

Transforming Child Maintenance

A fairer system for children and families

Test and demonstration: Exploring the impacts of child maintenance complex case work in Fife

Evaluation Report

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Executive summary

This report documents learning from an evaluation of a local test and demonstration approach to supporting parents with their child maintenance journey in Fife, delivered by Fife Gingerbread as part of the Transforming Child Maintenance partnership. The delivery model involves providing relational trauma informed support and advice intended to support families in Fife to establish and sustain child maintenance arrangements.

Transforming Child Maintenance is a partnership project funded by The Robertson Trust for three years. It is led by One Parent Families Scotland in partnership with Fife Gingerbread and the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) Scotland. Transforming Child Maintenance aims to achieve transformational change to the UK child maintenance system and contribute to tackling child poverty.

Following an evaluation conducted by the Poverty Alliance on the first phase of the Fife based test and demonstration approach between August 2023 and June 2024, this represents a further evaluation to deepen our learning. This evaluation was conducted between August and December 2025 by The Poverty Alliance to explore complex casework support delivered for lone parents in Fife with complex child maintenance issues and impacts for families.

The primary drivers for support are challenging income calculations, significant unpaid arrears and lack of enforcement. Many of the cases are impacted by domestic abuse. A Child Maintenance Project Co-ordinator at Fife Gingerbread acted as a full client representative for 42 parents, dealing with all aspects of their cases and communicating with the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) on their behalf. A key, unique part of the project is the support provided for parents to take cases to a tribunal. In Scotland, there is currently no legal support for child maintenance cases. The Co-ordinator has supported 10 cases to a tribunal between April 2024 and December 2025.

Key findings from the evaluation include:

Critical features of support

Evaluation findings highlight three critical features of the support provided by the project that have underpinned positive outcomes for families: (i) the expertise of the Project Co-ordinator at Fife Gingerbread, (ii) the continuous person/family centred support over time, and (iii) the persistence of the Co-ordinator in dealing with the complexity and challenges of the child maintenance system.

Ongoing support and advice and the adaptability of the Project Co-ordinator to manage a range of circumstances and support needs are both essential parts of the support provided, contrasting to the lack of person-centred support via the UK's CMS (a statutory organisation established in 2012 that manages child maintenance calculations and enforcement of child maintenance payments for families in the UK).

Outcomes and impacts for families

- Positive outcomes for parents include increased confidence, reduced worry and a sense of relief because of no longer having to navigate the child maintenance system alone.
- For parents who have experienced domestic abuse, having someone by their side offering emotional support was a critical aspect of the support received.
- Evaluation evidence demonstrates that with support; all the eight parents' cases had progressed, with two of the eight parents going from having no child maintenance arrangement to having an arrangement in place. There was a strong sense that the CMS was more helpful and responsive after the Project Co-ordinator became involved in the case. Two parents had also started to receive regular payments since being supported to take their cases to a tribunal.
- Without the complex casework support, practitioners and parents reported that many parents would not have been able to manage the complexity of their cases and the child maintenance system alone.

