

Single Parent Families Impact Report

Issue 34

Spotlight: OPFS Holistic Family Support

November-December 2025

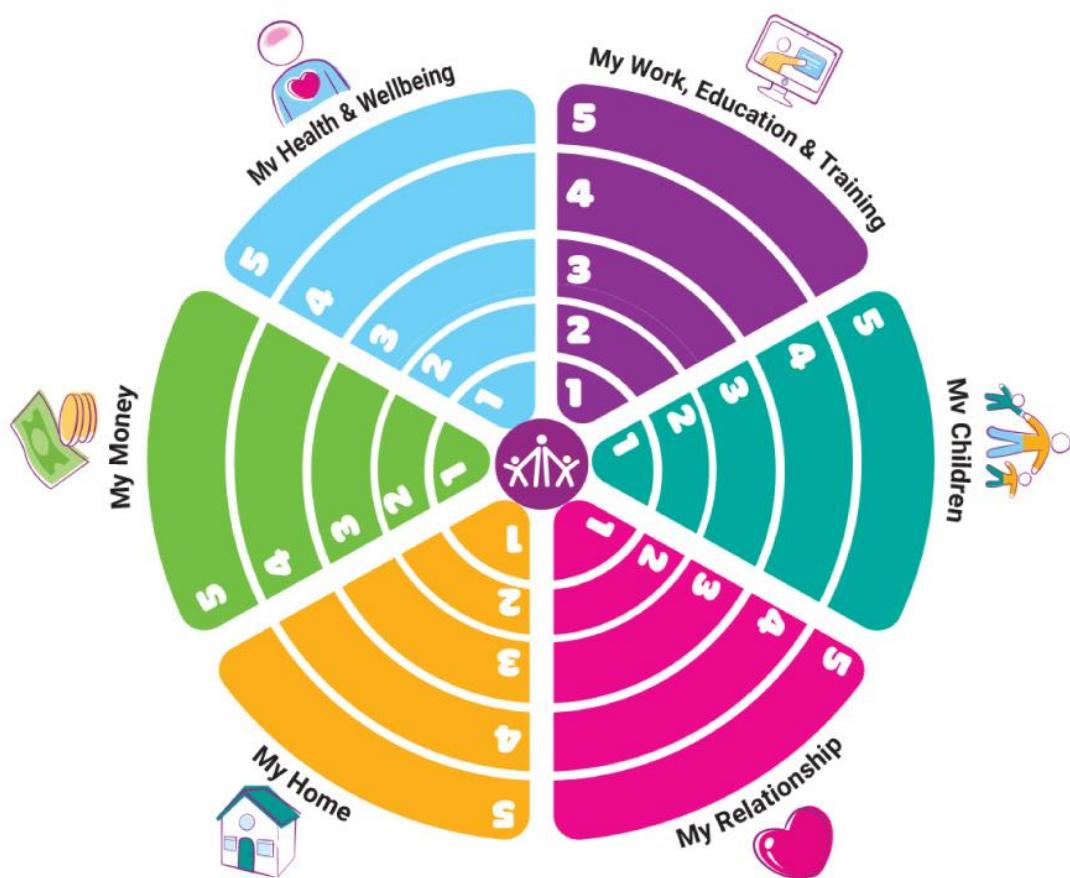
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Introduction

One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) gathers the experiences of single parent families across Scotland through our seven local services, our national Advice and Information service and our digital support. This gives us an early warning of the key issues affecting families. We describe in our reports how OPFS responds to these challenges.

OPFS publishes **four reports annually** to highlight emerging issues faced by single parents across Scotland. These reports are structured around our six **My Life and Me (MLAM)** areas, which represent the core themes of support within our services. It is crucial to bring attention to these barriers, as doing so amplifies the lived realities of single parents and ensures they remain at the centre of the support and policy decisions that affect them. The six core MLAM themes are as follows:



Each report highlights **two or three of the most prevalent MLAM areas emerging from our local services**, along with our responses to these.

