EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE
FATHERS AND PARENTING

SUBMISSION FROM ONE PARENT FAMILIES SCOTLAND

One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) is Scotland’s national single parent organisation. Building on over 65 years of advocacy and service-delivery expertise, OPFS provides expert information, advice & support, along with training activities, work preparation programmes & flexible childcare. Services include:

- National Information Service for lone parents and others working with lone parents:

- Community based advocacy, family support services and personal development programmes in Dundee, Falkirk, Edinburgh, Lanarkshire & Glasgow.

- Marks & Spencer Lone Parent Programme

- Lone Parent Peer Mentoring Service

- Specialist Services: young lone parents; lone & contact fathers; student lone parents.

- Training for intermediaries and Lone Parents

- Flexible childcare services in seven L.A.’s: Glasgow; Renfrewshire; Lanarkshire; Fife; Dundee; Angus and Aberdeenshire

- Mobile crèche services

- Policy, Research and lobbying decision makers at all levels in government

- 200 + staff, turnover of over £2m

Around 8% of Scotland’s 165,500 single parents are fathers.¹ This means approximately 13,240 families in Scotland are headed by a single dad. Working on a day-to-day basis with families, OPFS is well-placed to represent the views of single parents - both single mothers and single fathers - and to support them to engage with policy makers on important issues and concerns.

Partnership working represents an important means of influencing policy, and OPFS is involved in a significant number of partnerships including: the Early Years Collaborative; Parenting across Scotland; Education Scotland Family Learning Network; CPAG; Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform, the Poverty Alliance, the Ministerial Advisory Group on Child Poverty, and the Scottish Government’s Welfare Reform Scrutiny Group.

¹ Lone parents with dependent children, January 2012, Office for National Statistics
1. Introduction

OPFS is pleased to be able to contribute to Equal Opportunities Committee call for views on Fathers and Parenting. OPFS has gathered feedback from fathers whom we work with as well as using case studies from one to one work with fathers in Dundee, Falkirk, Edinburgh and Lanarkshire. Through the experiences fathers we are able to identify the key challenges they face in their day-to-day life and to describe the type of service OPFS provides to meet fathers needs. The committee has asked contributions to identify the key challenges fathers face in day-to-day life and the quality of support currently available to them. In particular:

1. What day to day challenges do you experience as a lone / unmarried father in Scotland?

2. Do you experience any particular challenges in a specific aspect of your life for example - work / family / social?

3. Do you experience any particular challenges dealing with a specific subject for example - finance or dealing with access or care arrangements?

4. What kinds of support and or services are available to you and do they meet your needs?

5. Do you feel you get equal access to all types of public facilities when out with your children?

6. If you said that you experience challenges, what are your thoughts on public perception and general awareness of the issue?

OPFS response to these questions this submission will cover:

- Single Dads & Contact Dads
- Facts about Single Parents (Mothers & Fathers)
- OPFS services for Fathers
- OPFS Survey of Single & Contact Dads
- Issues around being a Single Dad
- Policy Context
- Conclusions & Recommendations
- Appendix Dads Case Studies
One Parent Families Scotland aims to challenge the myths and stereotypes about one parent families whether headed by a single mother or a single father. It can be a challenge to bring up your children on your own, being solely responsible for their care and the family income. Single parents do a great job and are worthy of recognition as well as support and advice to get through hard times. The media’s coverage of single parents is often dominated by negative headlines where they are talked about in a negative or stereotypical light. The facts rather than the myths about one parent families challenge perceptions of lone mums & dads, who deserve to be congratulated and not condemned.

2. Definitions

A single parent is a parent, not living with a spouse or partner, who has most of the day-to-day responsibilities in raising the child or children. A single parent is usually considered the primary caregiver, meaning the parent the children have residency with the majority of the time. If the parents are separated or divorced, children often live with the primary care-giver and have contact with their other parent. With standard contact orders one parent has the majority of responsibility for the day-to-day routine, while the other – usually the separated father – sees the children at the weekend or selected weekdays.

The other option “shared care” involves sharing care of children post-separation. This is less common.

In its locally based project work OPFS works with both Single Fathers and Contact Fathers. There is recognition in this submission that the issues facing both groups can be significantly different – these differences are made evident by the fathers themselves.