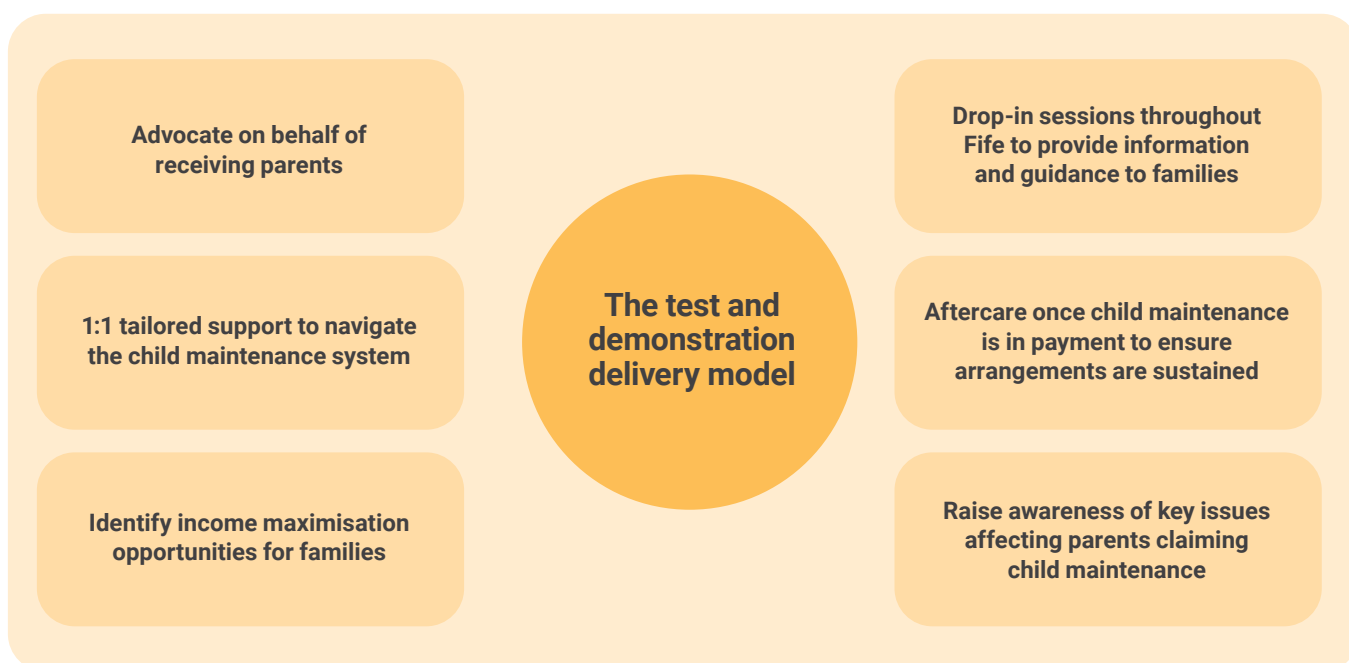
Recommendations

The Transforming Child Maintenance Project is a three-year partnership project funded by the Robertson Trust. The test and demonstration approach led by Fife Gingerbread, as part of this partnership project, demonstrates a critical need for transformational change of the existing child maintenance system. It also provides clear evidence to support the scaling up of local level child maintenance support that enables families across Scotland to establish and maintain child maintenance arrangements that provide better outcomes for children.

About the test and demonstration approach

As part of the Transforming Child Maintenance Partnership, Fife Gingerbread's child maintenance delivery model was introduced in July 2023. It provides one-to-one advice and support to receiving parents¹ living in Fife who are referred to the project internally, from external organisations and there have been self-referrals. The project has a full-time practitioner, the Child Maintenance Project Co-ordinator. **Figure 1** provides an overview of the types of support for parents and young people through the test and demonstration approach adopted.

Figure 1: The test and demonstration child maintenance delivery model



¹ Throughout this report, the term "receiving parent" and "paying parent" are used in line with the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) terminology and with the terminology agreed by the expert parent panels in the Transforming Child maintenance (TCM) partnership.

Referrals to the Project Co-ordinator fall into three categories:

- I. **Primary:** Signposting and requiring only basic level information where the parent moves forward on their journey independently.
- II. **Intermediate:** Requiring limited or short-term support, information and guidance.
- III. **Complex:** Specific and long-term support needs such as domestic abuse, significant unpaid arrears or escalation to tribunal stage after refusals to supersede.

In 2024, an evaluation of the first year of the test and demonstration approach led by Fife Gingerbread provided learning about the delivery of this element of the Transforming Child Maintenance Partnership and how it impacts on families.

The evaluation showed that having a dedicated child maintenance worker at Fife Gingerbread provided the resource and capacity to support more complex cases over a longer period. The complex case work is based on one-to-one, relationship-based support from the Child Maintenance Project Co-ordinator. Fife Gingerbread has long standing experience of providing one-to-one support to single parents. This work sits alongside a range of other projects at Fife Gingerbread that provide whole family support for single parent families.

Evaluation overview

Aims of evaluation

The aim of the evaluation was to explore the impacts of support from the test and demonstration approach led by Fife Gingerbread as part of the Transforming Child Maintenance partnership for families with complex cases in Fife.

Evaluation approach

This evaluation was conducted between August and December 2025 by The Poverty Alliance to explore the experiences of families and the impacts of support, the evaluation included:

- interviews and visual timelines were completed with eight receiving parents with complex casework support from Fife Gingerbread.
- interviews were completed with five receiving parents outside of Fife who would be defined as complex cases to compare experiences without dedicated support.
- an in-person multi-agency focus group with five practitioners including the Child Maintenance Project Co-ordinator.

The visual timelines involved exploring parents' journeys through the child maintenance system before and after the support they have received from the project to. This provided lived experience evidence of complex case experiences over time. Four of the interviews with parents supported through the Transforming Child Maintenance project were conducted in person with the Project Co-ordinator present and the remaining interviews were all conducted online via Zoom or Teams.

Recruitment of participants

Participants were recruited to take part in the research via the Child Maintenance Project Co-ordinator. Ten parents were selected for interview due to being at different stages of complex casework and having varying degrees of complexity. They were provided with information sheets explaining the aims of the research and what taking part would involve. As a thank you for their participation, parents received a £40 voucher of their choice. For the multi-agency focus group, practitioners were also recruited via the Child maintenance Project Co-ordinator. Parents with complex child maintenance cases based outside Fife and who were not receiving specialist support were recruited through One Parent Families Scotland.

Analysis

Interviews and the focus group were transcribed and analysed thematically by a team of two researchers using Quirkos.

