



# One Parent Families Scotland

*changing lives, challenging poverty*

## Evaluation of One Parent Families Scotland Practitioner Advice Service

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# Evaluation of One Parent Families Scotland Practitioner Advice Service

## Introduction

This report described the findings and conclusions of an evaluation of the One Parent Families Scotland Practitioner Advice Service undertaken in early 2018. The Practitioner Advice Service was set up by One Parent Families Scotland and funded by Comic Relief to provide a single parent financial capability helpdesk for frontline staff in Glasgow. The report is intended to present a summary of the impact of the service, and to inform the consideration of options for further development.

## Background

Established in 1944; One Parent Families Scotland is the only organisation that works exclusively with and for single parents and their families in Scotland. Building on over 70 years of advocacy and service-delivery expertise, One Parent Families Scotland provides expert information, advice & family support, along with training activities, employability programmes & flexible childcare, tailored to the needs of single parent families. One Parent Families Scotland works closely with partners and parents throughout Scotland, influencing policy and practice in the interests of one parent families.

One Parent Families Scotland encourages and enables single parents to believe in themselves, enter education, training or employment and take up new opportunities. One Parent Families Scotland also delivers childcare services – allowing parents to work, learn, and take part in training. With local offices in Edinburgh, Dundee, Glasgow, Falkirk, Lanarkshire & Aberdeenshire, One Parent Families Scotland, on average influences the lives of around 7,500 single parents and 4,000 children every year. In 2017 One Parent Families Scotland

- Supported 7,621 families including through one to one support, group support, money advice and employability programmes.
- Provided 95,233 hours of childcare to 2,611 families
- Provided 3,040 crèche places
- Trained 430 professionals from public sector and charity organisations
- Dealt with 3,579 telephone helpline enquiries

One Parent Families Scotland provides Freephone Lone Parent Helpline nationally and delivers a wide range of services to single parents and their children across Scotland, One Parent Families Scotland has unrivalled knowledge and understanding of the issues facing them. We are acutely aware of the needs of one parent families in an ever-changing environment, both in terms of practical services and, importantly, in terms of being able to access those services. We enjoy a reputation for providing high quality services, nationally and locally with the Scottish-Parliament recognising our work with communities in June 2014. One Parent Families Scotland makes a vital contribution to the lives of single parents and their children in Scotland.

## About the Practitioner Advice Service

The Practitioner Advice Service is based in Glasgow and is funded through Comic Relief to provide a 2nd tier single parent financial capability helpdesk for frontline staff. The Practitioner Advice Service contributes to the One Parent Families Scotland mission by providing specialist one to one advice to practitioners, delivering awareness training, facilitating networking opportunities for practitioners, and specialist case referral to the One Parent Families Scotland Financial Inclusion team.

The Project offers:

- Specialist advice to frontline advisors on welfare rights, money advice, financial inclusion, fuel poverty and housing issues that affect clients who are single parents. This can be via a free helpline, email, Facebook and Twitter
- Single parent awareness workshops to frontline advisors and other external agencies to promote better knowledge and understanding of single parent issues.
- Bi-monthly single parent awareness forums where advisors can discuss ongoing issues that affect their clients e.g Welfare Reform and Bankruptcy Law
- Specialist case referral service for single parent clients to One Parent Families Scotland Financial Inclusion team. This includes advice and representation at tribunals etc.
- Access to other One Parent Families Scotland services for other organisations and their users including peer mentoring, personal and social development programmes, employability services etc.
- An electronic referral system and provision of feedback to referral agency.
- A range of single parent information fact sheets.

The Practitioner Advice Service is designed to support practitioners who encounter single parents in their day to day work to be better equipped to provide appropriate advice and support. The outcomes of the Practitioner Advice Service are

- Single parent families will be more resilient through increased money management skills, reduced debt, stabilised income and access to affordable credit.
- Single parents will have improved mental health and family wellbeing through reduced anxiety over finance and access to other One Parent Families Scotland services.
- Single parents will receive more appropriate and effective advice and support from other frontline providers through provision of the second tier service.

It is founded on the following principles

- That there are issues and experiences that are specific to single parents, and the solutions to these issues are often also specific to single parents.
- That practitioners may frequently encounter single parents in need of specialist support.
- That practitioners may not have sufficient expertise to provide the most effective and appropriate support to single parents.
- That practitioners may not always have the skills or knowledge to identify when single parents are in need of support.
- That practitioners have the capacity, if provided with good quality, timeous advice, to provide an enhanced level of support to single parents.
- That practitioners, if aware of One Parent Families Scotland services, may make more, and more appropriate, referrals of single parents to One Parent Families Scotland.

- That this support to practitioners will allow them to better perform in their roles, increase the impact of One Parent Families Scotland, and improve the quality of life for single parents.

The Practitioner Advice Service is easily defined in terms of its aims, its target audience and the resources applied to it through the Comic Relief funding. The actual nature of the service in real terms, and in the perception of practitioners, partner agencies and single parents is much broader and encompasses the full range of services provided through One Parent Families Scotland.

### The Need for the Practitioner Advice Service

Single Parents face a range of interconnected barriers which have at the core, the unique challenge of the sole responsibility for the care of their children as well the sole provider. The factors that prevent Single Parents from working are often still present when they take up work. These include:

- The high level of economic disadvantage amongst out of work single parents
- Isolation, low self-esteem and therefore depleted self-confidence.
- Financial insecurity in and out of employment including high levels of debt and limited access to mainstream credit facilities.
- The shortage, costs and inflexibility of childcare
- Barriers to skills training and further education.
- A system of child maintenance which fails single parents
- A low pay-high turnover economy which doesn't enable work-family balance
- Living in areas with few local employment opportunities.
- Single Parents and their children frequently suffer poor health.
- Overcrowded accommodation or insecure, expensive and poor quality, privately rented housing

The poverty single parents face is multi-dimensional and covers material poverty, while welfare cuts, childcare gaps and poor housing have damaging impact. Family income, housing, parent and child health are all under pressure. For families to achieve their potential parents need access to affordable, flexible, high quality childcare; skills training; further education; fair work which supports a decent standard of living; adequate housing and good health care.

When the Practitioner Advice Service was conceived, 4 out of 10 families in Glasgow were single parent families, 6258 were social housing tenants in receipt of housing benefit, and 6355 were in debt. Single parent families are twice as likely to be living in poverty and are disproportionately affected by welfare reforms. Single parents are often unable to comply with conditions relating to JSA for a range of reasons not always recognised or understood by mainstream services, including staff from the Department of Work and Pensions. An important part of the motivation for the Practitioner Advice Service is to educate and inform staff of other agencies on the challenge single parents experience in complying with JSA conditions. One Parent Families Scotland identified deepening levels of hardship among their clients, and clients of partner agencies. Including fuel and food poverty and, in some cases, destitution.