3. Facts about Single Parents ( Mothers & Fathers )

The facts about lone parents

- It is estimated that there are over 165,500 single parents with 281,000 children in Scotland.

- By 2033, Lone Parent Households are projected to rise to 238,000 (from 24% to 38%).

- Less than 2 per cent of lone parents are teenagers.

- Around 8% of single parents are fathers.

- The median age of lone parents is 38.1.

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2 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single_parents
3 Household Projections for Scotland, National Records of Scotland, June 2012
4 Household Projections for Scotland, National Records of Scotland, 2008
5 Annual Population Survey (APS), (Labour Force Survey plus boost), 2009 data
6 Lone parents with dependent children, January 2012, Office for National Statistics
• 59.2% of lone parents are in work in Scotland, up 14.5 percentage points since 1997  

Single Parent Families and Poverty

• Around four in every 10 (41 per cent) of children in lone parent families are poor, compared to just over two in every 10 of children in couple families  

• The poverty rate for one parent families where the parent works part time is 23 per cent, and 18 per cent where the parent works full time  

• 38 per cent of lone parents said that money always runs out before the end of the week/month compared to 19 per cent of couples  

Family Life

• At least 9 per cent of single parents share the care of their child equally, or nearly equally, with the other parent  

• The majority of children have face to face contact with their other parent. 71 per cent of resident parents said that their child had direct contact with the other parent  

• Parental separation by itself is not considered predictive of poor outcomes in children. Parental conflict has been identified as a key mediating variable in producing negative outcomes in children. A comparison between couple families experiencing high levels of conflict with single parent families found that children fared less well in conflicted couple families, demonstrating that family functioning has a greater impact than family structure in contributing to child outcomes  

4. OPFS Services for Fathers

Single Fathers, can often find it difficult to find the information that’s relevant to them. Some feel that they are viewed differently or that sometimes it’s not easy to find the right support tailored to a father’s needs. Fathers have told us all of this can make the job of bringing up children on their own feel very isolating.

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7 Lone parents with dependent children, January 2012, Office for National Statistics
8 Working and Workless Households, 2012, Table P. ONS Statistical Bulletin, August 2012
10 Department for Work and Pensions, 2011
12 Family and Children Survey 2008, Table 8.8. DWP, 2010
13 Problematic contact after separation and divorce. Peacey V.; Hunt, J. Gingerbread, 2008
14 I’m not saying it was easy...Contact problems in separated families. Peacey, V.; Hunt, J. Gingerbread, 2009
There are times when single dads need support that’s more tailored to their situation, and that when they are dealing with a problem they may find it more helpful to hear how other dads have coped. Around 8% of single parents are men. While they face the same challenges as single mums, as a significant minority single fathers can sometimes feel particularly isolated and in need of mutual support. Single fathers are nearly four times more likely to have a common mental disorder than other men.¹⁶

Early Years Early Action – OPFS Dads Project.

UK research in relation to services for families reported that many are very gendered and make assumptions about the roles of fathers.¹⁷ This concurs with the overwhelming comments made by fathers taking part in OPFS Early Years Early Action project (2012) who stated that there were few services specifically for fathers and little understanding of their needs. One Parent Families Scotland's Early Years Early Action project was funded by Scottish Government from 2010-12. The project evaluation reported that fathers identified that involvement in the project resulted in a notable improvement in their ability to set routines and boundaries for their children

Through pictorial evaluation tools, children showed increased levels of participation in physical activities and one-to-one time with their fathers. Other findings from the children’s feedback show an appreciation that a father’s role can include elements of fun, nurturing and quality family interaction. As a result of increased family interaction:

- 81% of fathers said that the parent-child relationship was strengthened.
- 62% of fathers felt they had a better awareness of the benefits of play
- 67% reported an increase in the number of activities regularly attended.

Through parenting advice and support fathers developed consistent parenting styles which allowed both fathers and children to increase their resilience and trust in others.

Theorists such as Wilson and Prior (2011)¹⁸ state that interaction between fathers and their children often surrounds physically activity. The OPFS project adopted this approach which lead directly to an increase in feelings of attachment, regulation of emotions and development of closer bonds between father and child. However, it was important that financial constraints were recognised and activities undertaken were affordable and sustainable.