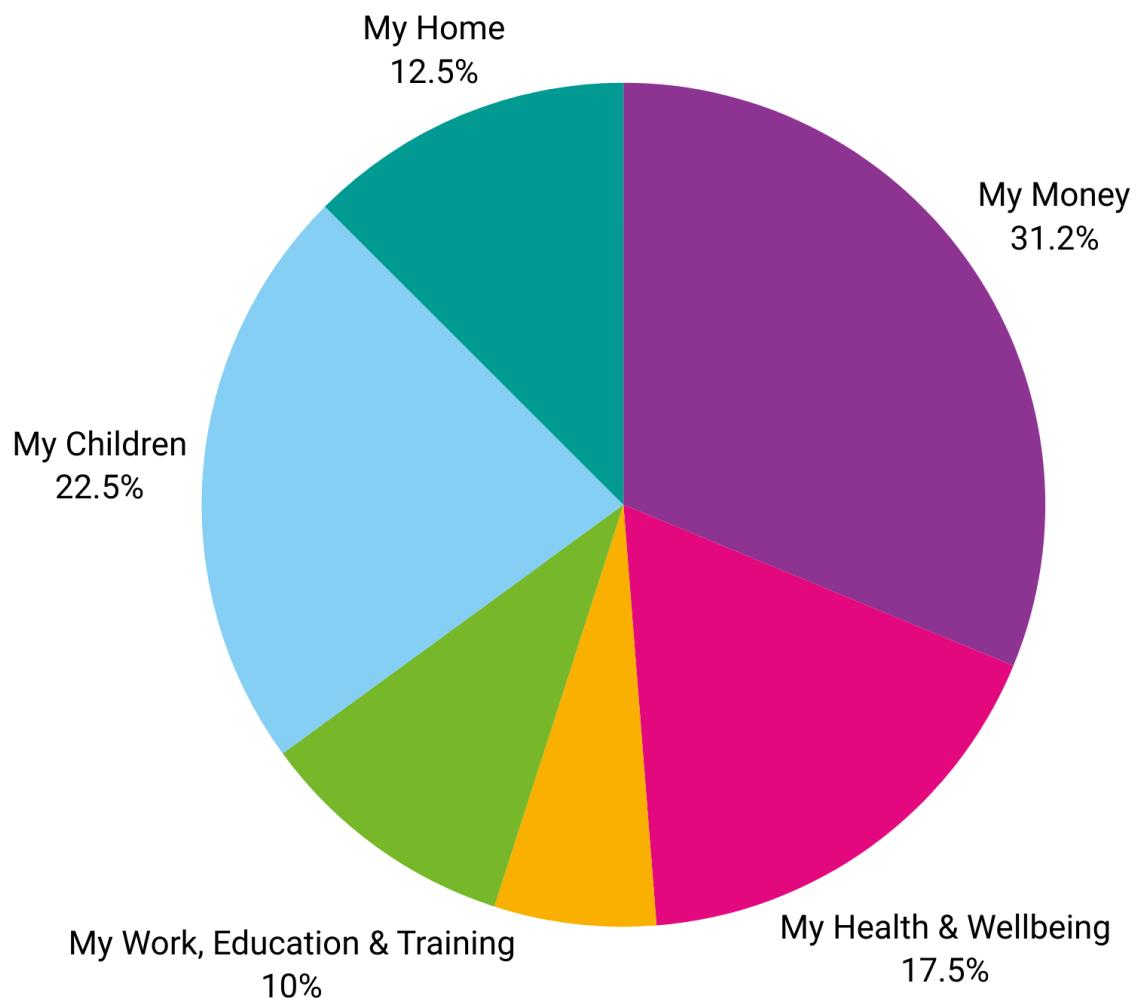
In the spotlight section, we share the expertise of a single parent that has been supported by OPFS. They share their experience of our service approach and its impact on their family.