In 2014 the Glasgow Centre for Population Health conducted research into the impacts of welfare reform on single parents and found that there is a need to improve service delivery responses. The One Parent Families Scotland advice line, helpdesk, workshops and forums contribute to the improvement of service delivery responses.

They achieve this through increasing practitioner capacity, knowledge and understanding of the specific issues for lone, by improving the advice offered to single parents by practitioners, and by facilitating a greater number of more appropriate referrals to One Parent Families Scotland services.

## About the Evaluation

In early 2018, OPF commissioned SKS Scotland to undertake an evaluation to the Practitioner Advice Service. The overall aim of the evaluation is to provide One Parent Families Scotland with independent evidence of the impact of the Practitioners Advice Service and to understand and demonstrate the following:

- How the service is meeting its objectives and outcomes.
- The effectiveness and impact of the One Parent Families Scotland Practitioner Advice Service
- To identify potential services changes, opportunities and developments.

The service evaluation is expected to inform the ongoing development of the service and workforce development. It should include recommendations for service development and redesign. The evaluation is intended to produce

- a literature review,
- a quantitative analysis of data on the use of the helpdesk, publications, website and financial performance supplied via One Parent Families Scotland
- a qualitative analysis of the views of practitioners who have used the helpdesk, information and advice service as well as those who have not.
- a consideration of the options for future development of the service and delivery of the outcomes associated with it.

To deliver this, the consultants reviewed background information on the service, interviewed One Parent Families Scotland staff, undertook two focus groups with single parents and interviewed 28 practitioners who had worked with One Parent Families Scotland through the Practitioner Advice Service.

Early in the evaluation, it became apparent that the One Parent Families Scotland model of service provision is remarkably seamless. Beneficiaries - both practitioners and single parents - describe being barely aware of any administrative distinctions between services or of any bureaucratic processes managing their receipt of different services. As a result, the commentary in this report takes account of the holistic nature of the One Parent Families Scotland services, rather than seeking to artificially focus on the Practitioner Advice Service as a discrete service.

## The Impact of the Practitioner Advice Service

### Outcomes for Single Parents

One Parent Families Scotland was regarded by all the single parents we met as being fundamentally different from their experiences of working with other agencies. They felt that One Parent Families Scotland had a greater understanding of their situations, was more effective, more holistically supportive and produced greater and longer term positive change for them.

The following sections describe the features of the service from the perspective of single parents.

### Absence of Bureaucracy

The relative simplicity of One Parent Families Scotland referral procedures and the time between a single parent seeking support and receiving support was compared favourably to experiences of other agencies.

*“The paperwork, there’s no paperwork with One Parent Families Scotland. You come, you see somebody, you talk to them and before you know it, things are being sorted. I’ve seen me sitting panicking thinking about going to the CAB and them asking me a hundred questions and filling forms before I get to talking about the problem. I’ve seen me sitting waiting six hours to see someone at the CAB, and then getting nothing done, because I haven’t got all the details they need.”*

The One Parent Families Scotland policy of siting staff in the premises of partner agencies was clearly effective in enabling seamless referrals to take place. Some of the single parents we spoke with were largely unaware that anything as formal as a referral had taken place at all. They viewed this as a positive factor, as their previous experience of inter-agency referral processes had created stress and, in some cases, led them to not attend appointments.

*“The Credit Union referred us. One Parent Families Scotland sit in their office so it was dead simple. You hardly knew it was a different thing.”*

*“Was there a referral? Hahaha. I suppose there must have been, but you wouldn’t have noticed. I was in the Credit Union and they just walked me over to the worker from One Parent Families Scotland and introduced me and that was it. We took it from there.”*

*“That’s how it should be though. You know sometimes you get a referral and it’s so much fuss, and then you’re not even sure what the referral is for, or who you are meeting or you miss the letter and you just don’t go. I’m sure that’s how a lot of people don’t get the help they need.”*

One Parent Families Scotland also had the capacity to make time to meet single parents in a relatively short period of time from initial contact. Most of the single parents we spoke with reported seeing One Parent Families Scotland staff almost immediately or waiting no more than a few days.

*“It’s the quickness of it. I spoke to them on the phone on and I was seeing someone by the Friday. That doesn’t happen anywhere else.”*

The proactive approach of One Parent Families Scotland staff in contacting single parents who were identified by partner agencies was highlighted as being of particular importance in enabling single parents to access support.

*“I actually collapsed – physically collapsed – in the broo. An adviser saw me collapse and phoned One Parent Families Scotland. The next day I got a phone call from them. I never went to One Parent Families Scotland. They came to me. I wouldn’t have known to come to them, and I wouldn’t have had the confidence if I did. It made all the difference.”*

### Practical support

The One Parent Families Scotland service appears to have achieved the balance between dealing with urgent and immediate issues on behalf of single parents and supporting them to build capacity and resilience to better manage in their situations. Single parents reported receiving vouchers which allowed them to retain electricity and gas services and, in some cases, food parcels when they really needed it.

*“I had been to some of the other advice services, you know. And that’s alright, don’t get me wrong, but see when you’ve no leccy and your house is cold, and you can’t cook for your weans, you don’t need advice, you need help right there and then. This is only place I know where I’ve ever got the help I needed when I needed it. A money management course doesn’t put hot food on the table.”*

Single parents also reported receiving toys at Christmas and medical, paediatric and other equipment which enabled easier care of children, some of whom had quite profound disabilities.

*“It’s hard having disabled kids. I’m only a wee lassie, and have you seen the size of my boy<sup>1</sup>? If he decides he’s not walking, I can’t do anything about it! I got a chair that fit him through One Parent Families Scotland. Now we can actually get about. Before I was stuck.”*

*“One Parent Families Scotland applied for my daughter, and they helped me get waterproof bedding. What a difference that kind of thing can make.”*

*“I got a food allowance through One Parent Families Scotland. It sounds like nothing, but when you’ve no food to put on the table...”*

*“At Christmas time, we all got donations of Christmas gifts. You’re scared your weans are going to wake up with nothing on Christmas day and you hate yourself for it. See those wee presents. They made Christmas.”*

*“One Parent Families Scotland takes me everywhere. When I got my place I had to get around hundreds of places getting things sorted out. I don’t live centrally and I’ve no car and One Parent Families Scotland came and got me and made sure I got to my appointments and things. You can’t put a price on that kind of support”*

This form of speedy, fuss-free initial contact and effective crisis intervention generated a greater level of trust in from single parents in the capacity and intention of One Parent Families Scotland to provide them with the kind of support that they needed. This in turn facilitated longer term working relationships between single parents and One Parent Families Scotland.

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<sup>1</sup> Where parents have used the names of children, these have been anonymised.



