

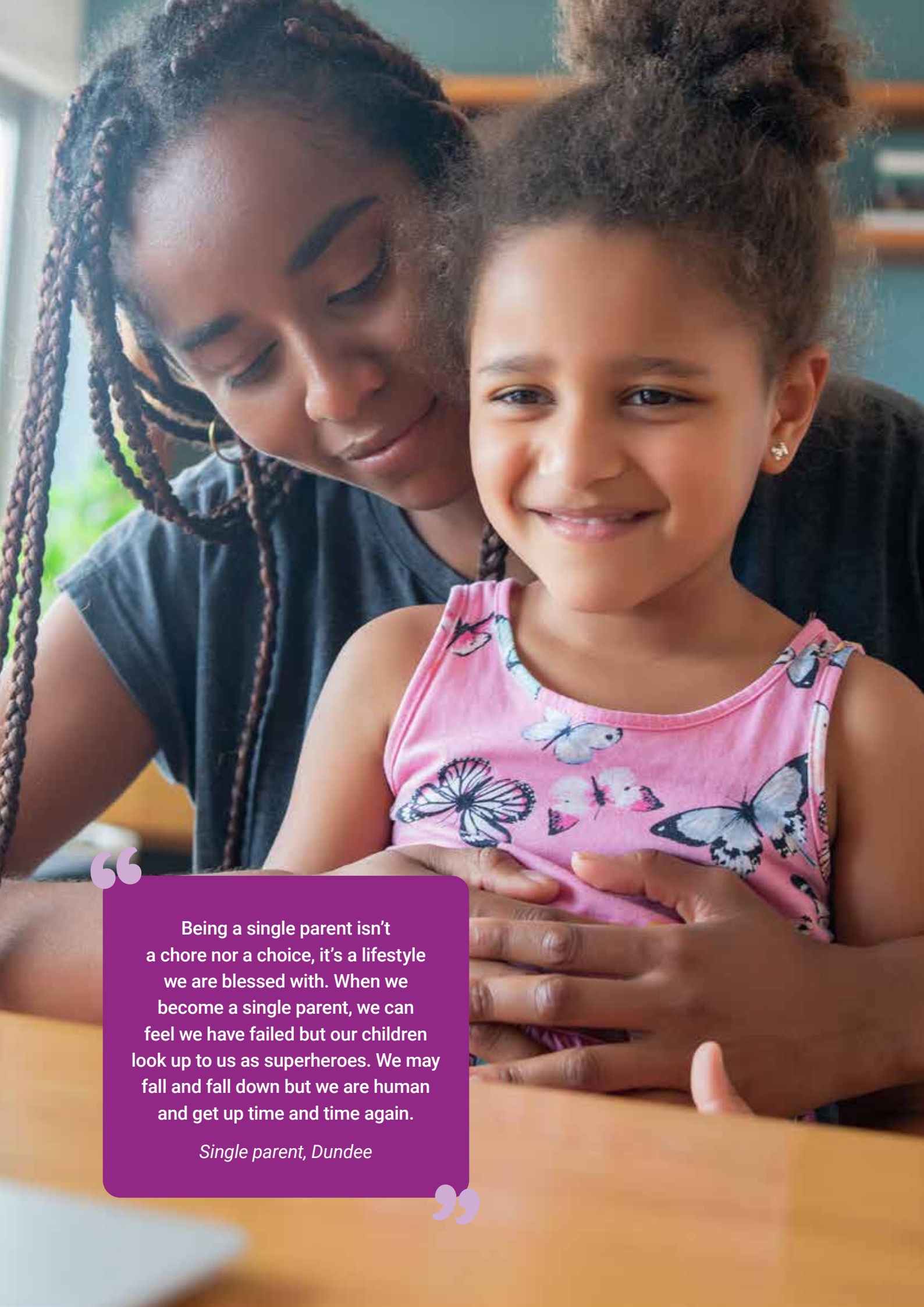


**One Parent
Families Scotland**
changing lives, challenging poverty

Annual Report 2023

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“ Being a single parent isn’t a chore nor a choice, it’s a lifestyle we are blessed with. When we become a single parent, we can feel we have failed but our children look up to us as superheroes. We may fall and fall down but we are human and get up time and time again. ”

