

Wraparound care for children with Additional Support Needs

Briefing
May 2025



**One Parent
Families Scotland**
changing lives, challenging poverty

Introduction

- Single parents, 92% of whom are mothers, are on call 24/7 for their children, often with no respite. This pressure is then further compounded when one or more children living in the household are impacted by disability.
- For families with a low income and lack of wider family support, these circumstances can be extremely challenging. The impact can be significant, for example on the parents' health and wellbeing, and can limit opportunities for them to take up paid employment.
- There is a need for greater recognition of the structural limitations parents caring for a disabled child or children face, the sources of poverty that they may encounter, and the subsequent policies needed to address these concerns. Given that 40% of children in poverty in single parent families have a disabled adult or child in the household, there is a strong case for urgent action to address the root causes of poverty for these households.
- Today's debate highlights the need for greater and more consistent support for families with a disabled child and is most welcome for shining a spotlight on this critical issue. As highlighted in the briefing below, current systems of support are insufficient to meet families' needs, and therefore the proposed approach to wraparound care has the potential to have a significant, positive impact on quality of life for the children and families that receive it.
- However, it is only by listening to the voices of single parents who look after a child with a disability, that those designing and actioning relevant policies can gain a fuller appreciation of the real issues and solutions required for families.

"My kids struggle mentally, and my depression is bad because it's such an overwhelming situation to be in. I need help to balance everything because it is hard coping with everything and being there as best I can for my children."

Adelaide, single parent with three children

"My son is on the autism spectrum so requires certain things and needs routine. It can be expensive with all the rising costs to provide what he needs, and it is constantly adding to my financial difficulties. I am very lonely and struggling with my mental health."

Lyn, single parent of son with autism

Single parent families and disability

Insufficient support for single parent families with disabled children is, at its heart, a child poverty issue. With higher household expenses, and lack of affordable, accessible external support, the statistics show us that:

- On average, the extra cost of disability is equivalent to 63% of household income after housing costs.
- Half of parents of disabled children are unable to work and have experienced poverty, because of lack of support for their child.
- Three in four parents have had to give up employment or their whole careers, due to lack of support.
- Seven out of ten parents said their disabled children's health had deteriorated because of lack of support.
- Only one in five felt their family received the support needed for their child to fulfil their potential.
- Over a third (38%) of parents have experienced marriage/relationship breakdown in the last 12 months because of lack of support for their disabled child.¹

Barriers to accessing quality childcare are also worse for disabled children – with parents and carers of disabled children paying higher than average costs, and three-quarters having reduced their hours or left their job because of difficulties accessing appropriate childcare.² Through no fault of their own they are facing extremely difficult choices, all of

¹ [Scope, 2023. Disability Price Tag 2023: The extra cost of disability.](#)

² [UK Parliament, 2014. Report of the parliamentary inquiry into childcare for disabled children.](#)

which are having negative impacts on ever-diminishing household budgets and the mental wellbeing of the whole family.

Furthermore, while not within the remit of the Scottish Parliament, single parents with a disabled child or children also face a UK-wide social security system where 'conditionality' is playing a more substantial role within welfare reform.

As well as having to juggle their dual roles of main unpaid carer and breadwinner, single parents with a disabled child are further disadvantaged by a social security system which places an inflexible mandatory obligation on participation in the labour market - without consideration of personal circumstances.

The impact of benefit conditionality on single parent families' financial circumstances is a major concern for OPFS, as we hear first-hand from parents about the impact on family wellbeing. A carer who provides at least 35 hours a week to care for a child with disabilities, and is in receipt of certain disability benefits, is normally exempt from conditionality. However, under Universal Credit many families with disabled children will be worse off, as extra disability payments are being cut by more than 50% for most disabled children.

At OPFS we are very concerned about the impact that upcoming changes to disability benefits at UK level will have longer term for these families in Scotland, should their benefit entitlement be subject to further reduction.

"My son has a disability, so this is causing me extra stress and anxiety, which affects my mental health. We are really struggling just to get by daily - everything is so expensive"

Kelly, single parent with son

Wraparound support for families

Evidence from families supported by OPFS supports the proposal in today's motion that not all families are receiving sufficient out-of-school care during holiday periods – and goes further to argue that support during term time is also not always sufficient to meet families' needs either. This may be due to cost, challenges around working hours related to Universal Credit conditionality, or insufficient or inaccessible provisions meaning that single parents are "on call" 24/7, which can be significant contributor to poorer mental health and wellbeing outcomes long term.

Single parent families need the Scottish Parliament, UK Parliament, and Local Authorities to take urgent action to increase levels of provision for children with additional support needs, including through an acceleration in the initial diagnosis process - and a more consistent, reliable, affordable, accessible system of support both during and outwith term time

Policy calls

To better support single parents with a disabled child or children, we believe that decision makers can:

Scottish Parliament:

- Encourage all political parties to prioritise the needs of disabled children and their families, and to recognise that disabled children and their families are valued members of society.
- Introduce more financial assistance for children with autism - given their needs and additional family costs are often more expensive in relation to equipment needed to cater for their individual sensory, emotional, physical, and developmental requirements.
- Increase support for families with disabled children in line with the Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan. The latter identifies six priority groups, including disabled families, as they have the highest poverty levels overall. Immediate support should be given to these families in consideration of greater living costs and lower levels of support through the UK social security system.
- Introduce a new National Outcome on valuing and investing in care, and all those who provide it.

UK Parliament:

- Similarly encourage all political parties to prioritise the needs of disabled children and their families and to recognise that disabled children and their families are valued members of society.
- Reevaluate changes to PIP and LCWRA payments – recognising that these policy changes will be a significant driver of child poverty and will prevent families from obtaining vital support for their children.

Local authorities:

- Work with families using a strength-based model to achieve positive family health and wellbeing.
- Provide support by way of adaptations, equipment, or more suitable housing to improve life outcomes for disabled children.
- Provide greater access to respite services for families with a disabled with physical/ mental health conditions or challenging behaviour. These services help to promote independence for children and young people and give the opportunity for parents to have a break and find, often much-needed, support.

About One Parent Families Scotland

One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) is the leading charity working with single parent families in Scotland. Building on over seventy years of advocacy and service-delivery expertise, OPFS provides expert information, advice, and family support for one parent families, along with training activities, employability programmes and flexible childcare. OPFS campaigns with parents to make their voices heard to change the systems, policies and attitudes that disadvantage single parent families.

Our vision is of a Scotland in which single parents and their children are valued and treated equally and fairly. Our mission is to work with and for single parent families, providing support services that enable them to achieve their potential and help create lasting solutions to the poverty and barriers they face.

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