Limitations

Due to timescales and resource available, this evaluation is limited to capturing the experiences of approximately a quarter of the parents who have received complex case work support from the project.

Findings

Understanding the need for complex case work support

There are many challenges that families face where there are complex issues related to child maintenance and support provided by the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) for complex cases is often insufficient. Several key reports and inquiries have consistently shown that the CMS is not working for families; the proportion of families with no arrangement in place rose from 25% to 44% between 2012 and 2019.

Parents and practitioners participating in the evaluation shared several experiences that portrayed an uncaring system designed to be difficult for families with complex cases. Figure 2 illustrates the key issues facing parents with complex cases who took part in the evaluation. Words that were used to talk about the system included 'toxicity', 'intimidating', 'minefield' and 'failing'. There are many hurdles that parents face when trying to navigate the system and these hurdles are particularly challenging for parents with complex and often traumatic lived experiences. Over the years, research has shown that the child maintenance system can enable continuing domestic abuse by one parent against another through using the system for economic abuse; for example, through withholding payments and making inconsistent payments. Parents who had experiences of domestic abuse shared the fear they experienced around accessing child maintenance and described a triggering system. For example, one parent with experience of domestic abuse stated:

"I went so deep into everything and pulled everything and hit them [CMS] with it all and just kept firing. You just have to. But it's that it's so draining because you're also having to relive all that abuse. You're doing all this because this is just another fight, right?"

(Parent 5, receiving support from project)

The anxiety of starting the process of contacting the CMS was palpable in this quote:

"I pick up the phone, once, couldn't do it twice, couldn't do it three times, couldn't do it, you know, and I'm constantly going, come on, you've got it today, let's do it. But then you get put on hold. And then it's like 45 minutes...And then you start thinking, no, I don't want to start this again." *(Parent 6, not receiving support from the project)*

For parents, a key frustrating issue is having to engage with multiple case handlers at the CMS therefore having to recount their situation repeatedly, including reliving distressing incidents. At present, the CMS does not provide parents experiencing domestic abuse with a named or dedicated caseworker. In late 2024, the CMS introduced a complex case team; however, this team supports all types of complex cases, not only those involving domestic abuse. There is currently limited information available to parents of how they are referred or access this team. The main contact is via an online portal, which some parents told us worked effectively in the application stage but overall was not accessible or designed to be helpful for parents. In an in-person interview, a parent attempted to show the portal on her phone, waiting for several minutes after logging in, only for the system to log her out immediately.

The onus on receiving parents within the current system to provide evidence was frequently shared by participants. Parents shared that they felt like detectives. In one in-person interview, a parent showed a huge folder of letters and documents that they had kept over years related to their case. A sense of infinite time given and lost to the child maintenance system emerged as a key theme in the interviews; particularly as almost all the cases had no definitive end in sight. One parent supported by Fife Gingerbread to take a case to a tribunal, shared the 'long process' of building up the evidence for the case:

"...was just all things like screenshots on WhatsApp you know where he would say he was taking the kids and then had cancelled, and it was such a long process you know going back through all WhatsApps and building up the evidence."

(Parent 12, receiving support from the project)

Issues with the current system led to confusion, frustration, emotional toil and lack of trust in the system. Poor communication underlined the systemic issues, with parents often left to try and make sense of inconsistent and confusing correspondence from the CMS. One parent shared confusion about the low level of payment she was receiving for arrears of child maintenance payments via the CMS.

"Nobody's explained to me why. Nobody even put it in the letter saying like, how is it possible this is the amount he's meant to pay? Why is the payment this when this is what it's on my portal." *(Parent 11, receiving support from the project)*