Single parent, Dundee



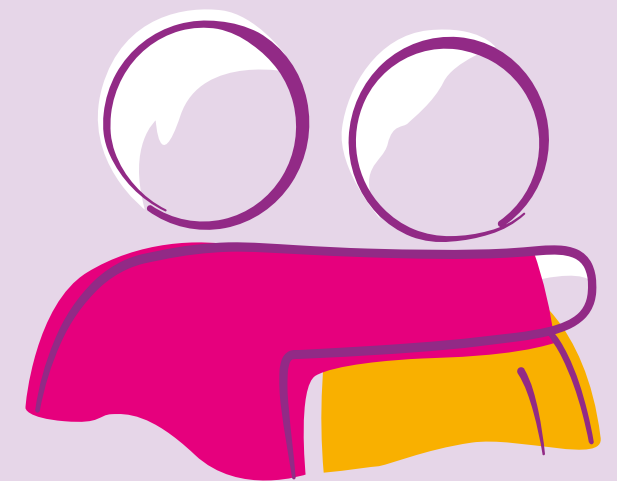
About One Parent Families Scotland

One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) is the only third sector organisation working exclusively with single parent families across Scotland. Our vision is of a Scotland in which single parents and their children are valued and treated equally and fairly. Our mission is to work with and for single parent families, providing support services that enable them to achieve their potential and create lasting solutions to the poverty and barriers they face.

OPFS campaigns with parents to make their voices heard to change the systems, policies and attitudes that cause child poverty.

OPFS provides life-changing services to single parents and children through specialist crisis interventions, single parent tailored benefits and money advice, family support and health & wellbeing support. We aim to support single parents to overcome the barriers to a decent standard of living, help achieve family wellbeing and give their children the best start in life.

We work to support parents who face daily struggles, most often by themselves with no support network in place, adapting to challenges and putting the needs of their children before their own. **OPFS** services and policy priorities are working towards being genuinely co-produced. They powerfully combine the shared expertise of practitioners and parents, who are experts through experience. This means **OPFS** is trusted by single parents and recognised by policy makers as the voice of single parents in Scotland. In this current landscape, with so many evolving issues, our work is for, influenced, and inspired by the strength of single parents dealing with the ongoing impact of the cost-of-living crisis.



Single Parents in Scotland

There are
144,000
single parent families,
25%
of all families
with dependent
children.

38% of children
in single parent
families are in
poverty, compared
with **24%** in other
families.

There has been
an increase in the
number of single
parents who
are fathers from
10% to 12%.

With savings **twenty**
times smaller than UK
average, single parent
families have been among
the most exposed to the
cost-of-living crisis.

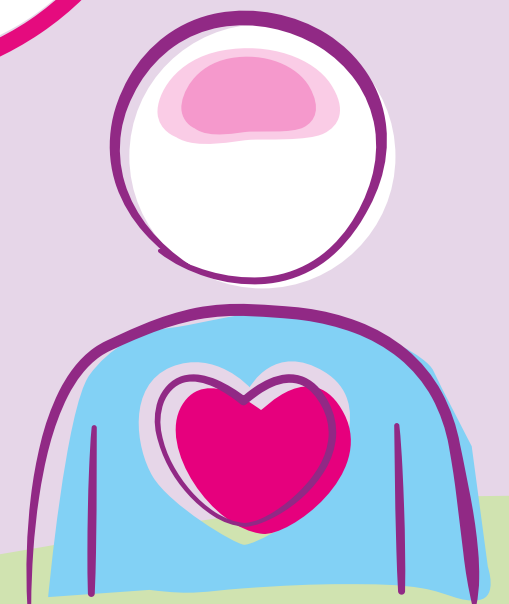
9 out of 10
single parent families are
headed by women.

