

Scottish Parliament Social Justice & Social Security Committee

Inquiry into Addressing Child Poverty through Parental Employment

Written submission by Fedcap Scotland (08 June 2023)

Background

Fedcap Scotland is a not-for-profit business dedicated to improving the social, health and economic wellbeing of disadvantaged people within our communities.

We're proud of the work that our teams are undertaking with people in great need across Scotland as a primary provider of Scottish Government's Fair Start Scotland devolved employability service. We're contributing to Scotland's labour market success story, working to support economically inactive and unemployed people.

Just over 3,000 people classed as economically inactive have used our services in recent years. Half of the adults who have come to us voluntarily, have gone on to secure sustainable employment in under 12 weeks and we've found that support can be particularly successful when people who are out of work are empowered to refer themselves for help.

Our numbers

Fedcap has delivered almost 40% of all job starts on the Fair Start Scotland service – working with 40 different local partners and 5,000 employers to help 8,000 people find work.

We've supported 3,853 parents and, so far, found work for 1,157.

Of those parents we support, 1,525 are single. To date, we have found sustainable work for 406 of them.

Almost eight out of 10 parents we work with are aged 25-49 with slightly more women (56%) than men seeking support.

More than two thirds declared having a health condition and of those, 43% had a mental health condition.

Investment in Scotland

In the last four years, we have invested over £12 million in Scotland including properties, salaries and technology.

As a large organisation delivering big contracts across the UK, we're able to invest in services that we have built collaboratively, having listened to the needs of the people who use our services.

Our customers have access to a bespoke online resource – the Fedcap Hub - which helps people improve their computer skills, develop their maths and English, create professional CVs, and teaches customers how to search the internet for jobs.

Partners

Working in partnership with local organisations is fundamental to the work we do at Fedcap. We believe in working collaboratively with other specialist third sector organisations to find the best solutions for the people we offer services to.

As a national organisation, we're able to create extra capacity within the local delivery ecosystem, that allows smaller third sector partners to focus on activities people will benefit from the most. This can be through technology or investment in services.

Examples of partners we work with include Gingerbread, Single Parent Scotland, Scottish Families, Womens Aid and local foodbanks.

Our approach

We believe person-centred employability and support provision is a must and that national programmes such as Fair Start Scotland that work in and with local communities, are making the right sort of progress. National programmes operate at scale, can demonstrate positive outcomes and do so at best value to the public purse.

While a national provider, we operate at a local level, engaging with councils and community partnerships. Through our network of operational centres based in communities across Scotland, we strive to personalise support for every individual, whatever their circumstances and barriers to work.

Barriers to work

A cornerstone of our work is to identify barriers and work with our customers to remove obstacles and help people see a path to employability is a realistic option for them.

We have built some very smart methods of getting feedback from people who use our services, including how we capture and use data.

More than one in 10 lone parents have told us they have debt problems with seven in 10 reporting they don't have access to a car or bike to travel to work independently.

A lack of confidence is a recurring barrier parents perceive they have – about job searching, interview techniques and having the necessary digital skills to find work in today's jobs market with one in 10 lone parents telling us they don't feel they have sufficient general computer skills.

We also find that childcare commitments and a wish to work around school hours, is seen by parents as a barrier to finding work. One single mother, who reached out to us voluntarily over social media, told us the trigger for her looking for a job was due to the cost-of-living increase, coupled with a change in their mental health. She thought that her mental health condition, together with the fact she had childcare needs would be a barrier to gaining employment. We successfully helped her to take up a part-time hybrid role in administration.

Our customers

Below are further examples of parents we've worked with to help them overcome obstacles in taking up sustainable employment, that has not only increased their self-esteem and economic wellbeing, but also improved their children's quality of life.

Eileen's story:

When Eileen arrived at Fedcap Scotland's Livingston office in March 2022, she was very depressed, having been repeatedly told she was not good enough to get a job and had suffered lots of rejections.

At the time she was living with her 10-year-old son and often went without food to ensure he could eat. Eileen saw little future other than struggling day to day.

Fedcap Scotland worked with Eileen to build up her confidence. Her personal adviser got her set up on the online Fedcap Hub to help her with interview skills and spent a lot of time chatting to her in person, over the phone, complimenting her when she was doing really well and being a listening ear if she was having a bad day.

Over the next two months Eileen became more confident and showed a lot more independence and a lot of drive to do things.

In May 2022, Eileen was offered a job as a shop manager. She was very happy and proud to be able to pay her way and support her son who says he is really proud that she now goes out to work and pays for things she has earned to look after him.

Eileen has since moved into another, more demanding role within sales and was the top salesperson across her UK business several times in her first few months.

Julie's story

Julie* was referred to Fair Start Scotland Aberdeen in May 2022. She told her personal adviser that she felt she had not been able to support her daughter fully. She would have liked to be able to take her on more holidays and days out. Overall, she was managing to give her daughter the best life possible while being unemployed, but found it a struggle.

Julie wanted to build on her skills and find a role that fit around her child's schedule. She was motivated by her daughter and was motivated to learn more skills to boost her chance of finding a role.

After joining Fair Start Scotland, Julie completed an administration course and two short courses related to teaching on the Digital College. She gained confidence and created a good quality CV on the online Fedcap Hub.

She worked hard looking for roles with the help of her personal adviser and her job coach. She secured a playworker job at a local nursery, while continuing to be her daughter's primary carer. She was so happy at gaining employment and feels hopeful about the future.

*Not her real name

Nigel's story

Nigel* joined Fair Start Scotland, looking for support with anxiety and confidence. He felt it was challenging at the age of 62 to find a suitable role with an employer who would consider his application.

Nigel has a 14-year-old son, and it was very important to him to find a suitable role with part-time hours to fit around his family life and commitments. The additional income would also allow him to improve his son's quality of life, a key aim for him. He struggled to find roles as he had limited digital access and confidence to carry out a job search, which was a barrier we immediately identified.

As Nigel struggled to apply for jobs due to limited digital access, we supported him to identify suitable vacancies and apply. We arranged for him to attend supported job search sessions where he used a variety of job search channels to maximise the number of applications made. He also received one-to-one support for job searching and cover letter writing.

Nigel attended weekly sessions and completed applications with very little help. We watched his confidence grow at every appointment, a big step forward for him. As soon as he identified a role, we practiced mock interviews and helped him soothe his nervousness for the interview.

Nigel is now in employment and thoroughly enjoying it. The part-time hours are perfect for him and only works Monday to Friday, which allows him to maintain his work-life balance.

*Not his real name