

**Speak
Out**

**Listening and responding to Young Lone
Parents Information and Support Needs**

A REPORT ON THE CALYPSO PROJECT

(Camelot Lone Young Parents Speaking Out)

March 2004



CALYPSO

Camelot Lone Young Parents Speak Out

This report is designed to give voice to a vulnerable and marginalised group in Scottish society, largely unrepresented and unsung but often stereotyped and blamed.

These are the 20,000 lone parents under 25, representing about 12% of lone parents in Scotland.

Research has shown that young lone parents (YLPs) have various issues which they have to face, but most of the research is not entirely Scottish-based so cannot tell us what the needs of Scottish young lone parents are.

Do the lone parent and other organisations offer the kinds of services and supports needed ?

Are we in touch with the ways of involving and communicating with young lone parents?

The work of the Calypso project and the previous Edinburgh Youth SIP project has given us the opportunity to answer these questions and begin a dialogue with young lone parents in Scotland which we will make sure continues.

Background to the project

The project began with the realisation that we knew little about young lone parents and their needs. We wanted to know directly from them what would help.

Young lone parents (up to age 25) were recruited through organisations and friends to take part in focus groups or individual interviews in Glasgow, Dundee, Edinburgh and Angus in 2003.

They included a spread of ages, people with a disability, young people from urban and rural areas and representation from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The groups expressed their views on the support available to them as young lone parents and assessed information material used by the main lone parent organisations. (See Appendix 1)

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Results from Focus Groups

1. Need for information and support

The YLPs had a wide range of issues about which they needed information and support, relating to their unexpected change in circumstances in becoming lone parents.

To cope initially they said they needed help with money, benefits and Tax Credits, childcare and housing. They had issues to do with pregnancy, childbirth and parenting about which they also needed information and support.

Such things as information on groups and children's activities, emotional support and health issues were raised specifically.

Many were also interested in education and employment and would have liked information on going to college, and issues around work such as New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), whether they would be better off working and how to access childcare.

Very specific issues were raised by individuals; parental responsibilities in relation to the father of the child, CVs and the workings of the CSA (Child Support Agency)

As much as help on specific issues was raised, what often came through was the feeling that their voice was not being heard,

" Being listened to if you are seen to be young" YLP Angus

What do I need?

"Info on money matters" Dundee

"Where to get help" Edinburgh

"What it's like to have a child, and afterwards" Dundee

"How to write a CV and get a job" Glasgow

"Any parent groups that run locally" Glasgow

"What courses I can go to at College that won't affect my benefits" Glasgow


"Children's Clubs and things for the kids to do in my area" Glasgow

Receiving accurate, full information was problematic;

" They only give advice on certain topics" YLP Angus

" Benefits – they are not clear enough" YLP Angus

These comments reflect the frustration of trying to get help, a feeling shared by all groups.

speaking 

"You get six different stories"
YLP Edinburgh.

2. Sources of information and support

These are very wide-ranging and represent many one-off contacts with agencies as well as longer term contact.

The main sources of help and information reported were Health Visitors, family (especially mum), doctors surgeries and the Family Centre in Angus which played a particularly significant role in that area.

Types of agencies reported range through local support services and groups, public services such as Housing, Social Work, Benefits Agency and Schools (teachers) then to employment and careers – related agencies such as Job Centre Plus and Careers Scotland.

The younger age group (under 16) showed a reluctance to accept fully information given by government agencies and felt they were treated differently because of their age.

3. For which issues has it been difficult to access information and support?

“ Just about everything, because it’s hard to get” YLP Dundee

“ All of them” YLP Angus

It was very difficult to get information and support for most of the issues mentioned in the Focus Groups. This was the view of all of the groups.

The reasons for this have already been hinted at above. There was a feeling that agencies could not take a ‘holistic’ view of ‘being a lone parent’ which made it difficult to gather together information and support needed. This was because sometimes agencies, “didn’t know the answer” which led to the need for, “getting support from different places.” The feeling that they were not being taken seriously was again commented on.

I don’t know where to turn!


“What childcare is available in my area” Edinburgh

“Getting help for children with behavioural problems” Dundee

“Sorting out my money problems” Glasgow

“Transport” Glasgow

“How much money I would get in a job” Glasgow

speaking 

“ I spoke to my Teacher, he was great!”
YLP Glasgow

4. Preferences and suggestions for receiving information and support

. There was strong support for receiving information from a group like the Focus Group.