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¹⁷ http://www.communitycare.co.uk
One Parent Families Scotland Fathers’ Workers reported that the success of the project was attributed to there being a service tailored to the needs of fathers in particular the provision of a male support worker. Time allocated to promoting positive relationships with fathers and their children was also reported to be a significant contributing factor to the success of the project. In line with the GIRFEC model practitioners ensured that children felt confident about the help they were receiving, had an understanding of the support offered, felt carefully listened to and had their wishes heard and understood. This proved highly successful as one father commented: "The project is having a great impact in helping [his child] and making [his child] feel comfortable with the changes that are happening in his life".

“Us Together “Third Sector Early Intervention Fund

One Parent Families Scotland has a 12 year track record of working with lone fathers and their children. With funding from the Third Sector Early Intervention Fund we have developed “Us Together: Supporting Scotland’s Children and their Fathers”

The Us Together team consists of: 1 Senior Children and Fathers Worker, four Children and Fathers Workers based In Edinburgh, Falkirk, Dundee, and North Lanarkshire.

These areas were chosen as there was awareness that within Edinburgh, Falkirk, Dundee and North Lanarkshire there were no specific support services offered to lone and contact fathers and their children. Our services are unique and tailored to the needs of lone and contact fathers and their children. In these areas a dedicated Children and Fathers Worker offers support fathers and their children on a one to one basis or through group work or family activities.

OPFS offers a person-centred approach using the SHANNARI model, My World Triangle and pictorial genograms for younger children. This is reviewed at regular intervals to ensure positive outcomes or future needs are identified. Upon referral, each child is assessed by a staff member to consider all aspects of the child’s life. This includes their health, social skills, confidence, educational progress and their ability to form good relationships. We work with other agencies /services to ensure fathers and their children have access to appropriate support in all areas of their lives.

In addition to “Us Together,” One Parent Families Scotland also delivers the Edinburgh Lone Fathers Project, Edinburgh Dads Club. The Dads Club is an activity-based parenting support project for single and contact fathers with young children in Edinburgh. It is carried out jointly by Gilmerton Child & Family Centre and One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS), with financial support from Edinburgh Childcare Partnership through the Sure Start programme. The Dads Club is supported by a full time Lone Fathers Worker.

Some of the fathers who use our services are severely disadvantaged and living on the margins of society. In order to ensure that we are reaching out to the most marginalised fathers, we advertise and provide outreach services in the places that such fathers are likely to frequent and through working in partnership with other statutory and third sector organisations. However, we also understand that working fathers may require support. We therefore ensure that these fathers are targeted through press and publicity materials displayed in and around the local areas. To enable working fathers to access our service, we offer support and group activities outwith normal working hours.

"Us Together “aims to achieve the following 4 outcomes:

Outcome 1: The health and wellbeing of children will be improved by low cost play and physical activity. By identifying and encouraging fathers to attend affordable and sustainable group activities/outings and individual outings with their children, we improve children's health and wellbeing. Opportunities that promote positive interactions create an environment that offers the best start for our children. Children therefore experience a broad range of activities within their local area that fathers might not have been aware of. We promote the benefits of play (both indoor and outdoor) which ultimately lead to improved physical and mental wellbeing for children.

Outcome 2: The relationship between child and father becomes resilient and stronger in the early years. This involves fathers in a learning process that helps them understand and contribute to giving positive and sustainable support to their children. We offer direct support to strengthen bonds between child and father and continually assess the children's progress.

Outcome 3: Children and their fathers are encouraged to learn within the home and group activities within their local community therefore creating a learning environment for both. By encouraging fathers to improve their numeracy and literacy skills, they are in a better position to support their children's life-long education thus becoming more resilient and able to take responsibility for their own actions. Fathers and children are encouraged to learn within the home and through educational visits and group activities.

Outcome 4: Fathers grow in self-confidence and increase parenting capacity.