### Longer term working relationships

Single parents who participated in the evaluation stated that they had worked with One Parent Families Scotland for up to 2 years. Several reported that they had not consistently worked with One Parent Families Scotland over 2 years, but had participated in several different activities, beginning with a crisis intervention, moving on to dealing with welfare benefits issues, and then taking a break from working with them before returning for support in accessing voluntary work or improving their employability

One single parent reported that they had initially worked with One Parent Families Scotland on debt management and had ceased working with them once this was stabilised. They had then sought further support from One Parent Families Scotland around 6 months later when a childcare issue created new stress and challenges. This indicates that the One Parent Families Scotland focus on resilience and capacity building is effective, and that single parents feel confident in leaving contact, and then resuming contact with the service should a further need arise.

Despite this longer term working relationship, there was no evidence of dependency on the service. On the contrary, it was apparent that single parents worked with One Parent Families Scotland for different reasons, and in different ways, and ceased working with them when they felt that their situations were stable. Single parents reported working with One Parent Families Scotland on numerous issues, and a faith that *“whatever it is, whatever the problem is, I know One Parent Families Scotland will be there for me.”*

One of the notable features of the service, which was positively regarded by single parents, was the practice of One Parent Families Scotland staff in making unsolicited contact with single parents to check on their progress on any issues and on their general wellbeing. This had the effect of further maintaining trust and enabling single parents to feel that One Parent Families Scotland support was there for them, not simply for a single issue, situation or problem.

### Personal service

There was an important distinction made by several single parents between their experience of working with other support agencies and their experience of One Parent Families Scotland.

*“I feel like I am a person, not a number. I’ll be sitting here breaking my heart and somebody will say, ‘I’ll write you a letter to the housing’. I mean, that’s good and all, but it’s not what I need right there and then.”*

They felt that when working with other agencies, they were treated as ‘cases’, as a specific problem to be resolved, and once that problem was resolved, then their reason for contact with that agency was over. In contrast, they felt that with One Parent Families Scotland they were treated as people with a variety of strengths, opportunities and problems, and that One Parent Families Scotland was interested in them as a whole and available to support them as a whole.

*“One Parent Families Scotland is unusual because it’s the same person that gives you all the help. In other places you are shoved around the houses. Here it’s like somebody who knows you, but somebody who really knows what they are doing.”*

This may be a result of the approach taken by One Parent Families Scotland staff, who appear to take both a problem-solving and pastoral role in their relationship with single parents, and of the One Parent Families Scotland model of service provision in which a range of supports are offered. The range of supports offered amounts, in practice, to a holistic service with the capacity to deal with almost any issue experienced by single parents.

The One Parent Families Scotland specialism is single parents; other comparable agencies have more niche specialisms concerned with one or more aspects of single parent issues, e.g. welfare benefits, mental health and wellbeing, childcare, family relationships, housing, etc.

*"I had a meeting during the day, and they texted me at night to make sure I was alright. It's those wee things that make a big difference to how you feel."*

*"They'll phone you up to see how things are ticking over. That way you never feel like you've lost touch and you're not embarrassed if you have to go back for more help."*

*"The offices are dead welcoming too. Have you ever tried to go to the CAB with children? No? Well it's not set up for it, believe me."*

### Financial support

The majority, if not all, of the single parents who participated in the evaluation had initially come to One Parent Families Scotland for support in managing finances. This included issues associated with personal debt, with benefits or with financial management.

Single parents reported that the financial support they received was accurate, non-judgemental, swift and effective.

*"They went to GHA and sorted out my arrears. I was just in fear. I would have been out on the street. I couldn't deal with it. Now the housing officer comes round to check I'm alright. They brought the weans presents at Christmas. I used to hide from them."*

One Parent Families Scotland carried out benefits eligibility checks, assisting in dealing with debt management, and offered support in managing finances.

*"One Parent Families Scotland applied for DLA for my wee boy. And they done it again. And they done it again. I can do it myself now, but I can still come here for them to help if I'm not sure."*

*"I applied for benefits and was refused 3 times. It was going to tribunal and was really scared. They changed the decision and it changed my life."*

The financial pressures described by single parents were significant and serious. If the service only were effective in dealing with these, then it would have made a substantial impact on the quality of life for single parents and their children.

### Mental well being

Financial hardship is a major cause of stress. When coupled with single parent family responsibilities, the stress associated with financial hardship can be even greater. The isolation commonly experienced by single parents affects their capacity to deal with that stress and increases the need for support in managing it.

*"It was straight in. Easy. Like there was no fuss. I was on an 8 week personal development group. Immediately. I've been to a lot of things and met a lot of pals through One Parent Families Scotland. It's quite isolating being on your own with kids. You never get to talk to another adult."*

The One Parent Families Scotland service reduces stress by addressing the financial hardship that is a primary cause of stress, by providing personal support to single parents, and by offering them opportunities to learn and apply new tools and techniques for dealing with stress.

*"I met One Parent Families Scotland in Pollok Credit Union. They helped with writing letters to debtors and got me on a positive parenting course. I can't say enough about them."*

*"The benefit changes came in and I was getting less money. I sat down with One Parent Families Scotland and worked it out and I was £200 a month short. I needed to find a way to make £200. That's a lot of money, but at least I knew what the actual figure was and could start to plan."*

*"The broo referred me for money advice, but you don't just come here for that. You get all sorts of support. I've been on lots of training. Employability, COSHH training, the lot."*

*"It was the housing benefit cap that did me in. I was just about managing, but when that came in it all went wrong. I was referred by the Jobcentre. They gave me this number and I met with One Parent Families Scotland. They took all the stress away from me. I think the staff are like angels. They must have wings."*

#### Training and employability

The One Parent Families Scotland service seeks to build capacity in single parents so that they can better manage their situations, and so that they have increased ability to maximise their income. To do so, single parents are offered a range of training opportunities, including financial management, personal development, childcare, and employability.

*"I came through Routes To Work. I was with them, and to be honest, I think they knew that I couldn't get work because I was a single parent. They never said that, but I think that was it. Once I came to One Parent Families Scotland they helped me get all my right benefits, and I don't have to go to Routes To Work. For the now anyway. I do actually want to work, but two wee ones, and no family support. It's not easy."*

*"I went to mood mentoring, mental health first aid, lots of other things. It helps you. I went to get help with my child's anxiety. I think it helped me just as much!"*

*"I went to a lot of courses. That's where I met my pal. They lived across the street from me, but we'd never spoke. Now we speak every day."*

Single parents reported a sense of excitement about the courses they had attended, and could identify real, long term benefits from their training experiences.

