

**One Parent Families Scotland**  
13 Gayfield Square, Edinburgh EH1 3NX  
**Early Years and Early Intervention Policy Statement**

**Introduction**

One Parent Families Scotland welcomes the policy statement which has been published, but we also have a number of specific comments to make in relation to the proposed task groups.

**Building Parenting and Family Capacity**

**Educating Teenagers about Relationships**

We would suggest that this group should include consideration of the importance of educating young people about relationships with their peers and their families and about the realities of teenage parenthood. One Parent Families Scotland is working in partnership with Scottish Marriage Care to offer this in Falkirk and Dundee through the Respond Project, funded by the Big Lottery Young People's Fund.

**Helping parents to provide a supportive home environment**

It is important to help parents to engage in lifelong learning as an example to their children and also to increase their own education and skills. This is particularly vital for lone parents in the context of the requirement for them to seek employment when their youngest child is 7 in 2010, since their qualifications and skills tend to be lower than parents in two parent families, yet they need higher incomes to have sustainable employment.

It is also vital that parents receive support with their own relationships since that influences their ability to parent.

**Separation**

Reform of the child maintenance system again by Westminster will have an impact on separating families in Scotland. There is an intention to resource face-to-face support for parents as part of this reform and this needs to be looked at. Help for children of separated parents is also needed and currently patchily available.

**Lone Parents with disability**

Lone parents are disproportionately likely to have children with additional support needs and can be under a great deal of financial pressure and strain from isolation as a result.

**Poverty**

Parental and family capacity are much harder to sustain with inadequate income. There is a need to ensure that services in disadvantaged areas are a priority for resources and that welfare rights support is widely available.

## **Communities providing a supportive environment**

### **Play and sports activities**

There is an acute need for play and sports activities, which are accessible, to all families, especially for older children for whom there is often very little available. This is vital for lone parents being required to work when their youngest child is 12, yet living in areas of deprivation and expected to provide adult supervision in school holidays.

## **Integrated Services**

### **Lack of requirement to offer childcare**

The policy statement notes the need to review childcare services to address fragmentation and costs. This too is critical for lone parents required to secure employment. We regret the lack of legal obligation in Scotland to make childcare available to parents in work, education or with children with additional support needs, unlike in England under the Childcare Act. Lone parents unable to find childcare will be confined to low paid employment fitting with school hours, which will not address the child poverty agenda.

### **Extended hours childcare**

One Parent Families Scotland has developed very successful flexible childcare@home service in children's own homes available 7 days a week when other care is not available. This allows lone parents and other families to access a wider range of jobs and training. Such services are currently available in Dundee, Aberdeenshire, Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire and are currently under threat in Fife and Glasgow due to a lack of commitment of funding. Other agencies also offer similar services in Edinburgh, Highland and South Ayrshire. Parents pay an hourly charge for use of the services and only use them for the hours required. Services can also be used very effectively by Social Work to support families under stress.

Children with additional support needs can have particular difficulty accessing group-based childcare, a need that childcare@home services can also meet.

### **Services for two to three's**

In Dundee our services were also involved in a successful partnership with education to deliver crèches for children aged two to three attached to nursery schools. This was a positive model and we would like to see evidence from such services used in the development of future services.

### **Holistic Family Support Services**

Lessons should be drawn from the GIRFEC pathfinders and from the Integrated Community Schools about what are the barriers to holistic work and what encourages it, particularly in relation to health and education services which have the largest resources but may have most difficulty in changing methods of work.

The Working for Families Model demonstrated excellent integration between family support and employability services, based on clear, shared objectives and targets and flexible resourcing on the ground.

### **Information Services**

One Parent Families Scotland has specialist information services for lone parents (lone parent free helpline **0808 801 0323**) and web site ([www.opfs.org.uk](http://www.opfs.org.uk)) and we are keen to ensure that these are made more accessible to parents at a local level. We also have excellent examples of integrated family support services in Dundee and Falkirk.

### **Family engagement in service planning**

We welcome the commitment in this to delivering services in partnership with parents and we believe voluntary sector agencies such as our own have a unique role to play in facilitating this. One Parent Families Scotland has already completed work in this area in relation to parent's experiences of accessing Further and Higher education, experiences of young mums and dads, experiences of lone and contact fathers and experiences of lone parents whose children have additional support needs.

### **Voluntary Sector collaboration**

A barrier to voluntary sector engagement can be the diversity of the sector. The Parenting Across Scotland consortium represents a wide range of national family support organisations to address this.

## **Devolved and non-devolved powers**

### **Lone Parents able to access higher education on benefit**

One area where Scotland has used flexibility in UK welfare policy has been in relation to allowing lone parents to access Higher Education while on Income Support. This has been successfully piloted in Glasgow at Rosemount Lifelong Learning Centre. Lone parents enter higher education as mature students, incur the largest student debts, may well struggle to get well paid jobs due to their caring role and then face having to support their children in Higher Education. Exploring wider Scottish flexibility on this matter with DWP would be helpful.

### **DWP responsibility for benefit take-up**

Take up rates of key benefits for families are acknowledged to be poor. DWP should be pressed to include take up targets in its operational objectives.

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