Fathers are given targeted one-to-one support and group work support. The dedicated fathers' worker provides an advocacy role, information and advice on a wide range of lone parent issues and can signpost to relevant agencies. Fathers are given tips and strategies on how to improve their self-esteem and self-confidence. Parenting advice is offered on a one-to-one and group basis.
5. OPFS Survey of Single & Contact Dads

One Parent Families Scotland held 5 focus group discussions in Jan 2014 to ask single and contact fathers for their input in this call for evidence. 29 fathers took part in these discussions. This short video gives fathers a voice https://vimeo.com/79215711

From the feedback it was apparent that like mothers, these fathers want the best for their children. It was recognised that also like mothers, this is more difficult to achieve as a single parent. The fathers recognised that there are a number of complex issues facing lone and fathers and that these issues will not be overcome quickly.

Contact with Services

Some of the fathers felt that “separated fathers “are seen as nice to have around but not essential to the development of children.” This view of men and fathers is quite entrenched in our culture, and by extension is present in the staff that the project encounters in many different areas.

Fathers were concerned about how they are treated by Early Years Services. Some of the fathers felt that they had encountered views from nursery staff which assumed that they are not as capable as mothers, and not respected accordingly. The fathers would like to see these services being proactive and encouraging more men to work in these services.

Fathers also expressed concern about Health Visiting Services. Some fathers felt that these services were based around the needs of mothers and that staff fail to acknowledge the role fathers play in the health of their children. The fathers suggested that health visitors should document their interaction with fathers.

Some fathers raised concerned about their treatment by Social Work Services. Some reported that they felt at times children had been made “accommodated children” based on misconceptions of their parenting abilities and ignoring their parental rights and responsibilities. Fathers also reported a feeling of fear when working with Social Work Services and some said that they had been treated with suspicion by Social Workers around about why they wanted to care for their child(ren). One father said that “I have found the Social Work service to be completely against my point of view. I have consistently felt that my opinion and feelings are always neglected by Social Work. They have never listened to mine or my son’s opinions” The fathers would like to see greater expectations placed on social workers to really involve fathers in care planning.

Some of the contact fathers we spoke to raised negative experiences dealing with Education Services. Some of them had been left out of important meetings about their child(ren) when the mother was included. They would like schools to be more proactive in involving separated fathers. However OPFS fully appreciates that any decisions around contact and involvement should be in the best interests of the child.
Many of the fathers were sole carers of their children and some of them in receipt of benefits. There was a unanimous feeling that the attitude of staff on the phone and in Jobcentres is uncaring of their circumstances as single parents and disregards their role as fathers (assuming that there is a mother doing the majority of the child care). Fathers expressed concern around how benefits are set up and transitioned between separated parents. Many of them have had to endure a huge gap of time until HMRC confirms that they are rightly claiming Child Benefit on behalf of their child (ren). This means that they cannot make applications for Income Support, Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit. Some fathers said that because of their caring responsibilities they cannot work however due to the time delay in claiming benefits they have had no income. They felt that it is important to look at the inefficiency that often surrounds fathers taking over the care of children 0-4 yrs and improve the support from the DWP and HMRC.

Provision of services

Fathers felt that services such as those delivered by One Parent Families Scotland are a good model of support. They acknowledge some of the challenges they face as single fathers, and valued the support available to them to be the best parents they can be to their children. Some of them travel a long way to be part of OPFS services, and are aware that most parts of Scotland do not have access to this kind of support. They would like to see greater emphasis and funding made available for similar support across the country. It was also suggested that statutory service should be more aware of specific support services for lone fathers.

Societal attitudes towards Single Fathers

The fathers we spoke to wanted to be treated as parents who have the same skills and challenges that mothers do. There was mixed responses to asking fathers what they felt about societal attitudes to lone fathers, some negative and some positive. Some fathers felt that “Attitudes are changing, single dads are more accepted. Male carers have proved their abilities” while other responses were more negative “People think of Dads as the weaker parent, we aren’t as good as mums”

Issues around parental rights and responsibilities for fathers.