It should be targeted at **Young** lone parents and be verbal rather than in printed form.

Written information should be in a lively format, like the Young Mum's Guide, or in pocket-sized, focussed leaflets in an eye-catching format.

Useful contact information could be included in Bounty Packs, Income Support books or (one suggestion) a newsletter from the Benefits Agency.

There was no great support for a Helpline as there was no desire to "talk to a stranger" YLP Edin. However, one dissenting voice from Angus (rural) said she would *prefer* to talk to a stranger.

Overall, the preferred option was to receive information through the medium of a group.

Advertising of services or information relating to YLPs should be put in places which YLPs might access, such as schools, youth organisations, Benefits Agency, Job Centres, Libraries, Nurseries, Hospitals (in Bounty Packs), Waiting Rooms in Doctors' Surgeries, Social Work Departments, Council Departments, Post Offices, Supermarkets, Chemists, Buses, Free papers and Billboards.

These could be used to highlight new provision, advertise a service or 'signpost' new YLPs to groups already existing.

Health Visitors were highlighted as the main professional group involved in information giving to YLPs.

As they are in the frontline, YLPs would like to see them develop their role as 'signposters'.

Where can I get information?

"Step-by-step leaflets" Dundee

"Like a magazine" Glasgow

"Something small enough that I can put it in my pocket."

Glasgow

"Through the post from different agencies who can help" Angus

"Pick it up when you get on the bus" Angus

"At the Dentist's or Doctor's"
Glasgow

speaking

" Pass on information through other Young Mum's Groups like this one "

Dundee and Glasgow

5. How would you like to be supported ?

“ANY WAY!” YLP Dundee

The sheer force of this comment reflects the strength of feeling amongst this group that there is little support available.

What I'd really like ...

Lone parent groups – offering the opportunity to meet other YLPs, make friends, receive and share information. This could be in the form of a Drop-in centre, a café, or a Young Mum's Group, like the Focus Group.

One-stop shop

Information on - organisations which can help, on benefits and work and higher education courses

More nursery/creche places

People – to take us seriously, who know what to do and really 'understand you'

Schemes such as buddying/befriending, to support 1-1.

Better advertising of services for YLPs.

“Have one particular advisor at the Job Centre who is interested in you, has had children/been a lone parent and can understand what you are going through.”

“I would like to have a mentor or key worker to help me”

“A more secure/easy way to move from benefits to a wage.”

“A way to do higher level college courses without having to come off my benefits and the course costing a lot of money.”

6. Publications/ Leaflets

After looking at a range of publications, the groups came out very strongly in favour of the , 'Young Mum's Guide' published by 'One Parent Families' as it had all the features they were looking for.

“ Pictures of young lassies”
YLP Edinburgh

The GOOD or BAD features in the opinion of the Focus Groups were:

GOOD

YOUNG in the title

Bright colours, eye-catching

Magazine style

Real-life stories – can relate to situations

Clear indication on front of what it's about

To the point – relevant

Not too much writing

Happy pictures of young lone parents (not dreary, sad, stereotypical)

They were not looking for:

BAD

Depressing cover, unhappy people, reminders of being a young mum

Not immediately interesting

Not clear from front page what it's about

Too much dense writing, “wordy”

Subtle colours

Difficult to understand

speaking **o**
“ Someone to take you
seriously”
YLP Angus **n**
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7. Future Work

Each group was asked to fantasise over what they would like to see in the future if money were no object.

The results are as follows:

- *Lone Parent Groups, drop-in, café, follow-on to Focus Groups*
- *Buddy or befrienders Scheme*
- *Magazine*
- *Educate professionals in issues of being a lone parent*
- *Support for YLPs in Higher Education*
- *Free classes for YLPs with creche provision*
- *Improved childcare provision in general but especially to support work or training*
- *Health needs met in local area (rural area)*

Profile of Young Lone Parents in Focus Groups

- 66 lone parents took part in focus groups or individual interviews in Angus, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow.
- Their ages ranged from 14 to 24.
- They were mainly female, with only three males.
- One participant was from an ethnic minority background.
- Three of the group were affected by disability, either their own or their child's.

Conclusion

This study suggests that YLPs are a marginalised group in our society, who lack the key information which would help them address their considerable support and information needs.