In this edition, a single parent shares their experience of the OPFS Holistic Family Support approach, demonstrating how tailored, holistic support can address multiple areas such as My Money, My Health & Wellbeing and My Children. This highlights the interconnected nature of the support offered through our services.

Methodology and overview of key emerging issues

OPFS local services and our national telephone and online Advice and Information services have supported families with a wide range of issues over the past two months.

Data from our national Helpline, local face-to-face services and digital support was analysed to identify the most prevalent issues impacting single parents during November-December 2025. The three MLAM areas most frequently reported were **My Money, My Children and My Health and Wellbeing, as illustrated below**



These three areas are explored in more detail in the next section of this report.

1. My money

Key challenges:

- Rising fuel and utility costs during winter months.
- Christmas-related expenses making it hard for parents to cover essentials such as food, fuel and clothing.
- Housing costs mounting, such as deposits, rent and Discretionary Housing Payment applications.
- Confusion around benefits entitlements.
- Stress navigating the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) due to unfair or inconsistent payments, leaving households financially strained and children at risk of poverty.
- Bursaries, student loans and apprenticeships reducing or affecting Universal Credit entitlement, leaving single parents disadvantaged compared to two-parent households who can share childcare responsibilities.



I do worry about the financial situation a bit less since I've started picking shifts [after attending employment training].

Single parent, Falkirk

OPFS responses:

- Financial health checks routinely offered to ensure parents are getting all the money they are entitled to.
- Giving advice about child maintenance, ensuring parents are fully aware of their rights and how to access support.
- Signposting parents to local support services such as food and clothing banks.
- Guidance on accessing emergency support such as food and fuel vouchers.

- Linking families to our **money and debt advice service** to manage day-to-day financial pressures such as budgeting.
- Linking families to charitable grants (Fuel Bank Foundation, Glasspool, Aberlour).
- Offering groupwork support and events focused on supporting parents to improve their financial capabilities, energy efficiency and housing situation.
- Mental health and wellbeing support to help families cope with financial stress.

Outcomes:

Parents reported feeling less isolated and trapped after receiving financial support. Emergency grants and budgeting support helped stabilise household finances. Increased access to entitlements and hardship funds reduced stress and improved wellbeing.

2. My children

Key challenges:

- Child maintenance queries and fairness of arrangements.
- There is a mental health impact on parents raising children with Additional Support Needs (ASN).
- Separation resulting in emotional strain on children.
- Teenage behavioural challenges and medical conditions affecting school attendance.
- Childcare access barriers continue to be an issue due to a lack of affordability and availability. There are long waiting lists for childcare, including after school clubs.
- Blended family tensions including between stepchildren and stepparents, but also with abusive ex-partners.



We need better after school clubs as there is always a waiting list.

Single parent, Angus

OPFS responses:

- Local OPFS teams across Scotland offer face-to-face meetings where parents receive tailored one-to-one family support. This includes practical advice and emotional support to navigate complex issues such as child maintenance, ASN provision, separation and children's wellbeing and development.
- Support for parents navigating court, education and local authority systems, building confidence to advocate for their children effectively.
- Advocacy for greater ASN provision and childcare services.
- Listening to and supporting parents through the day-to-day management of blended family dynamics and teenage behavioural challenges.
- Peer support and family programmes that strengthen parental resilience and create a sense of community.
- Support for parents to help them find appropriate childcare through our Childcare Connector Service. You can [find out more in our previous Impact Report which spotlights our Childcare Connector Service.](#)
- Support for parents of children who are not attending school, involving a comprehensive approach in which all parties are on board with solutions.
- Support with applying for charitable grants to buy essentials for children with ASN such as sensory toys that support regulation and wellbeing

- Signposting and supporting access to Trauma Informed Parenting strategies and CAMHS resources.