Some of the fathers who responded to the OPFS survey raised issues around parental rights and responsibilities. These were mainly around the financial implications that they have faced. There was a feeling of unfairness around the cost of court fees that fathers have to pay when requesting custody or access to their child (ren). Some of the fathers also felt that the way in which benefits were paid was unfair, especially for fathers who have shared custody at 50%. Some of the fathers responding to the survey said they felt alienated or devalued by society's attitude to dads and how they perceive they are regarded as male carers.
However OPFS supports the existing principal legal framework governing contact in Scotland set out in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, and the Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006, which define parental responsibilities and associated parental rights (PRRs). Amongst these is the responsibility (and associated right) of a non-resident parent to maintain contact with their child, if that would be in the child’s best interests. S.11 of the Act sets out the orders a court can make, including an order in S.11(2) about where a child should live (a residence order) and an order regulating the arrangements for maintaining contact between a child and a person with whom the child is not living, e.g. a non-resident parent (a contact order). However these particular provisions are set in the context of the three overarching general principles guiding any court action in relation to children, as set out in s. 11(7) of the 1995 Act, namely

- ‘the court must regard the welfare of the child as its paramount consideration’,
- the no-order principle: that the court should only make an order if it is better than making no order,
- ‘Taking account of the child’s age and maturity, the court shall so far as practicable give the child the opportunity to indicate whether he or she wishes to express any views on the matter in dispute; if the child indicates that he or she does wish to express views, give him or her the opportunity to do so; and have regard to these views.’

OPFS believes these principles, which put the welfare of the child at the centre, should continue to be paramount and would not support a presumption of ‘shared parenting/care’.

Whilst there are positive steps the government could take towards enabling shared care, a legal presumption of shared care would focus on parental entitlement rather than what is in the best interests of children, undermining the crucial legal principle that the child’s welfare is paramount.

6. Issues around being a Single Dad

Becoming a Single Dad

Becoming a single dad is a life-changing event. Taking on responsibility for the main care of children can be an exciting prospect, but it also brings with it a lot of practical considerations, worries and questions. For dads who have just split up with their partner or are in the process of separating, the transition for the family can be quite difficult to cope with, for example if a partner has died then the single father requires specialist support.

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“When we separated it was a shock to be left with the kids. It was the amount you need to deal with as well as the emotional turmoil. It’s having to learn so much so quickly! In the evenings at home you are alone. After the kids are in bed that’s when you worry – money, hanging on to your job, feeling no-one is there to turn to…juggling work and the kids. Will I be able to keep my job- that’s what goes through your head”

Work and Money

Making sure that the family has the money it needs can throw up a lot of questions for a single dad. How can a single dad find the right balance between working and being there for the kids? What if you need to take time off? Can you take paternity leave? What support is available if you want to return to education? And:

“How do I work my way through the minefield that is the benefits and tax credits system to make sure my children are well cared for and my family is getting everything that we are entitled to? Getting advice from OPFS on this was unbelievable. The weight was lifted from my shoulders”

Benefits, Tax Credits and Managing Money

Money is a vital part of family life. For single dads, it can be difficult to know exactly what money they are entitled to and often managing on one income, can stretch finances beyond their means. Understanding their benefit situation and having all the facts about what support is available can make managing money easier and less stressful.

Benefits and tax credits are supposed to help people get the financial support they need. As a single parent, it’s important dads and their children are able to access all the money you’re entitled to. Benefits and tax credits can be complex, as they are based entirely on a person’s specific situation.

Cuts to benefits and tax credits, changes to the rules on what kind of support is available to help single parents, charges to access the future statutory child maintenance system are just some of the challenges facing single dads.

“The government seem to be saying - work more, spend less time with your kids, pay more for your childcare and give the Child Support Agency a slice of your child maintenance payments. Never mind the fact that there are no jobs where I live, its often zero-hour contracts at low pay and re-training and support services are dwindling..”

Home, Health and Education

Day to day life as a single dad is challenging. Combining the role of sole carer and breadwinner raises many issues. Dads have told us that sometimes they come up against a problem which they need some help to work through.

“Sometimes being a single dad can be particularly difficult, and situations do arise that you feel you need some additional support to cope with. It isn’t
always easy to ask for help, but by doing so I felt I was in a much better position to think clearly, tackle problems directly and be there for my children when they really need me “

Childcare

The cost and availability of childcare are important factors in enabling dads to stay in work when they become the primary caregiver and in decisions single dads take to engage with training and employment. With childcare costs increasing in recent years, single parents have found it difficult to find childcare that meets their needs.