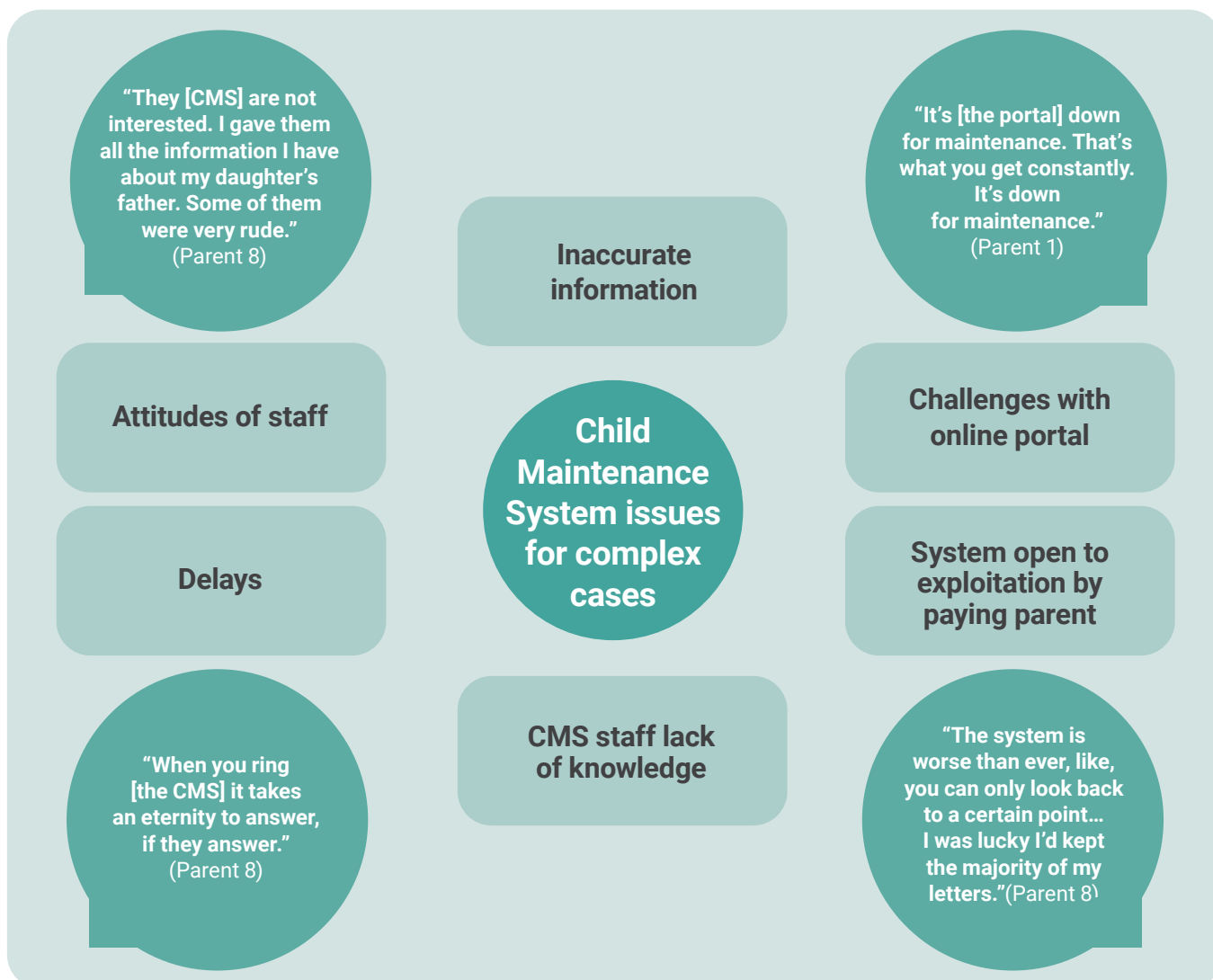
For families living on low incomes, not receiving any child maintenance or sporadic payments, affects their ability to afford essentials for their children and creates stress and uncertainty. Two parents who took part in the research for the evaluation who were living in other areas in Scotland, and therefore not receiving support from Fife Gingerbread as part of this project, shared the financial impacts of not receiving child maintenance payments on their family.

“I think I called them [CMS] during Christmas last year. I was like, oh, I need to buy a gift for my daughter. I’ve not received any money since October.

(Parent 8, not receiving support from the project)

“We were very tight indeed.” *(Parent 12, receiving support from the project)*

Figure 2: Child Maintenance Service issues



Support provided by the Child maintenance Project Co-ordinator

The Child maintenance Project Co-ordinator has acted as a named representative for child maintenance for 42 parents in Fife. For two of the eight parents receiving support who participated in the evaluation, the Co-ordinator acted as a client representative and dealt with everything to do with their CMS case. The other parents were managing their own case to varying degrees, with support being provided at semi-regular intervals as issues arose. These quotes show the range of support provided by the project:

“...I think I bounced ideas off her. I can’t remember. But she was very good in coming back and saying, like, do this and do that and go in and raise your variation.”

(Parent 5, receiving support from the project)

“... she’d never phoned child maintenance herself. She wouldn’t. She couldn’t. She doesn’t want to. She can’t mentally do that. So, like I log into her account. I literally monitor her account for her.” *(CM Project Co-ordinator)*

Complex cases require sustained support over time. Ongoing support and advice is an essential part of the child maintenance project as each stage of a claim represents a new challenge for receiving parents exacerbated by delays and inconsistencies in the CMS system. During the project, the Co-ordinator has supported 75 complex and intermediate cases of which 24 remain active. Parents cases are active until issues resolve, after which there are three-, six- and 12-month check-ins on sustainability of payments.

The core ways complexity plays out within the system are inaccurate income calculations, significant unpaid arrears and lack of enforcement. The Co-ordinator supports with these regularly, often writing complaint letters to the CMS. Case management data shows that underlying these presenting issues, domestic abuse is a barrier for 65% of complex cases (quarterly data August 2025).