Outcomes:

Parents felt less alone, built friendships through peer groups and became better informed so they could support and advocate for their children, improving overall family functioning and wellbeing. Improved access to childcare enabled parents to return to work or study. Children with ASN benefitted from sensory resources, improved routines and emotional support.



The best thing that they [OPFS] did for me and my son was they guided me in the right direction for me to get funding for new flooring and sensory toys for my ASN boy.

Single parent, North Lanarkshire

3. My health and wellbeing

Key challenges:

- Isolation and anxiety, often triggered by trauma or parenting stress.
- Mental health struggles such as depression, low mood and stress from parenting alone.
- Difficulty prioritising personal wellbeing, particularly while caring for children, compounded further if there is disability or ASN within the family

- Basic needs often go unmet, with parents struggling to access nutritious food, baby essentials and the support needed to look after their own wellbeing.



Everyone at OPFS has been so friendly, kind and helpful. From involving me in groups with other single mums, where I have met new friends to helping me fill out forms and build my confidence, but also making sure I'm getting everything I'm entitled to and setting up a funded crèche for my wee boy so I can get a bit of me time.

Single parent, North Lanarkshire

OPFS responses:

- Encouraging parents to access wellbeing groups and one-to-one support. This aids parents in developing strategies for tackling life's challenges and helps to reduce feelings of isolation.
- Referring parents to our counselling service and supporting them to follow up with more specialist support where needed. This helps parents to develop practical strategies for managing low mood and stress.
- Creating safe spaces for parents to connect and decompress through peer support groups.
- Partnering with services like SAMH, Breathing Space and How It Felt for mental health support to ensure parents access the right support for them at the right time

Outcomes:

Parents reported improved routines, reduced isolation and better emotional wellbeing. Peer support networks led to improved relationships between parents and their children. Children benefited from more stable home environments and supported parents.

Spotlight: Holistic Family Support



I am happy with the progress we all [my family] have made [...]. After attending three days [employment and training] workshop, I've [also] learnt a couple of good skills [to] manage things in my life. Thank you again for all your support

Single parent, Falkirk

The Scottish Government's vision for '**Whole Family Support**' is based on the idea that families thrive when their needs are understood and supported together, rather than in isolation. This approach emphasises early help, prevention and coordinated support across different areas of a family's life, including finances, housing, wellbeing and children's development.

OPFS's **My Life and Me** model aligns closely with this vision. Developed directly with single parents, the framework identifies six priority areas that matter most to day-to-day stability and long-term wellbeing. Targeting provisions in these areas ensures that support is responsive, relevant and joined-up.

This wraparound support includes meeting urgent needs such as crisis grants and food vouchers; supporting children through clothing referrals and educational needs; improving emotional wellbeing support through GP and mental health referrals, OPFS' counselling service, groups and one to one support; and providing longer-term help with housing and employability.

By working this way, support is tailored to the needs of the entire household and addresses interconnected challenges rather than treating issues in isolation.

Case study: As told by our services

The following story illustrates how OPFS supported a parent through flexible, early and relationship-based Holistic Family Support, working alongside statutory services to prevent crisis and reduce escalation.



[This has] impacted [me] 100% - OPFS put me on the right track, me, my family, my life.

Eric, single parent, Edinburgh

Eric's story: a single father who relocated to Edinburgh

Background

*Eric is a single parent to five young children. He recently relocated to Scotland from Rwanda and has since been living in Edinburgh. At the time of reaching out to OPFS, he was already in contact with multiple departments like employability, welfare rights and family support to address urgent needs for his family.

Eric and his children are currently living in temporary homeless accommodation in Edinburgh, in a guest house. This arrangement is far from stable as he has already had to move twice.

Eric has limited access to local support networks and community resources. He also struggles with a language barrier. All of these challenges are disrupting his children's education and making it hard for them to feel included and settled at school.

Eric reached out to OPFS directly, sharing that his mental health was suffering due to the uncertainty the family was living with, and this was affecting his ability to bond with his two youngest children.