*"I went on the managing money course. We all did. I count the money I have left after bills now in terms of what it can buy, and how long it takes to save up for little treats. A day at the beach is three weeks. A holiday in Aviemore is 20 weeks. Me and my pal have a wee club saving up for a holiday. It makes it clearer if we know what we have to put away, and what we are putting it away for. Saving money can be fun! Hahaha"*

There was evidence of single parents cascading learning and behaviours to their children.

*"My wee boy is saving up now. He gets his own money, and we've worked out what he wants and what he is going to spend and what he is going to save. Before that he spent his money as soon as he got it. Sometimes he didn't even want what he spent it on. He just didn't know how or why to save."*

### Children and family relationships

Single parents reported that the stress associated with financial hardship had a negative impact on single parents' ability to maintain positive relationships with their children and other family members. There was evidence that the support they received had enabled them to better manage this, with a consequent positive impact on their children, and on their wider relationships with family.

*"You get a bit of respite here. Not just formal respite, but you get support that makes you feel like you've had some respite. You know when you're at your wits end, but you can't show your weans that. It's not fair, it only upsets them and then it's worse. But it's worse if you have to keep it all in too."*

*"Unlike the social work, who you think are picking up faults, One Parent Families Scotland are helping. You don't feel like you're doing everything wrong with them. I feel like I'm actually a good parent now."*

The One Parent Families Scotland practice of making unsolicited contact, not focused around problem resolution, meant that single parents viewed contact with One Parent Families Scotland as a positive thing for them and their children.

*"It's not just us that get help. Your kids appreciate it too. My girl got a wee card on her birthday. That's an amazing touch. When you think how busy they must be, that they find the time for that. It's amazing."*

*"I've got a better relationship with my kids now. They probably don't have me nipping away all the time. Hahaha. Every time we come here, the kids leave with a sweet or a toy. They think I'm coming to see my pals! It's not like a big scary appointment where you wouldn't want to bring the weans."*

### Additional supports

The One Parent Families Scotland practice of providing holistic support, focused on the needs of single parents, rather than the management of problems, or dealing with 'cases', allows One Parent Families Scotland to offer extra supports where appropriate. The range of supports identified by single parents were numerous and varied, including support in dealing with domestic abuse, family relationships, problems with the law and even neighbour disputes.

One of the additional supports which was clearly highly valued was the availability of short family breaks.

*"One Parent Families Scotland came to me and said I needed a break. They knew that before I knew that. I knew I was stressed to the max, but I would never in a million years thought of a holiday. They came to me and offered me one. I didn't have to apply, didn't have to fill in a form. They just knew and offered it."*

*"We went to Aviemore for nothing! I'd never been to Aviemore before. It was great. No just for me, but for the weans too. We came back like different people. We're going to go again, we've been saving up. I know what it costs and how much I have to put by each week."*

Single parents who had been on these breaks reported improved relationships with their children, and with other family members as a result. They also reported a greater sense of general wellbeing which they attributed partly to the effect of having a holiday, and partly to the satisfaction of being able to give children and family members a holiday that they felt they could never afford.

## Conclusions on outcomes for single parents

The planned outcomes of the Practitioner Advice Service for single parents are

- Single parent families will be more resilient through increased money management skills, reduced debt, stabilised income and access to affordable credit.
- Single parents will have improved mental health and family wellbeing through reduced anxiety over finance and access to other One Parent Families Scotland services.

In both respects, the Practitioner Advice Service, and more broadly the One Parent Families Scotland suite of services, have excelled. Almost universally, the first benefit that single parents identified from their work with One Parent Families Scotland was that they were financially better off and more able to manage the income that they had. Comment from single parents almost always moved swiftly on to the positive impact on their own stress levels, mental health and general wellbeing.

*“They helped me deal with the debt, with the debt that I had. I was at my wit’s end, I couldn’t eat or sleep. I didn’t know what to do or where to turn. They made it seem easy. They reassured me that it could be managed and they made it so. I don’t know what I would have done.”*

The level of stress described by single parents was extremely acute, several volunteered that they had entertained suicidal thoughts because of financial hardship and fear of dealing with debt.

*“I was at the end of my tether. I was living in fear. I hated the postman. That sounds stupid now, but he brought the letters. I was on edge in fear of a knock at the door. I wanted it all to end. It seems mad now, but there was nobody I could talk to.”*

The personal support provided by One Parent Families Scotland was highlighted by every single parent as key to them being able to see that there was hope for change in their lives.

*“I came to see One Parent Families Scotland<sup>2</sup> and it was immediate. It was like switching on an off a light. I felt better the first time I saw them. Oh, sure I knew that my money worries weren’t over. Far from it. But I just felt better. I don’t think I knew just how much it was stressing me out. I felt better straight away. It was such a relief. That’s probably why I came back. I felt better, and I felt like these people would help me handle it.”*

*“One Parent Families Scotland did everything for me. I had nothing. My weans would have went hungry. That’s what it means to me.”*

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<sup>2</sup> Single parents frequently referred to One Parent Families Scotland staff by name. Individual’s names have been anonymised to One Parent Families Scotland.

## Outcomes for Practitioners and Partner Agencies

The Practitioner Advice Service is intended to support practitioners to be better able to identify single parents in need of support, to be better able to provide support and to make a greater number of, and more appropriate referrals to One Parent Families Scotland.

The range of practitioners with whom the Practitioner Advice Service may interact is vast. A review of the professional roles of practitioners who have used the service shows people with the following roles;

- Housing
- Financial services
- Advice services
- Department of Work & Pensions
- Childcare
- Health

### Practitioner contact with single parents

All of the practitioners interviewed had some contact with single parents. The majority were in posts where they came into direct contact with a range of people in need of financial and other support. A small number were in posts where they managed services for people in need. All of them were aware of serious issues of poverty affecting single parents.

*It's been absolutely fabulous. I work in the East End and in my work I see a lot of single parents, a lot of poverty, a lot of mental health. I met One Parent Families Scotland at an event and started working more closely with them over the next couple of months. Then I noticed that they were always at our events. I don't know how they find the time! We asked them to come out and join some of our customer sessions. Some of our customers got a voucher, or maybe it was cash for gas and electricity. That sort of thing is amazing. They helped raise aspirations and some of our customers started volunteering.*

*There was one case I was dealing with. I phoned One Parent Families Scotland and they said send me a referral. They got Christmas hampers.*

*Some of the people I deal with have serious issues. I had one woman – she had a long history of mental health and domestic violence. She had serious trust issues. She said to me 'I can't believe would go out of their way to help me'.*

*I had another woman who had been working while on benefits. She just wouldn't engage. She was terrified that she would lose her house and her benefits. I phoned One Parent Families Scotland to check that they could help. I wouldn't want to build this woman's hopes up. One Parent Families Scotland could do things I never even thought about. Never thought was possible. This woman could go to One Parent Families Scotland and she wouldn't come to me – not that I could do what they did – but she could go to them without fear, because she knew they were on her side.*

### Increased awareness of single parent issues

Practitioners were all aware that their specialism was not in the support of single parents, and that the time and expertise they had to offer to support parents in acute or complex need was limited. There were mixed views on their ability to identify issues that were specific to single parents, and to make referrals based on this kind of understanding.

