships that encourage and support her to progress.

OPFS Employability Service

- Completion of Individual Needs Assessment.
- Monthly one-to-one advice and guidance meetings to address barriers to accessing suitable and sustainable employment opportunities.
- Regular weekly attendance and Participation at OPFS:
 - Local Single Parent Peer Support Hub
 - Skills Boost Sessions
 - Job Club
- Access to resources and training materials

Impact

- Developed her C.V. and sought suitable referees.
- Preparing for future employment; active job search, application forms, interview skills, etc.
- Identified the sector that she would like to work within.
- Identified her future goals and actively participating in employability activities that will help her to achieve these.
- Accessing citywide services i.e. Glasgow Guarantee
- Awareness of the impact returning to work will have on her family finances.
- Feeling more optimistic about the future.
- Through the provision of a Chromebook Karen has equal access to the services and resources that will help her to engage and participate in positive activities.
- Karen has started to apply for jobs.

“Life has changed so much for me and my kids”

‘Life has changed so much for me and my kids since April last year, sometimes for the better. However, it has been the hardest of times for us. I know that it is difficult for everyone but having to end my relationship and move my kids home and school as well as losing my job, our income and having nowhere to turn has been very hard.

It’s all been made worse by children not being able to go to school, followed by the school holidays, me not being able to provide even the basics things I needed for my kids, not even hot water or heating, sometimes not enough food. I did everything I could to try and make sure they had enough, I wouldn’t have lunch or dinner, but anything I did just wasn’t enough. It made me feel unwell, alone, and scared. It’s such a struggle when you feel like things can’t get any worse, but you don’t know where to turn and you just can’t face telling anyone about your life.

I wish I could have found it easier to ask for help. When I contacted OPFS they made things so easy for me to speak about, no judgement just friendly help. They helped me to sort out my money, my debts and start getting back on my feet. I’ve made some good friends and can now see a way out of this terrible mess that I have found myself in. I keep hearing people on the radio and TV talking about the new normal, well I’ve needed a new normal and OPFS are helping me to do this. I’ve started going along to the groups and training courses and have started applying for jobs. Jobs that will let me be there for my kids and let me give them the things they need to grow-up well.

Our lives will never be the same again, but in so many ways, that’s for the best. OPFS have helped us through the worst of times. They’ve introduced me to services that I never knew about. It’s so important not to feel alone during these very difficult times and I don’t! I really feel like things are going to get better for me and my kids and that we will get our new normal.”