The financial wellbeing of
single parents is declining.
Those in 'serious financial
difficulties' rose from **23%**
in Oct 21 to **34%** in Dec 22.

The average age of
a single parent is
39
years, and 1%
are teenagers.

There has been an
increase in number
of single parents
identifying as
disabled from
23% to 33%.

Single parents
have the highest
proportion of
households in fuel
poverty.





Navigating challenges, amplifying voices: supporting single parent families

“

OPFS has been a blessing to me and my family in the following ways: I got financial support that enabled me to get a new uniform for my daughter and I took part in the CBT classes that guided me in managing my emotions. This is particularly helpful because my emotions were brutally injured. This has contributed to me being stable and improved my well-being.

Asylum seeking single parent, Glasgow.

”

It has been another very busy year for all of us here at **OPFS**, working with one parent families, providing vital services in person and online, supporting families at the sharp end of the cost-of-living crisis and continuing our influencing and policy work on the priority areas identified by parents.

Last year, we acknowledged that the pandemic had exacerbated already difficult circumstances for single parents and their families, and this challenged us to re-evaluate and adapt our approach to service delivery. Coming out of a pandemic and into a cost-of-living crisis has only deepened and added to the challenges that single parent families face.

Some of the key areas of support over the year have been:

- Financial strains caused by cost-of-living crisis and fuel costs.
- Families re-adjusting to life after COVID-19.
- Wellbeing and isolation (for parents and children).
- Ukrainian families parenting alone - supporting them to settle in Scotland.

In October 2022, **OPFS** released the findings of a comprehensive parent consultation, seeking insights into the day-to-day realities of single-parent families. The survey gathered valuable feedback on the challenges they face, their expectations from government support, and their desired improvements to **OPFS** services. These insights will inform the development of our service delivery, policy advocacy, and future research initiatives.

We have continued to publish bi-monthly Impact Reports, capturing the experiences of single parents using our services. These have served as a powerful tool for influencing government policy consultations and have shone a spotlight on school holiday expenses, the cost-of-living crisis, debt burdens, food affordability, and pre-paid meter issues.

Our commitment to improving the child maintenance system remained resolute. Securing funding from Robertson Trust with IPPR (Scotland), and Gingerbread Fife to conduct research on transforming and enhancing the effectiveness of the Child Maintenance Service (CMS). Our strong evidence base, gathered through our CMS consultation, played a pivotal role in securing this grant.

By partnering with participation specialists to strengthen engagement and participation practices, we ensured that single parents feel genuinely involved in shaping our decisions and initiatives, fostering a truly inclusive and empowering environment.

The agility and flexibility which colleagues and volunteers demonstrated during the pandemic has become integral to how we work to support parents, produce resources and make best use of different ways of communicating and sharing information with single parent families, our colleagues across different services and our partners.

Satwat Rehman,
OPFS Chief Executive

“ I have been given a lot of support with my confidence, the confidence building course has helped me a lot with talking to others. I got a Numeracy certificate that will help me in the future getting a job and a First Aid certificate.

Single mum, Glasgow. ”

What OPFS did during 2022 and 2023



Distributed **371** digital devices to single parent families.

Delivered awareness training on issues affecting single parents to **82** professionals.

Supported **8,169** parents, children and young people.

Provided remote and one-to-one support to **5,301** parents to feel better able to support themselves and their families.

Attracted **238K** users to our OPFS website.

Provided face-to-face support to **1,346** parents through groups, reducing isolation by creating local peer support networks and providing training to enable parents to enhance their life chances.

Directly supported **835** children (other than with childcare).

Enabled **264** parents to complete single parent tailored employability programmes and move into further education training or employment.

