

Single Parent Families Impact Report

A woman with long brown hair is holding a baby. The woman is wearing a light blue patterned top. The baby is wearing a white patterned shirt and light-colored shorts. They are outdoors with green foliage in the background.

Issue 35

Spotlight: Supporting single
parents into good jobs
January - February 2026

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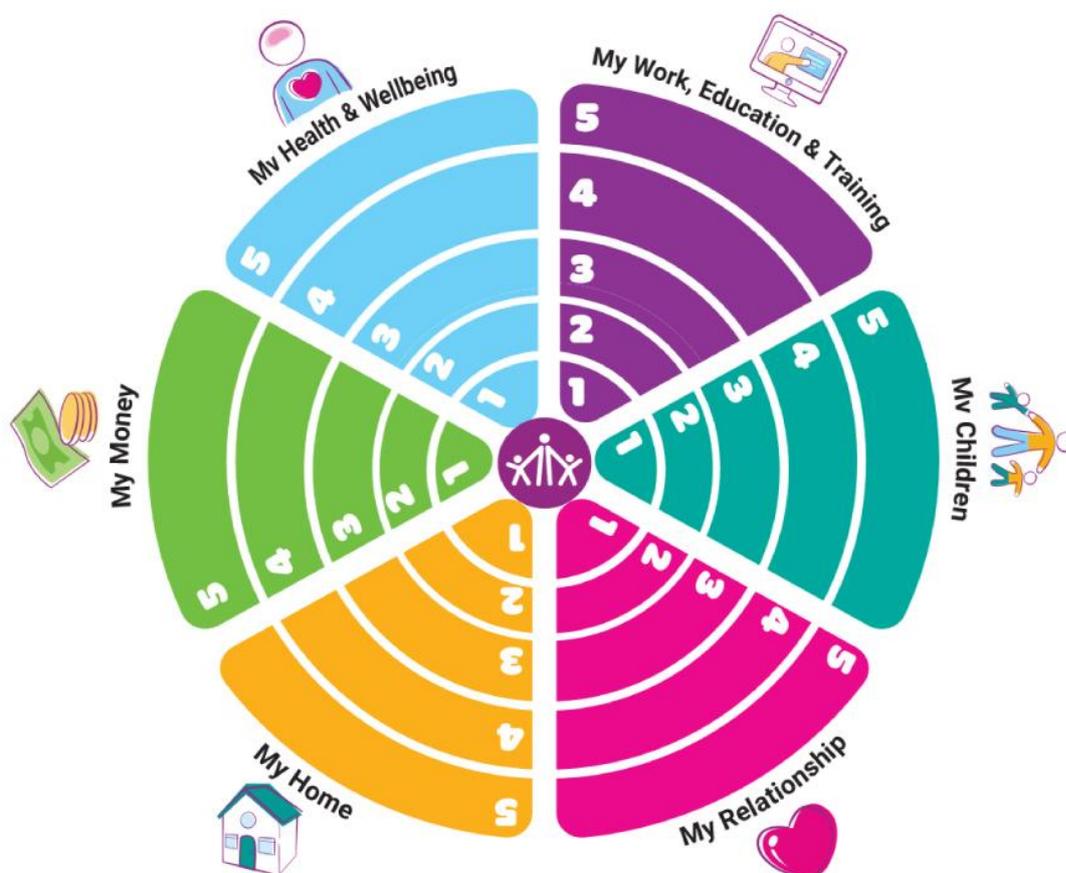
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Introduction

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:



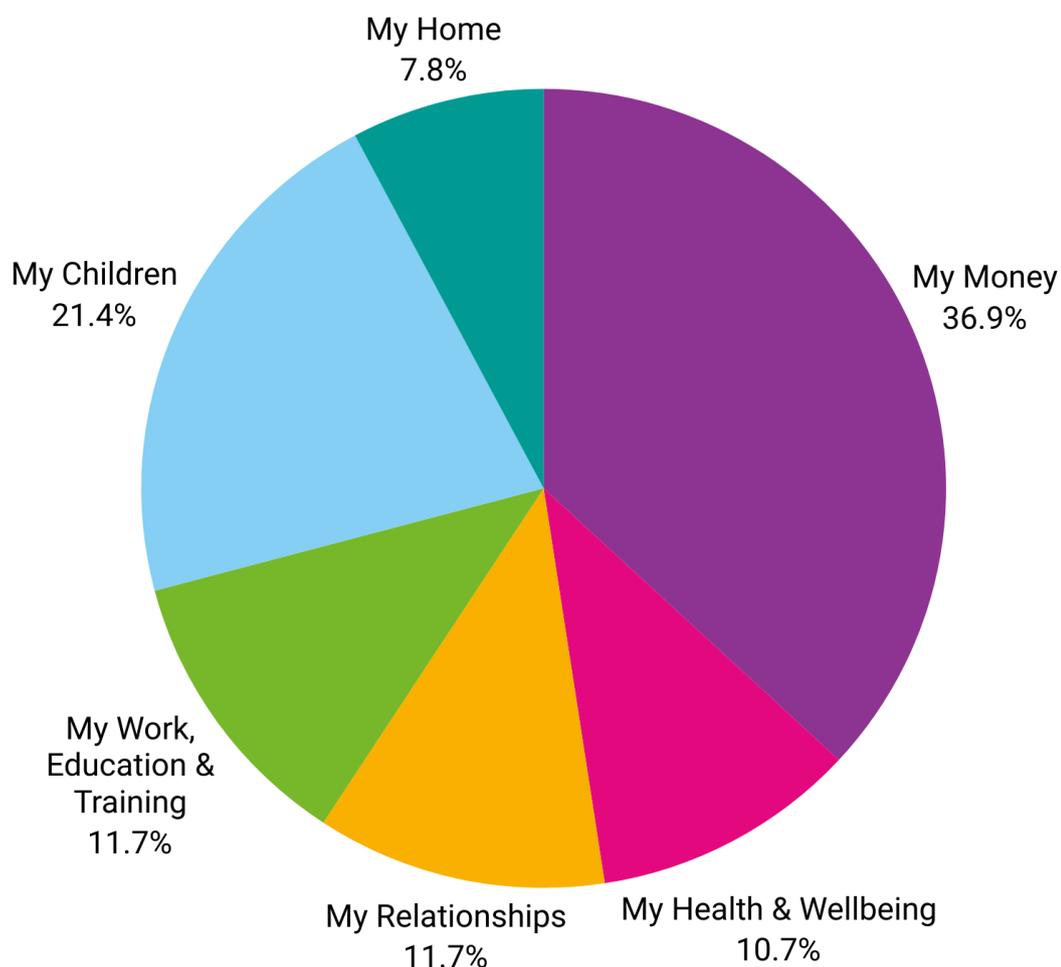
Each report highlights **two or three of the most prevalent MLAM areas emerging from our local services**, along with our responses to these.

The spotlight section in this report highlights a single parent's experience of the OPFS Lone Parent Employment Pathway. It showcases a co-produced, whole family approach that supports single parents into sustainable employment that can be adopted more widely by employers.

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 January - February 2026. The three MLAM areas most frequently reported were **My Money, My Children and My Work, Education and Training**, 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.
- Parents struggling to afford essentials such as food, fuel, nappies and travel.
- Delays, sanctions or errors in Universal Credit (UC), including missed appointments and backdated deductions.
- Parents awaiting first UC payment experiencing crisis-level hardship.
- Child Maintenance Service (CMS) problems such as underpayment, non-payment, confusion about entitlements and disputes.
- High upfront childcare costs preventing parents from entering employment.
- Parents with no recourse to public funds facing severe financial insecurity.
- Debt pressures including council tax arrears, Christmas-related debt and financial control within abusive relationships.
- Parents needing essential household items (beds, prams, flooring repairs).
- Confusion about benefit interactions such as Carer Support Payment reducing UC.

OPFS responses:

- Financial health checks routinely offered to ensure parents are getting all the money they are entitled to.
- Support to help parents understand benefits such as UC, Scottish Child Payment and Carer Support Payment.
- Signposted to the Scottish Welfare Fund for crisis grants.
- Supported applications for fuel vouchers, foodbanks and pantries.
- Referred to OPFS Money & Debt Advice Service.
- Provided guidance on CMS processes, mandatory reconsiderations and complaint routes.