Childcare is also a major determining factor in how many hours single dads can work and we know that many fathers have said they would work more hours if they could find good quality childcare which was convenient, reliable and affordable. Scottish parents are facing some of the highest childcare costs in Britain, with some local authorities charging twice as much as others for daycare. Nursery prices in some areas are as high as southern England, with 25 hours of care over 50 weeks at the most expensive, costing £11,688.

A report, compiled by the Daycare Trust and Children in Scotland, found only a fifth of Scottish councils had enough daycare places to meet local demand.

7. Policy Context

Policies and initiatives supporting parents in Scotland are connected to a range of inter-related Scottish Government policy frameworks. The Scottish Governments National Performance Framework acknowledges the growing awareness of the importance of early years for the long-term health, wellbeing, learning and life chances of Scotland’s children. The overarching aims are detailed in GIRFEC approach ensures that anyone providing support puts the child or young person – and their family – at the centre.

The Early Years Framework focuses on the needs of families with children from pre-birth to age eight. A central theme is the reduction of inequalities, particularly health inequalities. The parenting task group for the Framework recognised that: “Every child has the right to be planned for, prepared for and parented by adults who are aware of and responsive to their growing needs. We have a duty to support parents in developing the skills and capacities that will help them make the most of their role as parents, provide services which assist families with this responsibility and target support to those who need assistance to access those services” (Parenting Task Force, 2008). At the same time it acknowledged that some parents faced particular challenges. We believe single dads should be recognised as a priority group requiring access to tailored support.

http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/Scottish_Childcare_Lottery.pdf
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/scotPerforms
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/publications
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/01/13095148/1
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/07/parenting-report
Alongside this, a number of other inter-related frameworks have been put in place to address specific inequalities relating to health, deprivation and social inclusion. Equally Well 27 recommends creating healthy environments that promote healthy lifestyles for children. Achieving Our Potential 28 acknowledges the risks faced by children and young people who experience poverty and that many children and young people are being held back by social and economic factors that limit their chances of escaping poverty when they are older. The Child Poverty Strategy for Scotland 29 sets out the Scottish Government’s approach to tackling these risks by maximising household resources, improving children’s life chances, addressing area-based disadvantage and working with local partners. Many single dads are living on extremely low incomes and their needs should be identified in any strategies to eradicate child poverty and tackle health inequalities.

The preventative spend agenda led by the Scottish Parliament’s Finance Committee 30 recommended prioritising funding for early years” initiatives in recognition of the importance of positive child development upon national wellbeing across a wide range of indicators.” It is clear from the analysis presented in this response by OPFS that continued investment in support for single dads fits extremely well into this preventative agenda.

The Early Years Collaborative 31 is a part of the Scottish Governments plan to shift the balance of public services towards early intervention and prevention. In October 2012, the Scottish Government published its Parenting Strategy 32 with the aim of providing better support to all parents. OPFS submitted evidence to the development of the parenting strategy and we are please to see that single parents are identified as a key target group.

The concept of “progressive universalism” (some services and support will be available to all parents and additional support will be targeted at those requiring it) informs the Children and Young People’s Act. 33 In line with the goal to make employment, education and training more accessible for all parents, we hope the needs of single dads will feature as a priority in local authority plans when policy reaches the implementation stage.

UK government welfare reform 34 changes to the benefits system have had a devastating impact on single dads. They are now required to sign on when their youngest child is 5 years and to look for employment. OPFS has many cases of dads who have been sanctioned by JCP for reasons that do not meet the requirements of the legislation. Research yet to be published by OPFS has highlighted a significant number of issues and challenges experienced by lone

29 http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/14094421/6
31 http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/early-years
33 http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/legislation
parents, including single dads as they have attempted to make the transition to JSA and/or into employment. Of particular significance amongst these have been issues related to a lack of suitably flexible employment opportunities and corresponding affordable and available childcare.