There are services and policies in place which could offer support, but as we can see, they are generally not accessed by YLPs.

The study has presented us with the voices of YLPs telling us how we might communicate with them and give support and what significant barriers there are to doing that successfully.

Particularly significant, was the often repeated view that they were not taken seriously because of their age. This seemed to be having an effect on how they could access the support they needed.

As a result of the project :

New publications produced

Project Report

The 'Scottish Young Mum's Guide'

A leaflet on 'First Steps' – initial contacts for Young Lone Parents

Seminars held for agencies :

20/2/04 Glasgow, City Chambers

3/3/04 Edinburgh, Quaker Meeting House

10/3/04 Dundee, City Chambers

At these seminars, young lone parents from the Calypso project will be speaking out and agencies will have a chance to think about how they support young lone parents.

Questions for Agencies

The study poses certain important questions for agencies working with young lone parents. These were used at the Seminars as a basis for discussion of the findings.

The discussion groups at the Networking Seminars in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee were asked to respond to 5 questions resulting from the **Report on the Calypso Project**.

How do you approach young lone parents to let them know about your organisation?

Many agencies described ways of going out into the community to make themselves known, such as a bus in different localities, 'walking about' in local communities and meeting young people on their own terms and in their own setting e.g. gyms. tanning studios.

Information was provided by leaflets in G.P.s Surgeries, libraries and Social Work services or posters in Health Centres.

24 hour information at bus stops and in shop windows were other examples.

Targeting existing groups and linking with other agencies were also used.

Some services have a statutory contact which clients need to meet e.g. New Deal for Lone Parents. This is communicated by letter and is often misunderstood by clients.

What more would you need to know about their needs in general to offer information or a service to them?

There was a need to take a wider perspective and look at social, health and emotional needs. Training for staff was regarded as important so that they are equipped to help young lone parents access services. This would help to avoid making assumptions about needs and lead to better signposting.

A single person to 'buddy' and act as an intermediary was thought to be helpful.

The importance of bringing together organisations to network was stressed so there is shared understanding of roles and again better signposting. (see q.5)

Which lone parent organisations could support you?

The best-known organisations are One Parent Families Scotland, OnePlus and Gingerbread although a wide range of other organisations were mentioned as having a role.

The need for one point of access was seen as important (see 2) especially at the start of pregnancy.

Lone parent organisations were seen as providing information on what is changing as well as being a 'one stop' shop. They have a communication and integration role.

The Underground project in Edinburgh was singled out because of its success with this group.

The needs of young lone fathers were highlighted and OPFS Fathers Project mentioned as one of the few supports available.

Gaps in provision are for specific teenage groups for lone parents and lone parent groups in general.

What changes should you consider to your way of working with young lone parents as a result of this report?

A change in attitude was reported by many, reflected in such statements as;
‘thinking about young lone parents aspirations as opposed to their problems’
‘Stop doing things to or for people and start listening to what people need’
‘Change the way we present ourselves’

More specific changes included;

- using young lone parents to advertise the service
- including all groups e.g. asylum seekers letting them know they are welcome
- using positive images of young people to advertise
- supporting training by the provision of childcare.
- offering different kinds of activities e.g. art, cookery, aromatherapy which could be regarded as preventative as, ‘prevention is better than cure’
- ensuring continuity of service as far as possible being aware of its importance in building trust and meeting needs and aspirations. (The difficulty of sustaining this was recognised with recurrent funding crises in several organisations)

Which other organisations can you work with to address these issues?

A long list of agencies were proposed, with specific comments made about some. The Benefits Agency needed an intermediary; health professionals, GPs need to make referrals; health visitors and midwives to realise that non-medical staff can help their work; Housing departments are short of cash for ongoing support, but could work with other agencies who could provide this.

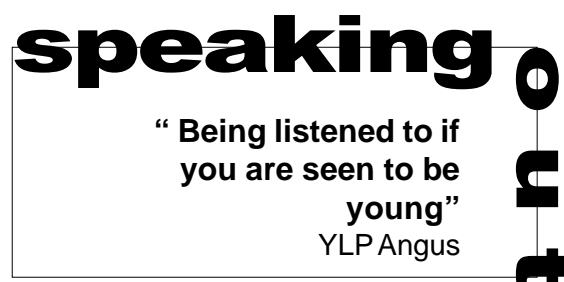
Gaps were recognised in provision for young parents with learning difficulties, also help with relationships.