- Signposted to Turn2Us, Home Energy Scotland, Citizens Advice Scotland and local authority welfare rights services.
- Referred to local OPFS local service teams for ongoing financial and employability support.
- Supported access to financial supports such as grants, the Flexible Frontline Fund and fuel vouchers from Children First.

Outcomes:

Parents reported reduced stress and greater stability after receiving financial guidance and crisis support. Access to emergency funds, benefit checks and help navigating complex systems such as UC and CMS improved confidence and day-to-day security. Many families reported feeling less overwhelmed and more able to manage their household finances.

2. My children

Key challenges:

- Parents struggling with childcare availability, affordability or reliability.
- Children experiencing anxiety, depression or emotional distress.
- Lack of adequate support for children with Additional Support Needs (ASN).
- Lack of support for school attendance issues, leaving parents feeling judged or unsupported.
- Parents needing help navigating contact arrangements.
- Children caught in conflict between separated parents or struggling with step-family dynamics.
- Parents feeling guilty about not providing enough for children due to financial hardship.
- Concerns about how to discuss separation or domestic abuse with young children.

OPFS responses:

- Provided a listening ear and emotional support to parents and carers.
- Guided parents through childcare options, eligibility and funded hours.
- Signposted to school guidance teams and family mediation services.
- Referred to local OPFS family support teams for one-to-one and group support.
- Offered benefit checks to ensure families received child-related entitlements such as Scottish Child Payment.
- Provided advice on managing contact arrangements and signposted to Relationships Scotland, Scottish Child Law Centre and Scottish Government Parenting Plan resources.
- Supported parents with applications for grants to help pay for children's essentials.
- Helped parents understand child maintenance processes.
- Encouraged access to community supports, counselling and wellbeing services.

Outcomes:

Parents reported feeling more supported and confident responding to their children's needs. Guidance on childcare, school issues and emotional wellbeing helped reduce feelings of isolation and conflict. Families told us they had benefited from improved structure and routines and were better able to access appropriate supports for their children.

3. My health and wellbeing

Key challenges:

- Isolation and anxiety, often triggered by trauma or parenting stress.
- Parents struggling to find available childcare due to changing work shifts.
- Parents on maternity leave unsure about future income or benefits entitlements.
- Parents wanting to retrain or return to work but lacking confidence or digital skills.
- Employers docking pay for time off due to child illness or emergencies.
- Parents worried about benefits sanctions if they reduce hours or leave unsuitable jobs.
- Parents returning from living abroad unsure how to navigate complex UK systems such as UC.

OPFS responses:

- Completed back-to-work calculations and explained impact on eligibility for UC.
- Referred parents to local OPFS employability teams for tailored support.
- Provided guidance on flexible working rights and signposted to Working Families.
- Helped parents understand time off for dependants' rules and employment rights.
- Supported parents to explore retraining options and local available courses.
- Encouraged parents to speak to Job Centre work coaches about adjusting claimant commitments.
- Provided financial health checks for parents transitioning into or out of work.
- Offered emotional support and reassurance during employment-related stress.

- Signposted to the OPFS Childcare Connector Service to support parents to enter work or training.

Outcomes:

Parents gained clarity and confidence about employment rights, benefit entitlements and pathways back into work. Support with flexible working, maternity transitions and retraining options helped to reduce anxiety and made work feel more achievable and sustainable.

Spotlight: Supporting single parents into good jobs

OPFS, in partnership with Public Health Scotland (PHS), has developed and is now delivering a new employment pathway designed to support low-income single parents in Glasgow into sustainable jobs, ultimately contributing to the reduction of child poverty.

A key element to the success of this partnership is the fact that the pathway was designed from the outset *by* single parents, *for* single parents, ensuring that their unique needs as sole caregivers and providers for their children were prioritised. Through this co-design approach, the programme tackles key barriers to workforce entry or re-entry, such as limited access to flexible, affordable childcare, gaps in work experience and transportation challenges.

Drawing on OPFS's expertise in supporting single parents into employment, Public Health Scotland were also able to "single-parent proof" their workforce policies, ensuring these policies more closely align with the realities faced by single parents.