Initial support

In our work with Eric, we used a Holistic Family Support approach, based on our **MLAM** framework.

My Money

We immediately carried out a **full financial health check** and offered income maximisation advice.

Support included:

- Ensuring he was getting all the benefits he was entitled to.
- A successful Scottish Welfare Fund application, which granted him £680 in total.
- Providing crisis food bank vouchers and gifts from our Christmas Appeal.

My Children

We focused on strengthening the **children's wellbeing** within the family.

Support included:

- Enrolling the children in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes.
- Parenting support through referrals to Parent Network Scotland.
- The provision of clothing and toys via referrals to community resources.

My Relationships

We supported Eric to explore how he could strengthen positive relationships within his family.

Support included:

- Identifying any gaps in Eric's local support networks and signposting him to Migrant Help, Ethnic Minority Law Centre and British Red Cross for family reunification guidance.

My Health and Wellbeing

We helped Eric address his mental health concerns, focusing on improving his wellbeing.

Support included:

- Being added to a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) waiting list for the new year.
- Encouraging Eric to engage with his GP for holistic healthcare and scheduling regular emotional check-ins.

My Home

We supported Eric with his **unstable housing** situation.

Support included:

- Drop-in sessions with Shelter Scotland and Turning Point.
- Repairs advice and help to complete housing support letters through engagement with specialist housing support organisations.

My Employment, Education and Training

We helped Eric to make progress with his work and training plans, giving him a more stable foundation for the future.

Support included:

- An employability referral for Eric to discuss training needs and support job applications, improving long term stability.
- Enrolling Eric on a first aid course to strengthen his CV.

***Name changed to protect the identity of the parent.**

Outcomes and impact of support



[OPFS] supported me in many ways - financial, face-to-face meetings, [this is] very crucial. [They also supported with] food banks, clothing banks and toys.

Eric, single parent, Edinburgh

1. Greater financial stability

Eric's financial crisis was stabilised. With increased income and emergency grants totalling £950, he was able to ensure basic needs like food and clothing were met for his family, reducing immediate stress. He told us that the support had made a big difference to his family.

2. Improved wellbeing and reduced stress

With support in place, the strain on Eric's situation was reduced, allowing him to build stronger bonds with his children.

3. Improved confidence

After using the service, Eric grew in confidence, partly because the continuity of his care helped reduce stress. The support offered gave him the stability to focus on his personal development and the wellbeing of his family.

4. Improved health and wellbeing

Even the initial consultation helped Eric feel relief and once solutions were in place, the positive impacts became apparent, as his mental health improved along with his family's wellbeing. The wellbeing of Eric's

children also improved, especially as a result of their new toys and English classes.

5. Better outcomes for children

This early intervention is likely to result in better emotional and stable outcomes for Eric's entire family, as Eric's children are already in ESOL classes and his mental health needs are being addressed.

Reflections from our Heads of Service

Support matters

Eric's story is a powerful reminder that **Holistic Family Support is essential for delivering the right help at the right time**. Families rarely face challenges in isolation. Financial hardship, housing insecurity and mental health struggles are deeply interconnected. Addressing these issues separately risks leaving gaps that allow crises to escalate. A holistic approach ensures that support is coordinated, preventative and focused on long-term stability.

Through our **My Life and Me** framework, OPFS delivered **targeted, tailored support across multiple areas simultaneously**, stabilising finances, improving wellbeing, strengthening family relationships and supporting children's education. This wraparound approach not only met urgent needs, but it also created a foundation for sustainable progress and restored hope for the future.

Early intervention was critical. Without coordinated support, Eric's situation could have worsened, with lasting consequences for his children's emotional wellbeing and educational outcomes. Instead, by working in a way that reflects national priorities for integrated family support, we provided help that was **timely, relationship-based and responsive to his family's unique circumstances**.