Dealt with **7,467** enquires through our helpline, emails, webchat, and website, providing information, advice, and support on a range of issues affecting single parent families.

Provided welfare rights and money advice to **3,953** families, resulting in financial gains of **£1,623,684** and predicted gains of **£3,338,621**



Support for families



As we emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions, **OPFS** services had to adapt our efforts to tackle both existing and new challenges that have arisen for single parent families. We understood that these changes, after such an unsettled time, would require sensitivity and compassion, for our colleagues and for the families that trust us to support them.

The period 2022/23 was one of both settling back into our ways of working whilst also innovating responses to the learning that we had as an organisation. In person services returned to almost pre-pandemic levels across our local centres based in 5 local authority areas, whilst retaining the remote support that has proved so critical for many isolated families.

Our national services which include online self-help resources and advice and support via our helpline, webchat service, email advice and social media posts continue to be available, and information has been updated throughout the year to ensure it is relevant and up to date.

The person-centred one-to-one support for parents remains central to our approach, ensuring individual family needs are identified and met. Over 22/23 we also worked to increase the volume of in person group support as the value of connections and peer support is so valuable, particularly when providing support in areas such as

wellbeing. We also continued with our free counselling provision, ensuring parents had the space to speak about their worries.

We have created opportunities for children and single parents to take part in group activities and go on outings in their local area. This has helped children to make friends and parents to form important relationships that go beyond the group.

OPFS understands the value of digital inclusion, so we continue to provide digital devices, whilst also supporting families to utilise digital resources in beneficial ways. This has included enhancing our own digital presence and promoting the resources that we have co-produced with single parents. In this way, the Scottish wide freephone lone parent helpline and digital presence continues to support thousands of single parents.

I attended the first week and the buzz from the group was fantastic. I could see women, who I have known to lack confidence, speak amongst their peers and share their strategies and experiences with their own children."

Head Teacher in Dundee school.



Advice and information services

The **OPFS** national advice and information service is tailored to the specific needs of single parent families and incorporates our helpline and webchat services as well as the self-help resources on our website. It provides support to single parents and practitioners throughout Scotland. By providing both nationwide services and face-to-face support in 5 different local authority areas, we aim to improve the health and wellbeing of single parent families and to contribute to the reduction of child poverty in Scotland.

We provide advice and support for single parents, Monday to Friday via:

- Our freephone Lone Parent Helpline.
- The **OPFS** Webchat / 'Ask-a-question' service.
- Information and advice on the **OPFS** website.
- Advice via email.
- Our local and national Facebook pages.
- Direct messages.

During 2022/23 our advice and information services:

- Dealt with 7,467 helpline, emails, chat, and web-based enquiries, providing information, advice, and support on a range of issues affecting single parent families.
- Provided knowledge and guidance to 4,145 people, of whom 3,151 were single parents.

- Provided online tools to connect parents, including the 'My Life and Me' self-help guide, 'Single Parent FAQs' and the Single Parent Forum'.
- Provided benefit calculations and welfare advice to parents which totalled **£3,338,621** of estimated gains into the pockets of single parent households.
- Assisted with the distribution of in-house grants and other resources such as Wellbeing Boxes.
- Delivered 8 webinar sessions to practitioners in various fields, raising awareness of poverty within single parent households.
- Attended numerous events, such as MSP surgeries, fun day events and community groups to promote the numerous services on offer at **OPFS**.
- Continue to collect and highlight parent experiences which are used to inform and enhance policy and campaign work ongoing throughout **OPFS**.

In the winter it's absolutely Baltic. I'm in a wooden house. Last year I had my heater on 13 hours a day because it was just so cold, and I had a newborn baby. I'm still in debt with my gas, so I'm refusing to put my heaters on until I've paid that debt.