Some felt that they had this kind of understanding prior to the Practitioner Advice Service, others felt that they had gained this understanding through the Practitioner Advice Service, still others felt that they did not have this understanding. Given the range of practitioners interviewed, and their varied professional histories and expertise, this may be expected.

*“I was working with a gentleman whose sister had died. He was taking care of his two nieces. The children had disabilities and the benefits had stopped because of the sister’s death. He had no idea about benefits, but the additional financial burden of looking after children was making life difficult. It was the complexity of this case that made me refer it on. I couldn’t have sifted through the issues and I wouldn’t have had the time to manage the process of getting things sorted out.”*

Common to all practitioners was an awareness that where a client presented an issue that the practitioner was not clear how to address – or which was beyond their remit – they could contact One Parent Families Scotland for advice or make a referral. For many practitioners this additional resource was the key benefit of the Practitioner Advice Service. They knew that if a client was a single parent, they were able through the Practitioner Advice Service to offer an enhanced level of support.

*“We come across lots of people in serious need. The level of support we can offer varies. Just knowing that for some, we have additional resources and expertise is a real bonus.”*

The service has developed partnerships with a range of organisations including Wheatley Group, Glasgow / West of Scotland Housing Associations, Money Advice Scotland and various other service providers. The service also works with Scotcash and Pollock Credit Union to promote access to ethical banking, affordable credit and increase awareness of Financial Capability.

One Parent Families Scotland have maintained a policy of siting staff in the premises of partner agencies. There were a greater number of referrals from agencies where One Parent Families Scotland staff had had a physical presence. To some extent, this was simply a result of the relative ease of referral – staff of partner agencies could simply walk across an office when working with an appropriate client. The physical presence of One Parent Families Scotland staff also produced a greater awareness of the nature of the service, and greater faith in the quality of the service.

It was notable in interviews with practitioners, that those who had experienced more long term contact with One Parent Families Scotland staff were more effusive in their praise for the service, more likely to recommend to colleagues, and more likely to be aware of the impact of the One Parent Families Scotland service on the single parents they referred.

*“I’ve known them for years. The fact that they are here means that there’s no gap, no reason for me not take a client to One Parent Families Scotland and no risk that the client drops off or disappears before I can get them in front of an adviser.”*

*“I know that if I take a client to One Parent Families Scotland for something – say they have had a benefits cut, or haven’t got electricity in their home – I know that it won’t just be that. One Parent Families Scotland will sit with them and find out what else is going on and help them with everything. I can’t do that. My job wouldn’t allow it, and I don’t know any other agency that can.”*

*“We run a group for single parents in the block. We’ve had One Parent Families Scotland do a lot of work with that group, and I know they’ve picked up a lot of issues, and helped a lot of our tenants with things that we would only have picked up when they got really serious.”*



### Using the Advice Line and Making Referrals

Practitioner decisions on whether to contact One Parent Families Scotland for advice or make a referral were based largely on the complexity of the need, and practitioner experience of contact with One Parent Families Scotland. In general, practitioners who had greater or longer term contact with One Parent Families Scotland were more likely to use the advice line, and more likely to use the advice line frequently.

*“A lot of the advice I would ask for I would know. There has been the odd occasion where I have called One Parent Families Scotland, but I’ve been doing this a long time. Where One Parent Families Scotland are invaluable is in doing so much more than I can do. I wish I could do the level of one to one support they can do. I can do some of the money stuff, but there’s more to it. These parents have huge unmet personal needs too. They’ve nobody to sit and even sound off to. The risk is that they are going straight into mental health teams if nobody can step in.”*

Practitioners who had used the advice line were universally impressed with the ease of access and quality of advice. The fact that they could simply make a single call, could be confident the call would be answered and could be confident they could then offer clear and accurate advice was felt to be a significant addition to the resources they had to assist the people they worked with.

*“Signposting... but it’s not signposting, is it? That’s when you tell a client they should, like... go over there. I’m sure that half the time clients simply don’t. It’s better than that. If I’m with a client, I just pick up the phone there and then, and 9 times out of 10, we know what to 10 minutes later. Obviously if it’s wee bit more complex then I make an appointment for them and I make sure that all the paperwork and documents are passed on.”*

*“To be honest, calling the advice line is so easy, and it works so well that I half look forward to having a reason to call it! That’s silly, isn’t it? But it’s a good feeling when you find something you are not sure about, but know exactly how you can find out, and can help someone immediately!”*

*“I’ve had single parents so impressed with how easily things are fixed when I call the advice line that they ask me if they can just call the line in future. I’m never really sure if they can, but I give them the One Parent Families Scotland number anyway. I know that if they call – even if they call the Practitioner Advice Line – someone will find a way to help them.”*

The immediacy of the advice line was one of the features most highly valued by practitioner. It enabled swift resolution of issues and helped to generate improved trust between practitioners and clients.

*“The advice line means that we can make calls immediately and get advice immediately right there in front of clients. None of this ‘I’ll find out and get back to you.’ People have heard that so often. Nobody believes it. I wouldn’t believe me if I said that. When it’s a single parent issue. I can call One Parent Families Scotland. I’ll always get through, and I’ll always get advice that I have faith in.”*

Many practitioners were aware of the impact of welfare reform on single parents, and of single parent conditionality, but few felt confident in their understanding of it. Single parent conditionality was a major factor in motivating practitioners to contact the advice line and/or make referrals. A few practitioners had become aware of single parent conditionality through One Parent Families Scotland presentations to their workplace or a practitioner’s group.



*“They came to my work. It was with regard to Universal Credit. Me and other members of staff had an input from One Parent Families Scotland and the implications for single parents. It was that that made me understand that there are specific issues for them. They provide an invaluable service and it’s good that I know that they are there, and they would be my first point of contact.”*

In many cases, single parent families were in acute need and financial support was urgent. For this reason, practitioners felt more confident in making referrals to One Parent Families Scotland rather than seeking to provide support themselves.

*“I know some of the grant funders, and I could make the application, but One Parent Families Scotland do it all the time. They know the kind of things that funders will support and won’t. They have the draft text prepared and can probably produce and submit a successful application in a fraction of the time it would take me to make a risky one. The risk that a client in that kind of need doesn’t get the help is too great. I want the experts to do that.”*

Practitioners were aware that there were sources of financial support available to single parents that they did not always have the time and expertise to access. Referral to One Parent Families Scotland meant that single parents were more likely to successfully access these sources.