In April 2024, the Co-ordinator began supporting cases to tribunal. Four of the eight parents interviewed had been supported by the project to take their child maintenance case to a Social Security and Child Support Tribunal to challenge the amount being received from the paying parent. In total, the project has supported ten parents to a tribunal with eleven more in the escalation process at the time of writing this report.

In addition to providing direct support to families in Fife, the test and demonstration project has included capacity building to upskill practitioners to ensure child maintenance was embedded in touchpoints with lone parent families. Many of the cases Fife Gingerbread supported were classed as primary and training frontline practitioners to better manage these is essential to allow specialists to focus on complex cases. A training session was created called Confident Conversations which uses a children's rights framing approach to train practitioners on how to speak to parents about child maintenance.

The impacts of this child's rights framing on referrals of complex cases to the Project Co-ordinator by internal and external practitioners was evident in the focus group as illustrated here:

"I think that helped me as well to kind of raise it to women... You can see the penny dropping when they go, oh yeah, actually, yes, I will do it then" (*Practitioner 4*)

Impacts and outcomes for families

Aims of evaluation

Analysis of the data from the interviews and focus group identifies a range of outcomes and impacts for families which are now examined. A key finding is that, without the project, many of the parents likely would not have been able to manage the complexity of their cases and the system alone. A practitioner in the focus group highlights this point here:

“I don’t think many women would have gone forward without, without that kind of support. I think they would have felt that was too big a thing to do. So, I think, definitely, I think the women that I’ve referred in to [Project Co-ordinator] have had more success with getting child maintenance and actually taking it forward...” *(Practitioner 4)*

Many of the parents, who were aware that this support was new and did not exist outside of Fife, shared the sense of luck they felt to have access to the project.

“I have never heard anyone say anything positive about phoning the Child maintenance [Service], and I speak to so many women, and we share stories on the groups. Women all around Scotland are having issues. We are lucky to be in Fife and to have [the Project Co-ordinator].” *(Parent 12, receiving support from the project)*

All eight parents being supported by the Fife Gingerbread project had experienced periods of no payments, irregular payments and fluctuating payment amounts before their referral. **Table 1** shows the status of parents' child maintenance before their referral to the project compared to when the evaluation was conducted.

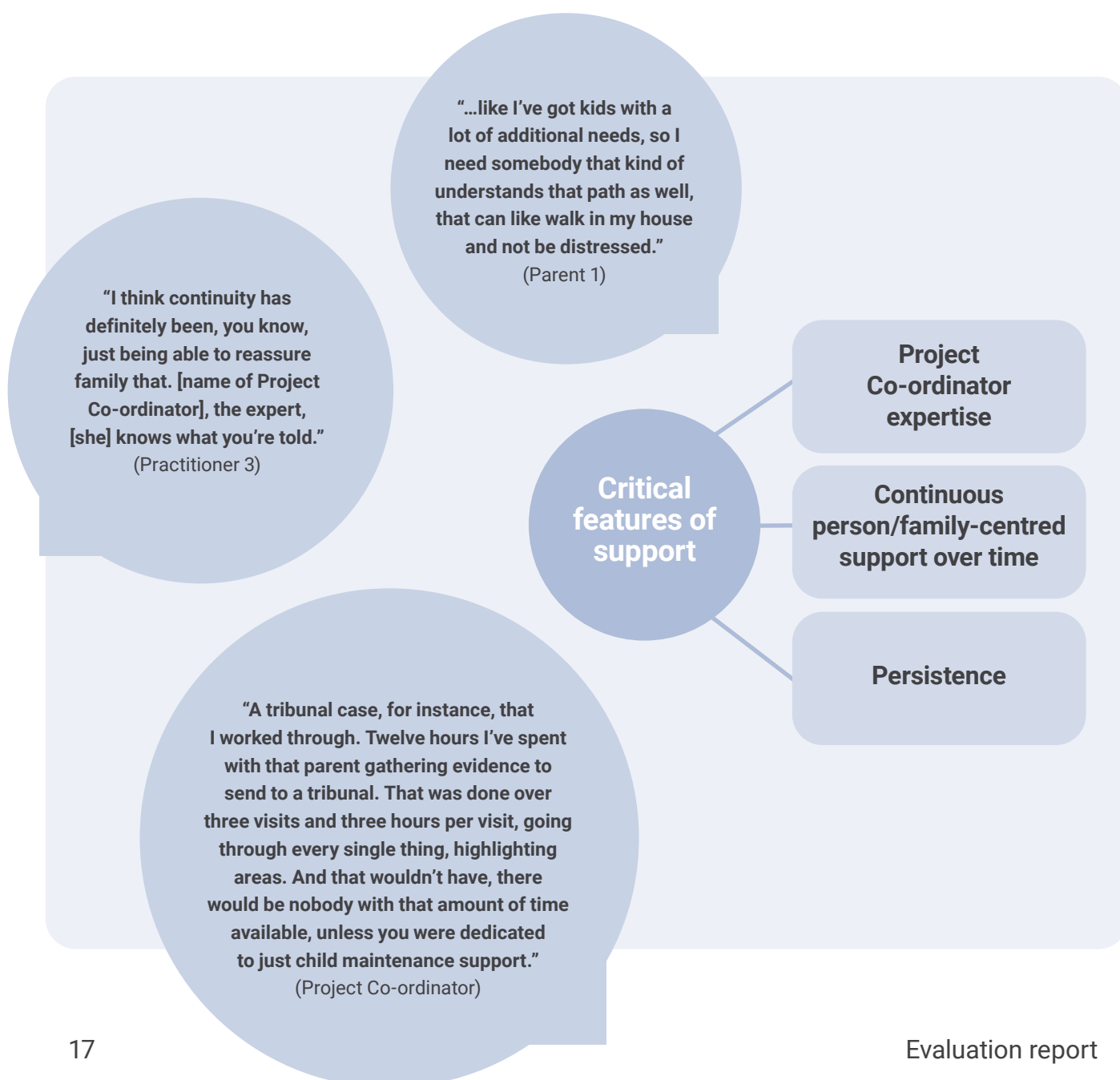
Table 1: Parents' child maintenance circumstances before and after receiving support from the project