8. Recommendations

Contact with Services

1. Early Years Services. Some of the fathers felt that they had encountered views from nursery staff which assumed that they are not as capable as mothers. *The Fathers would like to see Early Years Services being proactive and encouraging more men to work in these services.*

2. Health Visiting Services. Some fathers felt that Health Visitors fail to acknowledge the role fathers play in the health of their children. *The fathers suggested that health visitors should document their interaction with fathers.*

3. Social Work Services. Some fathers reported a feeling of fear when working with Social Work Services and some said that they had been treated with suspicion by Social Workers around about why they wanted to care for their child(ren). *The fathers would like to see greater expectations placed on social workers to really involve fathers in care planning, within the framework of the appropriate legislation.*

4. Education Services. Some father felt excluded from important meetings about their child (ren) when the mother was included. *Fathers suggested that would like schools to be more proactive in involving separated fathers.* *However OPFS fully appreciates that any decisions around contact and involvement should be in the best interests of the child.*

5. JCP & HMRC There was a unanimous view from Fathers that the attitude of JCP staff on the phone and in Jobcentres is uncaring of their circumstances as single parents and disregards their role as fathers.

*Fathers felt strongly that JCP & HMRC should review processes around how benefits are set up and transitioned between separated parents. They felt that it is important to look at the inefficiency that often surrounds fathers taking over the care of children 0-4 yrs and improve the support from the DWP and HMRC.*

Provision of services

6. Fathers felt that some of the challenges they face as single fathers are unique, and valued tailored support from agencies which understand and were able to support them to be the best parents they can be to their children.

*Fathers said they would like to see greater emphasis and funding made available for support for single fathers and their children across the country. It was also suggested that statutory services should be more aware of specific support services for lone fathers so they can signpost them on.*
Societal attitudes towards Single Fathers

7. Fathers we spoke to wanted to be treated as parents who have the same skills and challenges that mothers do.

*Fathers said they would like to see a government campaign to challenge the stereotypes about fathers still very much present in Britain. The campaign would aim to challenge the stereotypes about single dads and instead show them for what they really are – hardworking, resourceful and a vital part of the diversity of family life.*

Parental Rights and Responsibilities for Fathers and Shared Care

8. The Government should remove the obstacles that make it harder for low-income couples to share post-separation care.

- **OPFS believes the principles, which put the welfare of the child at the centre, should continue to be paramount and would not support a presumption of ‘shared parenting/care’**

- **Parents sharing care should both be entitled to take advantage of the flexibilities available to single parents on Jobseeker’s Allowance, such as the ability to fit working hours around school hours if their child is aged under 13.**

- **The Government should reverse housing benefit changes to the age limit for the shared room rate which would mean any single person under 35 would only be able to claim a lower rate intended for a room in shared accommodation, as these hit the parent in a shared care arrangement not deemed the main carer.**

Childcare

Childcare is a major determining factor in how many hours single dads can work and we know that many fathers have said they would work more hours if they could find good quality childcare which was convenient, reliable and affordable.

- **The Scottish government to take the lead in implementing the Early Years Framework by legislating to provide a childcare place for every child.**

- **A universal entitlement to early childhood education and care, with subsidies to limit what parents pay themselves, would make the benefits of early learning available to every child.**

- **The UK government should reverse its childcare tax credit cut which reduced support for childcare costs from 80% to 70%**
Employment and family life

Fathers who are the main carer of their child/ren told us how difficult it is to combine the role of sole carer & breadwinner and that a recognition that single parents in work would benefit from a more family friendly work environment.

- Employers should be encouraged and be made aware of the benefits of flexible working and family-friendly practice.
- Government & Business organisations should promote more tolerance for men who need to spend time with their children.
- Policies such as adequately paid parental leave, improving rights to request flexible working, provision of decent and well-paid part-time jobs, and access to affordable and quality childcare are crucial to supporting single dads to sustain employment.
- System of paid parental leave introduced which as a minimum should incorporate a set number of paid days for the care of children who are ill, which operates in a similar way to statutory sick pay for individuals.
- In addition, we believe that unpaid parental leave should be available until a child is aged 18.

9. Conclusions

It's often women who are associated with single parenthood. However Scotland’s single dads are significant percentage of parents with the main care of their children. They face many of the same barriers single mothers face but the response above highlights some of the different challenges single dads face. A single dad responding to our survey put it this way:

“Society puts too many unnecessary barriers in our way. Lone fathers and their children deserve better. Becoming a lone-father family is difficult enough.”

One Parent Families Scotland
28 February 2014