The Scottish Welfare Grant is a discretionary scheme administered by local authorities. It provides grants that do not have to be repaid. There are two different types of grants in the Scottish Welfare Fund. Crisis Grants aim to help people who are in crisis because of a disaster or an emergency. A decision to award a crisis grant will be made within 24 hours and there are a variety of methods available to support grant awards. Community Care Grants can help families facing exceptional pressures with one-off items, like a cooker or a washing machine and can be processed 15 working days.

The Buttle Trust’s core activity in Scotland is in the making of grants for basic but crucial items for children and their families – beds, bedding, white goods etc.

### The Impact on Partner Agencies

Many practitioners described a broader and deeper organisational relationship with One Parent Families Scotland, not simply the receipt of advice or making referrals.

In some cases, the relationship pre-existed the Practitioner Advice Service, and enabled the Practitioner Advice Service to be better promoted and have greater practitioner awareness. In other cases, contact with One Parent Families Scotland, initiated through the Practitioner Advice Service had led to enhanced inter-agency working relationships and partnerships.

*“I had phoned the advice line. They said about this other project they are going to do - budgeting, finance, etc. That’s going to take place in our offices now. They’ve come out and spoke to housing officers. Our housing officers have been impressed - great buy-in. One Parent Families Scotland now attend our open days and we’re going to do more budgeting courses for tenants.”*

Many practitioners described new joint activity directly arising from their contact with One Parent Families Scotland. This included one-off inputs from One Parent Families Scotland to practitioner meetings, support from One Parent Families Scotland to develop new or enhanced services for single parents and, in some cases, the development of new services.

*“My job is all about mitigation of welfare reform. I see families who are affected by the benefit cap. 75-80% of them are lone parents, and some of them have 3 or 4 kids, all of them under 5. I see people who are sitting with no money in their meters. I’ve got people sitting using their hot water once a week. I see Health visitors concerned about childrens’ development needs because there are no toys in the house. My contact is about how they budget – and that’s when I contact One Parent Families Scotland. They get immediate support and longer term budgeting support.”*

#### Feedback

One of the things that practitioners valued highly about the Practitioner Advice Service was the quality of feedback they received on the progress for a client after making a referral. In most cases, practitioners simply wanted to know that the circumstances for the person they had referred were improving. In other cases, practitioners noted that this feedback allowed them to record outcomes for their own organisational priorities, and make notes in relevant case files.

*“I got really good feedback, I know that it worked for this gentleman. They applied for guardianship of the children. God knows that can’t have been simple. The DLA got reinstated, the got working tax credit and child benefit. All the things that should have happened. I’ve no idea how that would have turned out without One Parent Families Scotland. Probably quite badly.”*

*“I have to get closure on a case. Closure is exemption from benefit cap, or avoidance of homelessness. If I make a referral, that case stays on my books. I need to know what happened with it.”*

We have just under 5000 single parents across the group. One Parent Families Scotland has a very good profile because the staff is active, they are always out there building a profile. One of them has been supporting a pilot in Sandyhills. That sort of thing helps get our locality managers on board.

We have a referral process with One Parent Families Scotland We make referral and get feedback. I can see the difference that they make to our tenants. They do a really good 360 degree service. Not just seeing them through a housing prism. We recognised the value of the additional support from One Parent Families Scotland and developed a partnership. We wanted it to be something more than a referrer relationship. It is critical we can no longer rely on an environment where you have One Parent Families Scotland waiting on referrals turning up. What if they lost their funding for that service. We would be in trouble. Change? its empowering our staff – like a cascade learning model, bringing knowledge. We wanted to set up single parent’s groups, for them to become the experts. We struggled with funding. After engagement with One Parent Families Scotland, we put together a big lottery application, got 250K then. It all went to One Parent Families Scotland, but our tenants get the benefit, so as far as we’re concerned it’s win-win. Win-win-win actually because One Parent Families Scotland, us and the tenants all win.

## Forums

The Practitioner Advice Service allowed One Parent Families Scotland to offer practitioners access to single parent awareness forums. These forums were designed to allow One Parent Families Scotland staff to provide practitioners with information on single parent issues and enable them to provide accurate advice and make more appropriate referrals to One Parent Families Scotland. The forums attracted a lower than anticipated participation rate and were discontinued part way through the period of the funding.

Around 60% of the practitioners interviewed were aware of the forums, and around 50% had attended at least one. Although all were convinced of their value, there were mixed views on whether they would participate if forums were still offered. The majority expressed some reservations, citing reduced organisational staffing and an increased individual workload, leading to pressure on time and a requirement to strictly prioritise investment of time on any activity which did not immediately deliver on their service delivery priorities. While it was recognised that the information and support offered through the forums had the potential to improve their work with clients, it was not wholly clear that it would improve their own efficiency. The One Parent Families Scotland forums were considered by some practitioners to be focused on single parent issues. All of the practitioners we interviewed felt that they had a different specialism, and that they and their employing agencies would prioritise professional development opportunities that were more closely aligned with their specialism.

There was some commentary that there was an overprovision of forums, practice sharing and other networking and information sharing events, particularly in the most deprived neighbourhoods of Glasgow. This led to an even greater need for prioritisation, and a risk that the value of each forum was diminished.

There was also a view that information was more easily accessible through online sources, tempered with an acceptance that establishing accuracy and relevance to a Scottish and Glasgow context from online sources was challenging and the risks of providing inaccurate information were even greater.

Some practitioners offered that when seeking information on single parent issues, they go straight to the resources published on the One Parent Families Scotland website. These were universally considered to be accurate, up to date, relevant and accessible. In this respect, practitioners' reluctance to invest time in forums was, in part, a consequence of their confidence in the other sources of information provided by One Parent Families Scotland.

## Practitioner Views on Developing the Service

Practitioners who had used the service were very satisfied with the nature and quality of the service. Most of them felt that the service was flawless as it was, and they could not identify anything specific that they felt would improve it.

*"They provide an invaluable service and it's good that I know that they are there, and they would be my first point of contact."*

The majority of ideas for improvement simply suggested that there was a need for more of the same, perhaps targeted at particular specialisms. Some of this appeared to arise from a mistaken belief that the Practitioner Advice Service was targeted solely at the specialism of the practitioner being interviewed.