Parent code	Before	At time of interview
1.	No arrangements	Received first payment recently
2.	Periods of no payments via CMS Direct Pay and Collect and Pay	Went to court and since has received irregular payments. Waiting to go to court again
3.	Periods of no payments via CMS Direct Pay and Collect and Pay	Brief period of payments but not receiving payments currently
4.	Put in claims years ago and 'never really heard anything back from it'	Received some payments but issue arose where they could not find the paying parent's address
5.	Reduction in amount of child maintenance being received	Awaiting tribunal
10.	Not receiving payments via CMS	Received some payments in recent months
11.	Reduction in amount of child maintenance being received	Current investigation of paying parent. Started receiving some payments in run up to court date
12.	Reduction in amount of child maintenance being received	Payments received after tribunal

For the eight parents who took part in the evaluation interviews, the outcomes of support went further than financial impacts, such as receiving some or more regular child maintenance, and included a range of positive outcomes such as confidence and feeling emotionally supported.

Figure 3 shows the critical features of support underpinning the project that emerged from the analysis of the interviews and focus groups: (i) the expertise of the Project Co-ordinator at Fife Gingerbread, (ii) the continuous person/family centred support over time, and (iii) the persistence of the Co-ordinator in dealing with the complexity and challenges of the child maintenance system.

Figure 3: Critical features of the test and demonstration approach adopted in the Transforming Child Maintenance partnership



Progression of cases

Navigating the child maintenance system

The critical features of the test and demonstration approach highlighted above (expertise, person/family centred, continuous support and persistence) impacted on the progression of all the parents' cases. Some of the parents' cases had come to a standstill prior to their engagement with the project. In both the focus group with practitioners and in interviews with some of the parents, there was a strong sense that the CMS was more helpful and responsive after the Project Co-ordinator got involved in the case. In a couple of interviews, parents shared that the CMS was resistant to having the Co-ordinator added as a representative and in one interview, a parent shared that the CMS did not take their experience of domestic abuse into consideration until the Project Co-ordinator got involved. they experienced around accessing child maintenance and described a triggering system. For example, one parent with experience of domestic abuse stated:

“And it really does make a big difference because I struggled and then once they [Fife Gingerbread] came in, because it is somebody bigger than myself, they [CMS] are more willing to talk to you.” *(Parent 2, receiving support from the project)*

“Since [Project Co-ordinator] got involved...they're actually more willing to talk to me than they've ever been before in the entire time I've had them. I just get told I'll never see a penny normally and they'll get back to me when they get back. And it's never actually got this far ever since 2021.” *(Parent 2, receiving support from the project)*

“Most of the time, a parent has already told them [the CMS] this stuff, or uploaded the evidence, or asked the question, yeah, and got the wrong answers or put the wrong way. I am doing no different. I just have a title.” *(Project Co-ordinator)*

The Co-ordinator's expertise of child maintenance legislation and policy was also pivotal to the progression of parents' cases. When discussing key highlights or successes of the project, one of the focus group participants said: "It's having a champion. It's someone to fight in your corner...Who knows what they're doing and she's not afraid" (Practitioner 3).

As mentioned previously, primary drivers for complex casework support are challenging income calculations, significant unpaid arrears and lack of enforcement often involving writing complaint letters to the CMS. Many of these cases are impacted by domestic abuse. Challenging income calculations is particularly complex when a paying parent is self-employed. One parent had received no payments via Direct Pay before their case was moved to Collect and Pay. She explained that she was told "you'll probably never see a penny" by the CMS because the paying parent was self-employed. This parent was told by the CMS that they could not find the paying parent's wages via the HMRC and advised her to report the paying parent to the tax office.