Single Parent supported by OPFS



Policy and Influencing

Our policy and influencing work involves and amplifies the voices of single parents to advocate for systems change. Our work with parents has highlighted some key issues this year which informed our priorities:

- **Poverty.** Single parents contacting the services were facing extremely difficult financial situations, often in crisis with many unable to pay for household essentials and having to use food banks.
- **Debt.** The rise in the costs of heating, electricity and essentials has meant single parents taking on more debt. A change in family circumstances such as a divorce, separation or bereavement often results in a debt burden for the parent with care.
- **Childcare.** The lack of flexible and affordable childcare was a significant barrier to single parents' ability to find and stay in paid work.
- **Disability.** An increasing number of parents contacted our services were disabled or have poor health as did their children.
- **Mental health impacts.** The ongoing impact of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis has taken a significant toll on the wellbeing of single parents, with many describing the stress and worry they faced causing an impact on their mental health and self-esteem as well as physical health.

Over the year, **OPFS** has been supporting single parents to have a say in the issues affecting their lives. Working directly with parliamentarians, policy-makers and the media, we've been instrumental in influencing government policy and challenging social stigma.

Our achievements have focused on areas including child maintenance, where we have called for new ways to close loopholes, tackle payment avoidance and reduce charges to access the CMS as well as make domestic violence training mandatory for all CMS staff. OPFS has taken over the Secretariat role for the Westminster APPG on child maintenance along with our colleagues in Gingerbread (Eng & Wales). This gives OPFS a significant opportunity to ensure the needs of single parents are recognised in any new developments on child support with an opportunity to reduce child poverty.

Social impact is the key criteria of judging our policy and advocacy success. We aim to ensure issues affecting single parent families are included in relevant national and local policy developments. We have worked with single parents and partners to develop more effective policies through our membership of the End Child Poverty coalition, the Scottish Campaign on Rights to Social Security, the Scotland that Cares campaign and a coalition of third sector organisations calling for a more progressive and fair tax system.

We believe holistic family support services which bring together financial, practical and emotional support in one place can ensure families receive the appropriate support at the right time. In this respect we worked with The Promise on poverty-proofing research for families in or on care system edges. Together with single parents, we challenged judgemental attitudes and stigma, and influenced government policy to try to ensure single parent families receive a fair and just deal. We joined the Scottish Government Climate Change Policy Working Group, which will inform and shape climate change policy that responds to the specific needs of single parents.

Over the next year, **OPFS** will campaign to keep the focus by policy makers on key drivers of child poverty. We will contribute to proposals to develop a 'minimum income guarantee'; continue to lead the campaign to end the young parent penalty in Universal Credit and contribute to the implementation of the Scottish Government's 'Tackling Child Poverty' delivery plan. We will continue to work with our partners IPPR & Fife Gingerbread for the need to transform the UK child maintenance system.

We have grave concerns about the impact of benefit conditionality and sanctions on the well-being and rights of children. We will campaign for punitive benefit conditionality and penalties to be scrapped.

In the longer term, beyond dealing with the immediate crisis facing families, we will support the call by JRF and the Trussell Trust for the UK Government to introduce an 'Essentials Guarantee', which would embed in our social security system the widely supported principle that, at a minimum, Universal Credit should protect people from going without essentials.