*"It could be rolled out further. I mean into homelessness services, health, anti-poverty services. They could all do with it."*

*“We do debt advice. Debt advice is actually quite easy. It’s all numbers, and if you don’t have anything, they can’t take it off you. Dealing with the underlying problems is hard. It’s the stress that comes with it, and the learning how to deal with money, and the other issues that come with poverty – poor physical and mental health, addiction, poor family relationships, etc. That’s where we need to be better at referring on. One Parent Families Scotland must get referrals from all these specialists. I don’t know how they cope.”*

These comments highlight the scope, scale and range of practitioner specialisms who form the target audience for the Practitioner Advice Service, who can refer in to the Practitioner Advice Service, and to which the Practitioner Advice Service and the more holistic One Parent Families Scotland services contribute outcomes. There was some recognition of the risk of demand for the Practitioner Advice Service exceeding supply, and a small element of concern that the Practitioner Advice Service would not be adequately resourced to deal with the level of demand if every practitioner who could refer in, did so.

*“I love being able to phone them up and get somebody immediately. I love knowing that I can send somebody there and know they’ll get a good service. I’ve got the fear that one day, everybody in Glasgow will start doing it, and then I won’t get through immediately, or there’ll be a waiting list. What can you do though? It’s not their fault that there’s so much need for them.”*

There were also demands for a similar kind of service which was not restricted to single parents. This may be beyond the scope of the mission of One Parent Families Scotland.

*“I could use this for a lot of my clients. There could be a bit of flexibility in the ‘it has to be a single parent’ thing.”*

Practitioners who had not used the service demonstrated a more limited understanding of it. Some of them suggested that the service needed to be more directly marketed to them. In particular it was felt that service marketing material needed to highlight the relevance of the service to their specialism.

*“I don’t know anything about it. I know that colleagues sometimes use it, but I don’t know what it does, or what it’s got to do with me. They should maybe make this clearer in their marketing material.”*

*“There could be more communication between your staff and staff of other agencies.”*

There were some questions about the branding of the service. Some interviewees, who had not used the service, reported a perception that it was for practitioners with other specialisms. It was not clear what had produced this perception. None of the interviewees could identify any specific material that gave this impression.

Some interviewees, who had not used the service, reported that they did not conceive of themselves as ‘practitioners’ at all, and that the ‘practitioner’ brand had put them off. This may be a genuine issue in terms of promoting access to the service to the broadest range of professionals who may be in contact with single parents. It is difficult, however, to identify another term which may not produce similar issues in some sections of the target audience.

### Conclusions on Outcomes for Practitioners and Partner Agencies

The direct outcome for practitioners is that they will be better able to offer single parents more appropriate and effective advice and support.

The service has been exceptionally effective in enabling this. This is demonstrated by the concern some practitioners expressed about the potential impact on them and their clients should the service cease to be available.

Practitioners could identify clear outcomes for the people they worked with that would not have been achieved without the service. These outcomes related to benefits for the people themselves, but also for the practitioner and their employing agency.

*“If someone isn’t able to pay their rent, because of the benefit cap, or because of whatever, that’s a problem for me. We’re in the business of sustaining tenancies. If One Parent Families Scotland can help people get their benefits and manage their money, and be happier people, that the same thing we want.”*

Practitioners had gained new knowledge and felt better equipped to identify where there was a need for them to call the advice line, or to make a referral. Where practitioners had done so frequently, they felt that they had gained some skills which allowed them to offer better quality support to single parents without recourse to One Parent Families Scotland. Most practitioners however, felt that the complexity of the issues that came up, and the pace of change – particularly with regard to welfare reform – meant that there would always be a need for the Practitioner Advice Service.

*“I work in partnership with One Parent Families Scotland. I don’t think of it so much as referral as partnership. I’ve referred lots of clients over to them. It’s usually when there is a financial problem or something around the impact of welfare reform. I don’t always refer, only if it’s something I can’t deal with myself.”*

## Outcomes for One Parent Families Scotland

A key aim of One Parent Families Scotland is to highlight the impact of policies on single parents and their children, bringing parents' everyday experiences into the development of national policy and legislation.

The Practitioner Advice Service contributes to One Parent Families Scotland policy work by generating evidence of the financial challenges faced by single parents, and by supporting single parents to provide direct evidence to policy makers.

*"We tested the forms for the new Sure Start. We gave them feedback so that they could make the forms as simple as possible. Maybe simple is not the right word, maybe as suited to us as possible. That's probably more like it."*

In addition to this, One Parent Families Scotland have benefited from an increased organisational profile. This has been enabled by the additional staffing resourced through Comic Relief grant. Staff have been active in participating in and contributing to a wide range of practitioner fora and networks. They have been proactive in establishing new one-off projects and longer term partnerships with organisations who have substantial contact with single parents. They have invested time in being sited in partner agencies and visible to their staff. All of this has had the desired effect of increasing practitioner awareness of single parent issues, and producing a greater number of, and more appropriate referrals to One Parent Families Scotland.

It has also enabled practitioners in partner agencies to be more able and confident to support single parents. Practitioners reported that they gradually gained knowledge through contact with One Parent Families Scotland staff, and once they were confident would support some single parents without requiring support from One Parent Families Scotland. This meant that single parents got a better service, practitioners gained skills and One Parent Families Scotland were able to produce a multiplier effect, i.e. to have some single parent support delivered directly by practitioners in partner agencies, thus increasing the total support available to them, and reducing the demand on One Parent Families Scotland staff for support with less urgent, serious or complex cases.

The consequence of this has been that One Parent Families Scotland are more likely to be working with more single parents who do experience more urgent, serious or complex issues, but also that they have more time available to offer this level of support. The efficiencies gained by building the capacity of practitioners in partner agencies, produced a consequent increase in capacity in One Parent Families Scotland to work with those single parents more likely to need the level of skills and knowledge held by specialists in working with single parents.

All of this contributes the achievement of the primary outcome that single parents receive more appropriate and effective advice and support from other frontline providers through provision of the second tier service. More than this, however it produces a consequent outcome that single parents in greater need have greater access to the specialist expertise and resources of One Parent Families Scotland.

## Conclusions and Development of the Practitioner Advice Service

The overwhelmingly clear and consistent message that came across from all stakeholders was that the design, structure and fundamental operations of the Practitioner Advice Service and of One Parent Families Scotland was already very suitable and there were very few opportunities for improvement or need for anything substantial to change.

The key features of the service design that were influential in generating positive outcomes from the Practitioner Advice Service were:

- The availability of One Parent Families Scotland staff.
- The specialist knowledge and understanding of issues for single parents.
- The accuracy and clarity of the advice available.
- The confidence that practitioners had in the service.
- The holistic nature of the support for single parents.
- The opportunity to develop new partnership work.

The design of the Practitioner Advice Service may be regarded as mature and largely appropriate to the outcomes it is intended to deliver. The model may be regarded as proven, and the benefits it delivers for practitioner and single parents of value.