Raising a variation in income with the CMS and the CMS not taking this forward was a common theme in the interviews. In these instances, the Project Co-ordinator's role was one of persistence, through advocating for parents, raising complaints, and encouraging parents. For example, one parent said: "I'd say to [Project Co-ordinator], that's them [a variation in income] rejected. She'd be like, raise them again. So, I raised them again" (Parent 5, receiving support from the project).

Progression of cases - Tribunals

In Scotland, there is no legal support for child maintenance cases. The continuous support from the Project Co-ordinator to build the evidence for a tribunal and to support the parent over lengthy periods of time to get to this stage has been a critical part of the project. Two of the parents described their journey and the support they'd received to prepare for their tribunals:

"She [Project Co-ordinator] was able to look through the court papers, which parts were relevant, write a letter. I wrote a letter with her help, we screenshotted that... Basically, the whole process, she was leading the whole process... I just wouldn't have even known where to start if it hadn't been for her." *(Parent 11, receiving support from the project)*

"Because I'd said to her, 'can I do this all by myself and just come back and forward with you because I want to know how to do it myself?' And she [Project Co-ordinator] said, 'just keep pinging me, just ping me the stuff and I'll ping you back'. And when I sent her the 16 directions, and she was like, 'that's brilliant'." *(Parent 5, receiving support from the project)*

Positive outcomes for parents

All the parents contrasted their experiences since receiving support from the project with their experiences before. For example, one parent shared feeling 'deflated' and like they were 'banging their head' with the CMS, but since receiving what she described as 'a great support' from the service, she has been given the 'confidence' and the 'strength' to go forwards with her case (parent 11). For many of the parents, there was a sense of relief at now knowing where they stood with their case and not feeling alone, even with the hurdles ahead. In the focus group, a practitioner said: "...It's having that reassurance of like they're not on their own and you're [speaking to the Project Co-ordinator] gonna be there leading the way". When asked what difference the support had made, many parents talked about increased confidence: "Confidence in moving through all that and knowing, there's probably so many people that have been through it, so I'm not alone" (Parent 5). In the focus group, one practitioner said they had 'seen a lot of relief' for parents supported by the project.

Personal/family centred support provided by the project has meant that parents feel that they have someone to turn to. The impacts of having this support on parents' levels of stress and anxiety was clear. For example, in this quote, a parent shared the emotional toil of having to manage her child maintenance case alone prior to the support from the project.

"So, when I was dealing with it on my own, to then, I used to phone my mum in tears, like, I can't keep doing this. Like, it's so, I'm done, I'm drained, like, what am I fighting for? Essentially, nothing, because I'm getting nowhere. And then [Project Co-ordinator] came along, and then we got to tribunal, and they were like 70 pound a week."

(Parent 3, receiving support from the project)

Personal/family centred support provided by the project has meant that parents feel that they have someone to turn to. The impacts of having this support on parents' levels of stress and anxiety was clear. For example, in this quote, a parent shared the emotional toil of having to manage her child maintenance case alone prior to the support from the project.

"Because a lot of people can go into depression because of all this rejection and everything they're [CMS] doing. It is not easy for everybody. Not everybody is strong enough to bear certain things." *(Parent 8, not receiving support from the project)*

In an interview with a parent whose case was being fully managed by the Project Co-ordinator, a sense of relief at no longer having to deal with the CMS was evident:

“that’s [support from the project] been brilliant. That’s been the only reason I can survive this maintenance crap. Because I didn’t understand the portal, I didn’t understand anything”
(Parent 1, receiving support from the project)

For parents with experience of domestic abuse, accessing child maintenance for their children brings fear of continuing abuse. For these parents, having someone by their side giving them emotional support was a critical part of the project.

These positive outcomes contrasted to the situations of five parents interviewed living in other parts of Scotland with complex cases who did not have access to support. Four of these parents were not receiving regular child maintenance payments through the CMS. In contrast to the experiences of parents in Fife, for parents with no access to one-to-one support, navigating the CMS alongside unpredictable payments, whilst being a single parent and often struggling to get by on low incomes, was described variedly as overwhelming and tiring.

One parent had searched everywhere for advice or support after the CMS told her they could not do anything more on her case: “I started asking people everywhere I go to...I just ask them do you know anybody that works on child maintenance?” (Parent 8, not receiving support from the project). After months of trying to find advice, she found an address online and information on how to write a letter to the CMS. Once she wrote a letter, she got a call soon after to say they had tracked the father down. The amount of time that parents with complex cases must spend trying to access child maintenance and the ongoing worry and pressure this puts on families was evident.