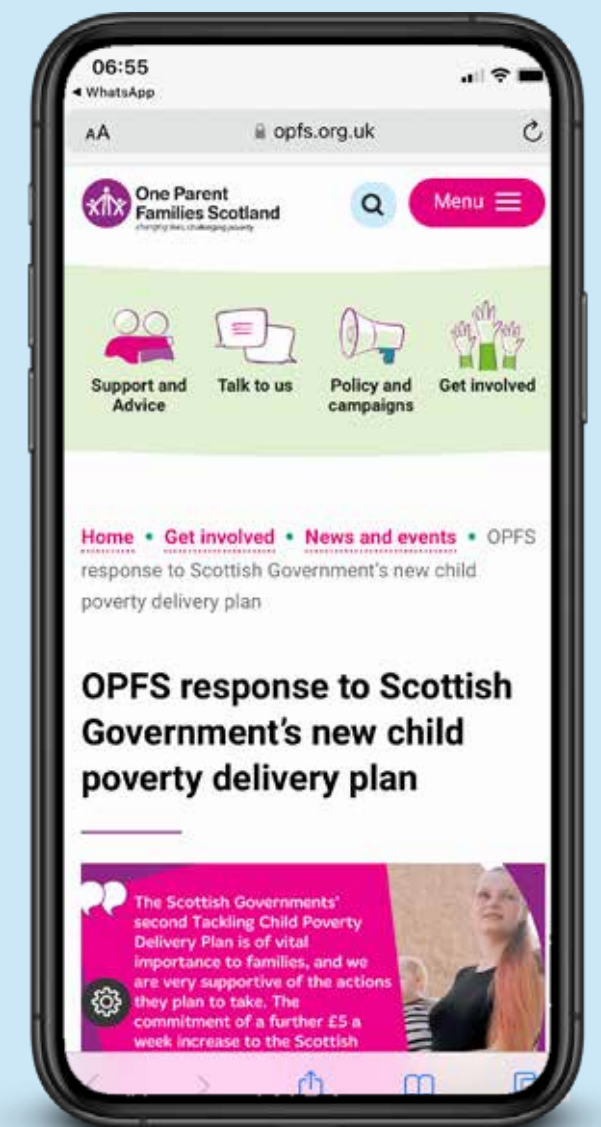
We will continue to contribute to the Scottish Government expert group which is developing proposals for a Minimum Income Guarantee. Alongside this we will highlight the need to redress the systemic inequalities rooted in our economic system, which must include the introduction of a progressive tax system and a just transition so that single parent families are not left out of plans to meet our commitments to a net zero economy.

Our digital services

OPFS offers a wide range of digital services to enhance our nationwide offering to single parent families and other related audiences. These include:

- **Our main website** - just over 238,000 users
- Our health and wellbeing website - **My Life and Me**
- Communications across a variety of social media channels, with a focus on supporting single parent families.
 - Twitter - 7k followers
 - Facebook - 4.7k followers
- Digital engagement tools like live chat on our main website, which have provided another means of single parents accessing support and advice.
- Our e-newsletters. Over 3.2k subscribers receive relevant and engaging content direct to their inbox.
- We have enhanced our website with innovative digital services tailored to connecting and engaging with single parents. These include:
 - A peer-to-peer online forum
 - A debt and family budget planner
 - The OPFS podcast

We continually monitor the content we publish online to ensure that it meets the needs of single parent families.



Thanks to all our funders, supporters and donors including:

- Arnold Clark
- BBC Children in Need
- Braes Store House
- Capital City Partnership
- Cash for Kids
- Cattnach Trust
- Charles Gordon Foundation
- Clyde Gateway
- Community Solutions
- Dentons Charitable Trust
- Dundee City Council
- Dundee Partnership
- Dundee Volunteer and Voluntary Action
- Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations' Council
- Falkirk Council
- Glasgow City Council
- Harris, Raymond Kenneth Thomas, Trust
- James T Howat Charitable Trust
- Mental Health Foundation
- Nimar Charitable Trust
- North Lanarkshire Council
- Ponton House Trust
- Pump House Trust
- Reuben Foundation
- Save the Children
- Scottish Children's Lottery
- STV Children's Appeal
- Tesco Community Grants
- The Gledswood Charitable Trust
- The National Lottery Community Fund
- The Northwood Charitable Trust
- The Promise Scotland
- The Robert Haldane Smith Charitable Foundation
- The Robertson Trust
- The Scottish Government
- The Souter Charitable Trust
- University of the West of Scotland
- Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire (VANL)
- Volunteering Matters
- WCH Trust for Children
- William Grant Foundation

Board of Directors

The following were directors during the year to 31 March 2022:

Chair:

- Halena Gauntlett - Implementation Manager, University of Strathclyde

Vice Chair:

- Keir Mitchelmore - Retired Solicitor, England and Wales.