This work establishes a framework for scaling single-parent-friendly employment practices across NHS Scotland and other public bodies, creating a model for wider adoption

Single parents participating in the employment pathway programme received:

- Pre-employment training: A six-week OPFS academy programme covering work-family balance, financial planning and essential skills, with guaranteed interviews for participants.
- Paid employment opportunities: 18-month work contract with Public Health Scotland.

- Skills development: Access to SVQ level 2 and 3 in Business Administration with the City of Glasgow College to boost their skills.
- Comprehensive support: Single parent tailored support, such as covering childcare and travel costs.

On completion of this programme, all eight of the parents who participated secured permanent employment within the Business Service area of Public Health Scotland. One participant progressed into further education at university, where they would go on to build long-term career progression opportunities.

Parent spotlight: As told by our services

The following story illustrates the journey of one of the parents who took part in the training academy. OPFS supported her to secure flexible, relevant employment through the programme and continued to work alongside her once she started work, providing ongoing holistic support.



OPFS didn't just help me get a job - they stayed with me every step of the way.

Katie, single mother, Glasgow

Katie's story: a single mother from Glasgow

Background

*Katie is a single parent to her nine-year-old son who has autism, asthma and multiple allergies. Alongside caring for her son's ASN, Katie was also managing her own anxiety and depression. At the time of contacting OPFS, she had been out of work for some time.

Although she had a strong employment history, including senior banking roles, returning to work felt unrealistic and overwhelming.

Katie reached out to OPFS directly, sharing that she wanted to work, but was facing several barriers including low confidence after time out of work, concerns about the impact that working would have on her benefits and worries about juggling work with her caring responsibilities and finding suitable childcare for her son.



I wanted to work, but there were so many barriers that I couldn't see how this could ever happen for me.

Katie, single mother, Glasgow

Initial support

Through the Lone Parent Employment Pathway, OPFS provided early, tailored support focused on stability and confidence-building.

This included:

- A one-to-one employability assessment.
- Advice and guidance.
- Financial inclusion support, such as in-work benefit calculations.

This helped Katie understand how employment would affect her benefits so she could be more confident about returning to work at a pace that suited her and her family.

As her confidence grew, Katie took part in support opportunities to help her reconnect with the labour market.

This included:

- Employability courses.
- Groupwork and peer support groups.
- OPFS co-design sessions with other single parents to help shape Positive Single Parent Friendly Workplaces.

Training Academy

The Training Academy co-designed by OPFS and PHS focused on:

- Confidence-building.

- Skills development.
- Childcare planning.
- Work-life balance.
- Preparing for applications and interviews.

After participating in the Training Academy, Katie secured a supported, 18 month fixed-term role with Public Health Scotland.

Further support

As Katie moved into work, OPFS continued to provide holistic support to her. Katie's needs were at the core of the response, and the support was tailored to her unique situation.

She was supported by accessing:

- The OPFS Financial Inclusion Service for ongoing advice.
- The OPFS Debt Advice service.
- Crisis and housing support.
- Tailored support from the OPFS Glasgow Childcare Connector Service to plan and sustain suitable childcare arrangements.

By February 2026, Katie had progressed into permanent employment and was enrolling in further education, working towards a Business Administration qualification alongside her job.

Name changed to protect the identity of the parent.

Outcomes and impact of support



This is the best thing I have ever done. It has changed my life, for me and my son.

Katie, single mother, Glasgow

1. Greater financial stability

Katie's household income stabilised and increased by around £800 per month. On top of this, she gained access to a workplace pension. As a result, she was able to meet her family's basic needs, such as food and clothing, whilst also beginning to prioritise long-term financial security for her future.

2. Secured flexible employment

With the option of flexible, hybrid working, Katie was able to return to work while managing the demands of raising her children on her own.

3. Improved confidence

As a result of using the service and securing flexible employment, Katie grew in confidence. This was partly because the continuity of support she received before and after entering employment helped reduce stress.

4. Improved wellbeing and reduced stress

As a result of the support, Katie reported improved mental health, increased confidence and a new sense of purpose for both herself and her son.