The importance of networking was stressed with suggestion made for the formation of a network of ‘interested parties’ to follow up the work of the seminars and the project. In addition, online chat rooms and noticeboards were proposed as virtual networking methods. Agencies recognised the value of meetings like the networking seminars and would like something similar to be set up on a more regular basis.

Specific suggestions made were for the contact mailing list from the seminars to be circulated and offers of premises for further meetings. A booklet with city-wide information would be a useful tool on discharge from hospital. This could evolve from a network.

It was felt that there was too much advice from too many professionals offered at a time when young lone parents were at their least confident and lacking in self esteem.

Knowledge of what agencies do seemed to be key to streamlining the whole process and making it easier for young lone parents to get what they seek.



APPENDIX 1

Schedule of Questions for Focus Groups

1. What issues or subjects do you need support and information on?
2. Where do you get your support and information from?
3. What subjects/issues has it been hard to get information on?
4. How would you like to receive information?
5. How would you like to be supported?
6. Also show group a range of publications and Information Sheets presently available from our organisations and seek comments.
7. Consult Focus Group on possible new projects.

Publications reviewed by groups

One Plus

A Guide to Opportunities at One Plus
Holidays for One Parent Families Fact Sheet
K Plus
Solutions Leaflet
Choices Leaflet
Childcare Course Leaflet
One Plus CALYPSO Promotional Leaflet

One Parent Families Scotland

OPFS membership form
OPFS Rights Guide
NEW DIRECTIONS Guide for lone parents
SEPARATION - managing your money
OPFS Annual Report
OPFS Benefits Leaflet (draft)
Young Mum's Guide
Annual Review 2002

APPENDIX 2

Key Recent Research Projects

1. *One Parent Families 'Lone Parent Information Project'*. By Helen Finch. Focus groups in England with lone parents aged 20-24 plus teenage parents, 1999. Contact: 255 Kentish Town Road, London NW 5 2 LX Tel. 0207 428 5400
2. *OPFS EYSIP-funded focus groups and interviews with young lone parents, aged 14-25, Edinburgh 2003.* Contact :OPFS Tel:0131 556 3899
3. *OPFS ongoing monitoring of helpline enquiries.*
4. *'Poverty: The price of Young Motherhood in Britain', YWCA & Oxfam.* Focus groups and interviews with young parents aged 15-30 in England. Includes sample of minority ethnic young parents from Birmingham, Bradford and London. 2001/2002. Web site : www.ywca-gb.org.uk
5. *'Supporting Young Parents, Models of Good Practice', YWCA.* UK-wide Literature and policy review, 2002. Web site (as 4)
6. *'It's like that', Prince's Trust.* Research with young men and women aged 14-25 in urban and rural areas of England, Wales and Scotland 2001 *Parenting was one of key issues addressed,Included interviews with young mothers and involved and uninvolved fathers.* Web site : www.princes-trust.org.uk
7. *Youth transitions and Health – a literature review published on NHS Health Scotland research website: www.hebs.scot.nhs.uk, Specialist Subsite, Research Centre, Published Documents.*
8. *'Undeserving Mothers', Canadian study of young mothers in care,2001, available from author, Lena Dominelli: Ld@socsci.soton.ac.uk*
9. *Sidelined, Young Adults Access to Services - New Policy Institute, Catherine Howarth and Cathy Street. Web site: www.npi.org.uk/reports*
10. *Carnegie Young People Initiative. 'Taking the Initiative; Promoting young people's involvement in decision making'. UK Overview Report 2001 & Scotland Report 2000. Web site: www.carnegie-youth.org.uk*
11. *Young Mothers Initiative, Fife, 'Young Mums Talking', 2000. Contact: Marriann Raymond Tel. 01592 414815*
12. *'Young, single, non-residential fathers; their involvement in fatherhood', Suzanne Speak et al 1997. Available from www.workingwithmen.org*

Other research on lone parent needs

This study has focussed primarily on information and support needs. There is other research on related topics available which is included to provide a context for this study.