The impact of UK Government welfare reforms mean that over 62% of children in single parent families are expected to live in poverty by 2021.<sup>3</sup> Children living in single parent families have been identified as a priority group in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act<sup>4</sup>. The Scottish Government, through the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 committed Scottish Ministers to: (i) set out in their Delivery Plans<sup>5</sup> what (if any) measures they proposed to take in relation to children living in single-parent households; and to (ii) include in their annual progress report the effect of those measures on reducing the number of children living in single-parent households for each of the four poverty targets.<sup>6</sup> The Scottish Government 'Every Child Every Chance Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018-22'<sup>7</sup> sets out new policies and proposals support progress towards these targets.

There is therefore an increasing need for services which mitigate and manage that impact. There is a persuasive and urgent case for the continuation of the Practitioner Advice Service model of enabling practitioners from other professions to be better able to identify single parents in need of support, to be better able to provide support and to make a greater number of, and more appropriate referrals to One Parent Families Scotland.

In terms of future development there are three main strands of the service that may bear further exploration.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/cumulative-impact-assessment-report.pdf> p153

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2017/6/pdfs/asp\\_20170006\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2017/6/pdfs/asp_20170006_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0053/00533606.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2017/6/crossheading/targets-relating-to-child-poverty/enacted>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0053/00533606.pdf>

## Reaching Single Parents

The mission of One Parent Families Scotland is to work with and for single parents and their families in Scotland. To achieve this One Parent Families Scotland provide a range of services to single parents and their families. This requires some investment in the marketing of services and, in particular, ensuring that services are available to single parents who are harder to reach.

*“We’ve got stuff we hand out – and we put One Parent Families Scotland contact details on it, because we know that they are good. It was a bit of a surprise the amount of stuff they do. I thought it was just welfare. We refer on when people have issues with their their electricity their gas, etc. The caravan holidays too. We try to get people on them. When people are stressed and we can see it. We’ve got were own welfare rights and money advice service bit any single parents I’d refer to One Parent Families Scotland.”*

Evidence from practitioners in this evaluation indicates that there are numerous single parents across Glasgow, who experience significant issues, and who are not in touch with One Parent Families Scotland or other support services.

It was notable that almost all of the single parents who participated in this evaluation, came to OPFs either through contact with another service, or through peer referral. A network of practitioners, who regularly encounter single parents in need of support, who have the skills and knowledge to identify when support is required, and who are aware of the support available – to them and to single parents – from One Parent Families Scotland, is an invaluable resource in reaching single parents.

*“We don’t really refer as such, it’s just that if we’re doing a session and it seems like there’s somebody there who needs more advice, then they just go off for a one to one with One Parent Families Scotland and they take it from there.”*

The Practitioner Advice Service has made a significant contribution to building such a network, and to enabling One Parent Families Scotland to reach single parents who may not otherwise have made contact with the services. There is, however, still an inestimable number of practitioners working across Glasgow who are not yet part of this network.

There is therefore a strong case for continuation of the Practitioner Advice Service as an element of a broader One Parent Families Scotland marketing strategy.

## Building Capacity to Support Single Parents

The Practitioner Advice Service has enabled practitioners – through targeted training and knowledge transfer - to be better able to support single parents in their day to day practice. This has produced benefits for more single parents in terms of access to and quality of support, benefits for practitioners and their agencies in terms of delivering on their own priorities, and benefits for One Parent Families Scotland in terms of delivering better support to single parents and making best use of One Parent Families Scotland resources.

*“It’s getting to know what they provide. If we come up with a situation – we know where to go rather than telling folk they would have to go and find somebody themselves. Makes life easier for us. Takes a bit of stress off us. It’s the ease of working with them. There’s no fuss, it’s almost seamless. It’s part of financial inclusion which is part of a tenancy sustaining policy – that’s what we’re all about.”*



The impact of the Practitioner Advice Service is amplified by the capacity built in practitioners, and the capacity this creates in One Parent Families Scotland. Investment in building capacity in practitioners is likely to produce greater benefits for single parents than alternative uses of One Parent Families Scotland staffing resources.

*“There’s nothing I’d change. No not really, it’s pretty comprehensive. If we ask for advice we get it, and eventually we’re building up our own expertise, so we don’t always have to ask for advice.”*

There is therefore a strong case for investment in developing the capacity of practitioners as a mechanism to maximise the impact of available resources

### Developing Services for Single Parents

The practitioner advice service has worked with partner agencies to develop new or improved services to the needs of the single parents they work with. These services go beyond the supports provided by One Parent Families Scotland, and by partner agencies, by producing responses to need which are specialist in nature but informed by the specific needs and circumstances of single parents.

Elements of the Child Poverty Delivery Plan require new commitments to tackling child poverty from a number of agencies. This is likely to increase demand for One Parent Families Scotland to provide support to agencies in developing evidence based and appropriate services.

*“What we’re doing is we’re running a series of events with One Parent Families Scotland and Home Energy Scotland. It’s on Financial education, we do that bit, One Parent Families Scotland do the welfare bit and Home Energy Scotland does the energy bit. One of the things that can bring single parents to our attention is fuel poverty, but that comes with all sorts of other financial problems so it’s part of a package that we are trying to put together. We’ve been asked by the Department of Work & Pensions to run a course too. That will be done with One Parent Families Scotland.”*

*“We looked at sorting events for ourselves, but we weren’t getting an attendance. We then thought we’ve a lot of single parent tenants, we’ve got a nursery full of parents, we’ve got a captive audience, and if people don’t need or aren’t interested in a particular session, they can just go to the things they are interested in. It’s helped us get numbers. It’s easier for us to get attendance.”*

There is therefore an increasing case for One Parent Families Scotland support to partner agencies in developing service specific responses to the needs of single parents.

### Overall Conclusions

The Comic Relief funding which has enabled the development and delivery of the PAS is time limited. Practitioners have expressed their concern about the impact on them, and on the single parents they they work with if the service were no longer available. There is therefore some urgency in identifying new resources to continue the service, or making alternative arrangements to maintain the benefits of the service.

There may be some case for seeking a greater level of investment from partners. All partners are clear about the value of the Practitioner Advice Service, and how it contributes to the achievements of their outcomes. It may not be unreasonable to assume that if partners value the Practitioner Advice Service input, they may be able to quantify that value by investing in it. This may not be possible for some partners. If this were to be taken forward, there may need to be some flexibility in the arrangements between Practitioner Advice Service and partners.

The market for the Practitioner Advice Service, in terms of the number of practitioners and potential partner organisations in Glasgow, and potentially across Scotland, is likely to be limited only by the resources available to deliver services and develop relationships with suitable organisations.

The continuation and development of the Practitioner Advice Service may be made timeous by changes to the welfare system and elements of the Child Poverty Delivery Plan, but even if these were not anticipated, there would be a persuasive case for its continuation. The Practitioner Advice Service has proven to be an invaluable resource to practitioners, an effective source of support to parents, and an important contribution to maximising the impact One Parent Families Scotland achieves with limited resources.

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