5. Better outcomes for children

This holistic, tailored support was ongoing and resulted in better emotional outcomes and more stability for Katie's entire family.

Reflections from our Heads of Service

Katie's journey highlights the complex challenges many single parents face when returning to work. It also shows the value of OPFS's holistic approach, which brings together employability support, childcare, financial inclusion and in-work support to help single parents enter, sustain and progress in employment. This not only results in better outcomes for families but contributes to the reduction of child poverty in single parent families.

Reasons for the challenges

- Childcare remains one of the most significant barriers to employment for single parents.
- Complex benefit landscapes create significant anxiety for parents who are considering work.
- Employment often lacks adequate in-work and aftercare support beyond statutory minimums.
- Single parent households face heightened financial difficulty, meaning they have less capacity to absorb shocks such as reduced hours, temporary unemployment or unexpected childcare costs.

Recommendations to alleviate these challenges

- Greater employer awareness, empathy and support for the realities of single parenthood, including recognition of caring responsibilities and additional pressures faced by single-income households.
- Genuine flexible workplace practices, such as flexibility around hours, home or hybrid working and start and finish times.

- Improved advocacy, advice and navigation support to help parents understand their benefit entitlements, employment rights and financial implications of moving into or progressing in work.
- Investment in affordable, accessible and reliable childcare including wraparound and school-age provision that aligns with real work patterns, not just standard hours.
- Ongoing in-work support to help parents sustain work and progress.



[After the support] I began to truly believe that employment was within reach. I felt confident and ready to submit my application [...] for the [...] role.

Katie, single mother, Glasgow

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:

Employment support:

- Support for single parents entering education and training.
- Sustainable, family friendly employment, which pays the Real Living Wage and provides living hours at a minimum.
- Embedding flexible working as standard practice from day one of employment. This includes ensuring flexibility around hours, start and finish times and home and hybrid working.
- Continued provision of specialist single parent employability support that helps parents sustain work and progress.
- Provision of support to pursue career progression through in-work training and mentorship opportunities.

Childcare:

- A childcare system that puts choice for all families at the heart of provision.
- Affordable, accessible and reliable childcare, including wraparound and school-age provision that aligns with real work patterns, not just standard hours.

Conclusion

Single parents across Scotland continue to navigate a complex landscape of financial pressure, childcare challenges and employment barriers. As highlighted throughout this report, the winter period brought intensified strain, with many parents struggling to afford essentials, manage rising fuel costs and cope with delays or deductions in benefits.

The issues emerging across My Money, My Children and My Work, Education and Training demonstrate how interconnected these pressures are. Financial hardship is closely tied to childcare availability, children's emotional wellbeing, parental mental health and the ability to sustain or progress in work. Parents described feeling overwhelmed by navigating complex systems while also managing school attendance concerns, ASN and the emotional impact of separation. These overlapping challenges reinforce the need for holistic support that recognises the full context of a family's life rather than treating each issue in isolation.

Katie's story powerfully illustrates the transformative potential of OPFS's holistic approach. Through the Lone Parent Employment Pathway, she received coordinated support across employability, childcare, financial inclusion and emotional wellbeing. This wraparound model enabled her to rebuild confidence, secure flexible employment and increase her household income. This approach helped reduce stress and created a pathway toward long-term stability for both Katie and her son. Her journey demonstrates how sustained, relationship-based support can unlock opportunities that once felt out of reach.

A consistent theme throughout this reporting period is the importance of early, preventative and joined-up support. When single parents receive clear advice, advocacy and practical help, they are better equipped to make informed decisions, manage uncertainty and build resilience. This not only benefits parents but also helps create a more stable and supportive environment for children.

OPFS continues to call for a coordinated national response that reflects the interconnected realities of single parent families' lives. This includes improving access to childcare through a system that puts families first,

alongside action to support sustainable, family-friendly employment, education and training. Investing in specialist single parent employability 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-focused lens, it leads to meaningful and lasting change. OPFS remains committed to amplifying single parent voices, strengthening early intervention and ensuring that families across Scotland have the support they need not only to cope, but to thrive.



One Parent Families Scotland

changing lives, challenging poverty

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

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