This case reinforces a vital truth: **Holistic Family Support is a practical necessity**. When services collaborate to deliver personalised, joined-up help, families are empowered to overcome immediate crises and build resilience for the future. OPFS remains committed to this approach because it transforms lives and ensures that single parent families receive the right help, at the right time, in the right way.



[The] support has been amazing; I've been moving around. I get lost. You guys help me, I'm lucky!

Eric, single parent, Edinburgh

OPFS recommendations

We recognise that there are a combination of policy and operational factors which result in the challenges that families face, but we know that change is possible. Below, we have outlined what we believe must happen so we can all get it right for all single parent families.

OPFS is calling for action across the following areas:

Holistic Family Support:

- Increased funding for income-maximisation services, with targeted investment in services which are best able to reach priority families.
- Strengthened partnerships and collaborations between services - for example between the voluntary sector and the statutory services who work directly with single parents.
- Fair, multi-year and sustainable statutory funding for holistic family support services.

Early intervention and prevention:

- Early intervention support that is offered before crises emerge, for example to help single parents with transition periods such as starting education or training.
- Support for parents to build the confidence and skills they need to navigate complex systems independently.
- Statutory bodies should also work to ensure that systems are simplified and tailored to the needs of users.

Employment support:

- Access to sustainable, family friendly employment, which pays the Real Living Wage at a minimum. This should be achieved through specialist employability support and actions to reduce inequalities in the labour market.
- Support to pursue career progression through provision of in-work training and mentorship opportunities.

Housing:

- Enhanced provision of safe, affordable and sustainable housing for families across Scotland, ensuring that no child is left growing up in temporary accommodation.

Advocacy and education:

- Improved awareness of single parents' unique needs and rights among decision makers, statutory bodies, service providers and single parents.
- Access to improved resources, such as clear, accessible guidance on childcare funding, welfare entitlements and ASN provision.

Conclusion

Single parents across Scotland continue to face significant and overlapping pressures, particularly during the winter period. **Rising living costs, increased fuel and food expenses, housing insecurity and ongoing challenges with the benefits and child maintenance systems are placing many families under severe financial strain.** These pressures are closely linked to concerns about children's wellbeing, access to affordable and appropriate childcare, ASN and parents' own mental health, creating a cycle of stress that is difficult to break without timely support.

The experiences captured in this report reinforce the reality that **financial hardship rarely exists in isolation**. Difficulties with money often sit alongside anxiety, isolation due to language barriers and challenges supporting children through separation, disability or disrupted education. For many single parents, navigating multiple complex systems while parenting alone can feel overwhelming, particularly when support is fragmented or inconsistent. This highlights the importance of services that recognise and respond to the full context of a family's life.

Eric's story demonstrates the transformative impact of OPFS's Holistic Family Support approach. By working flexibly across our 6 MLAM areas, OPFS was able to provide Eric with stability at a critical point for his family. Early intervention, trusted relationships and coordinated support helped to reduce immediate crisis, improve mental wellbeing and create pathways toward longer-term security, integration and independence for both Eric and his children.

A consistent theme throughout this reporting period is the value of holistic, relationship-based support that is preventative rather than reactive. When single parents receive clear advice, advocacy and emotional support, they are better able to access entitlements, make informed decisions and build resilience. Peer support and practical assistance navigating complex systems both not only improve outcomes for parents but also create more stable and nurturing environments for children.

OPFS continues to call for a coordinated national response that reflects the interconnected realities of single parent families' lives. This includes action to address early intervention support, sustainable family friendly employment, improved support for families with ASN, secure housing and sustained funding for holistic family services. Investing in early, Holistic Family Support is essential to preventing families from reaching crisis point and ensuring that single parent families across Scotland are supported to thrive.

This report demonstrates that when support is centred on the lived experiences of single parent families, and delivered through a holistic family lens, it can lead to meaningful and lasting change. Through our services, OPFS remains committed to amplifying single parent voices and working towards better outcomes for children and families across Scotland.



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

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