Latest research on young lone parent needs

Experiences

- Young parenthood - tendency to repeat itself over the generations. **Ref: 4,8**
- Young women who have been in care, more vulnerable to early pregnancy. In one study, 25% of female care leavers were pregnant or already a mother. **Ref: 5, 6**
- Stigma of lone parenthood particularly extreme for teenage parents. Feeling of not being taken seriously or being looked down upon/not valued. The positive experience of being a mother not acknowledged or valued. **Ref: 1,2,11,4,5, 6, 7**
- Lonely, isolated. **Ref: 5**
- Lack of self-worth, distrust of benefits agency and social workers. **Ref: 1,2,11,4,5, 6,7**
- Lack of experience or confidence in seeking help, reluctance to ask for help, ignorance about help available. **Ref: 1,2,11,4, 6**
- For some young people, positive outcomes of early parenthood – increased confidence, social status, independence, focus to life. **Ref: 4, 5, 6**
- Young mothers felt that mothering came naturally – didn't need training courses. **Ref: 6**
- Both young mothers and fathers experienced extreme difficulties in relationships with each other and their families. **Ref: 5, 6**
- Recognition that best for child to have mother and father but felt too young for committed relationship. **Ref: 6**
- Young lone parents are amongst poorest section of the population, most vulnerable to crime, poor mental health, homelessness etc.

Over two thirds of children living in families where the mother is aged 16-24 are in the poorest 30% of the population. **Ref: 5,9**

- Young fathers particularly isolated. Not acknowledged/needs not catered for. Lack of peers to turn to. Emphasis on ensuring that they pay maintenance rather than being involved in parenting. **Ref: 1,2, 6,7**
- Young non-resident fathers – many would like to be involved but face difficulties. Many made to feel unimportant and not acknowledged. Few aware of lack of legal rights. Lack of appropriate housing made maintaining contact with child difficult. Need help to develop positive relationship with child, greater recognition of non-financial support. Better outcomes for those children who have an 'involved' father, particularly boys. Young men with highly involved fathers are: Less likely to be bullied, less likely to be at risk of depression/suicide, do better at school/work, less likely to be in trouble, etc. An invisible, hard-to-reach group. **Ref: 6,7,12**

Needs

- Varying circumstances and needs depending on age and level of family support. Very young parents with little family support very vulnerable, especially those who have been in care - 'Cycle of poor parenting' hard to break. **Ref: 1,2,4,5,6**
- Need help building successful adult relationships. **Ref: 5, 6**
- Most want to study to gain qualifications and better jobs but significant barriers exist, particularly lack of affordable childcare and lack of confidence. **Ref: 2,11,4, 5, 6, 7**
- Young people's participation is a right acknowledged in Article 12 or UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However socially excluded groups of young people (which includes young parents) are least likely to be involved. 'Ways should be found to involve and engage with young people who are marginalised.' **Ref: 10**

The Calypso Project acknowledges with thanks the support of the **Camelot Foundation** for this study which was carried out by staff of **One Parent Families Scotland** and **One Plus**. The findings include some material from an earlier study carried out through the **Edinburgh Youth Social Inclusion Partnership (EYSIP)** with staff from **OPFS** and **Edinburgh City Youth Cafe**, using the same schedule for Focus Groups and individual interviews.

Many thanks to all the staff involved who gave so much time and energy to the project. A special thank you to the young lone parents who were prepared to “speak out”.

Project Staff

One Parent Families Scotland

Caroline Urquhart
Audrey Walker
Kim McRae
Alice MacAlister
Ian Maxwell

One Plus

Eileen Dougall
Suzanne Craig

Young Mums Guide

Marion Davis
Jacqueline McDowell
Ruth Coleman

Steering Group Members

Evlyn MacLeod Young Mums' Unit WHEC, Edinburgh
Margaret Murphy, Fairbridge, Edinburgh
Maureen Conway, Children 1st Dundee
Fiona Johnston, Social Work, Angus
Shona Stephen, The Prince's Trust, Glasgow
Theresa McCormack, One Plus, Glasgow
Kath Lunny, SAYF (Support in Accommodation For Young Families) Dundee

Contacts:

Kate Russell at One Parent Families Scotland
13 Gayfield Square, Edinburgh EH1 3NX
Tel:0131 556 3899 or email : katerussell@opfs.org.uk

Morag Cassidy at One Plus
55 Renfrew Street, Glasgow, G2 3BD
Tel: 0141 333 1450 or email : morag.cassidy@oneplus.org



One Parent Families Scotland
Registered charity no. SCO 06403

One Plus
Registered charity no. SCO 11688