“Just worrying, yeah, worrying, is it going to come in this month? Like what’s going on? Why is it all over the place? Why are they saying he has missed payments when they’re collecting, taking it directly from his wages. Are the payments going to stop? It’s just that uncertainty.”
(Parent 7, not receiving support from the project)

Financial impacts

Monitoring data for 89 children and 45 families supported between September 2023 and November 2025 shows that financial gain recorded for all monitored families was £112,515 in November 2025. This aggregate data is not broken down by primary, intermediate and complex cases. When interviewed parents were asked about the impacts of the project, several shared the financial impacts on their family. For example, one parent reported how more regular child maintenance payments meant she could get toys for her child and afford to make packed lunches. Another parent shared the impact of more regular payments as a direct result of the support on the long-term financial security of her family:

“Without child maintenance, without that win, I would have had to have been selling the house...So the support means being able to pay the mortgage...I wouldn't be able to pay the mortgage and that would be me selling the house without the support of [Child Maintenance Project Co-ordinator].” *(Parent 12, receiving support from the project)*

Changes to the test and demonstration project

In the interviews, parents were asked if there was anything they thought could be done differently as part of the project. Across the parents, the main response was that they could not see how the project could be improved in any way. One parent responded:

“Honestly just more [Project Co-ordinator's name] – more [Project Co-ordinator's name] for all the women who are not getting any support and who are out there on their own and trying to fight this system that – it just doesn't work.” *(Parent 12, receiving support from the project)*

A couple of the parents shared that there could be more awareness of Fife Gingerbread and the project locally for example through posters in schools. One parent suggested that more detailed accessible information about the project on Fife Gingerbread's website would be useful: “It doesn't say this is what we can do for you. We've got child maintenance and can help you fill out your forms. It doesn't actually do that” *(Parent 2, receiving support from the project)*.

Conclusions

As part of the Transforming Child Maintenance partnership, the core aim of the test and demonstration approach led by Fife Gingerbread is to establish and sustain child maintenance arrangements. This is grounded in the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child rights to an adequate standard of living and responsibility of parents. The Transforming Child Maintenance partnership believes that fair financial support, wherever possible, from both parents is part of this to give children from separated families the opportunity to flourish.

In conclusion, this evaluation shows that the test and demonstration approach adopted in the Transforming Child Maintenance partnership has delivered a range of positive outcomes and impacts for families with complex cases that it supports with clear evidence of cases being established and sustained as a result. The cases of all eight parents who took part in the evaluation have progressed as a result of the one-to-one case work support (see figure 1). One parent who had no previous child maintenance arrangement, now has an established arrangement in place. With no legal support for parents in Scotland to take their case to a tribunal, the expertise and support provided by the Project Co-ordinator to take parents' cases to tribunal is unique in Scotland. Four of the parents interviewed had been supported to take their case to tribunal to challenge the amount being received. As a consequence, one of the parents had sustained payments in place at the time of the evaluation. The length of time that the process takes to get to a tribunal means that within the timescales of the evaluation it was not possible to track longer-term impacts for all parents.

Evidence from the evaluation shows that there are three critical features of support underpinning the project which have impacted on the progression of all the parents' cases:

- (1) expertise**
- (2) family and person-centred support**
- (3) continuous support and persistence.**

These critical features of support contrast starkly to views on the support provided by the CMS which was often described as uncaring and failing by parents and practitioners. For parents with experience of domestic abuse, the emotional support provided by the project has been critical, with many parents saying they would have not managed to take their case to the CMS or to a tribunal without this. The Child Maintenance Project Co-ordinator role has meant that parents in Fife have someone by their side when navigating the child maintenance system. This support has led to positive long-term outcomes for families including improvements in confidence and reduced stress and anxiety. A sense of luck amongst parents that they lived in Fife and had access to the project was evident in all the interviews.

To conclude, this evaluation supports the Transforming Child Maintenance Partnership's recommendations for a government funded network of regional child maintenance experts in providing face-to-face support for families with challenging and complex cases. For families on low incomes, this financial support can be pivotal. When asked about what more support there could be for parents with complex cases across Scotland, parents who took part in the evaluation were unanimous in their ask for one-to-one casework support to be available to all parents. Long-term government funding would ensure that families with complex cases can access child maintenance support that is continuous and family and person-centred. The evidence in this evaluation clearly shows that the current child maintenance system is not working, preventing families from accessing financial support. Evidence from the Transforming Child Maintenance Partnership shows that child maintenance is a key lever for reducing child poverty as well as realising children's rights to an adequate standard of living under the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child. The findings from this evaluation support the Better for Everyone report recommendations for an extension of the model of support provided through the test and demonstration approach beyond Fife.

"More [Project Co-ordinator's name] would be a great help. It feels like it is just her and it shouldn't be that I get this amazing support because I am in Fife but someone somewhere else has nobody and we are all dealing with the same overwhelming paperwork and the same complex systems and it is intimidating. So yeah more [Project Co-ordinator's name] please." *(Parent 12, parent receiving support from project)*

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Transforming Child Maintenance Partners



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