Treasurer:

- Fiona Duncanson - Business Director, St Georges School

Company Secretary:

- Rosalind Paterson - Finance Manager

Board Members:

- Clare Simpson - Former Director of Parenting Across Scotland
- Susan Smith - Campaigns Manager, Chest, Heart & Stroke Scotland
- Addie Dinsmore - Head of Communications & Fundraising (Scotland) at WWF-UK
- Kerry McKenzie - Head of Service, Public Health Scotland
- Whitney Barrett – CEO, Wellbeing Scotland
- Alison Livesey - Managing Director JP Morgan Chase Payments Business
- Professor Dr Andrew Sharman - Managing Partner, RMS Switzerland

Finance Group: Fiona Duncanson, Keir Mitchelmore, Kerry McKenzie, Satwat Rehman, Ann McKenzie, Rosalind Paterson

Personnel Group: Halena Gauntlett, Susan Smith, Addie Dinsmore, Dr Professor Sharman, Ann McKenzie

Financial statement

Statement of Financial Activities (incorporating Income and Expenditure Account)
Year ended 31 March 2023.

Incoming resources:

Income from:	Notes	Restricted Funds	Unrestricted Funds	2023 Total	2022 Total
Donations		£6,693	£414,726	£421,419	£359,995
Investments:					
Bank interest		-	£1,969	£1,969	£34
Charitable activities:					
Awareness of need, training & policy research		£494,651	£120	£494,771	£534,917
National information & support services		£336,249	-	£336,249	£352,400
Family support services		£1,326,808	£80,052	£1,406,860	£1,367,798
Other income					
Investment Income		-	£13,878	£13,878	£10,951
SSP Income		-			£334
Total income		£2,164,401	£510,745	£2,675,146	£2,626,429

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the special provisions of Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

Financial statement

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the special provisions of Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

Expenditure on:

Charitable activities:	Notes	Restricted Funds	Unrestricted Funds	2023 Total	2022 Total
Awareness of need, training & policy research		£484,908	£561,755	£1,046,663	£837,132
National information & support services		£362,533		£362,533	£309,758
Family support services		£1,095,266	£43,124	£1,138,390	£1,395,657
Investment Management costs		-	£4,966	£4,966	£5,615
Total expenditure		£1,942,707	£609,845	£2,552,552	£2,548,162

Full accounts available on request from OPFS, 2 York Place, Edinburgh, EH1 3EP.



OPFS offices

Edinburgh Headquarters

One Parent Families Scotland,
2 York Place, Edinburgh, EH1 3EP
Helpline: 0808 801 0323
Helpline email: helpline@opfs.org.uk
Tel: 0131 556 3899
Email: info@opfs.org.uk

OPFS Dundee

Families' House
20 Grampian Gardens
Dundee DD4 9QZ
Tel: 01382 501 972
Email: dundee@opfs.org.uk

OPFS Falkirk

68/70 Forgie Crescent,
Maddiston, FK2 0LZ
Tel: 01324 711 271
Email: falkirk@opfs.org.uk

OPFS Glasgow

6th Floor Standard Building
94 Hope Street
Glasgow G2 6PH
Tel: 0141 847 0444
Email: glasgow@opfs.org.uk

OPFS Lanarkshire

39 Civic Square,
Motherwell, ML1 1TP
Tel: 01698 239 961
Email: lanarkshire@opfs.org.uk



**One Parent
Families Scotland**
changing lives, challenging poverty

Together we can make a difference to children's lives.
Support the work we do by donating. <https://donate.opfs.org.uk>



www.opfs.org.uk

Lone parent helpline: 0808 801 0323 Helpline email: helpline@opfs.org.uk

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