



Dudleston Harkins
Social Research Ltd

Evaluation of the Glasgow Lone Parent Project

Final Report

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Evaluation of the Glasgow Lone Parent Project

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Prepared by:

Dudleston Harkins Social Research Limited

Contact details:

Dr Judith Harkins
20 Birkdale Crescent
Westerwood
Cumbernauld
Glasgow G68 0JZ
01236 782379
07932 654868

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Executive Summary

The Glasgow Lone Parent Project was a short term funded partnership project initiated in 2014 by Glasgow City Council's Poverty Leadership Panel. It aimed to improve the way services in Glasgow supported lone parents, encouraging collaborative practices across relevant service providers in order to do so. The project consisted of a Development Manager, hosted in Glasgow City Council (GCC), and a Lone Parent Advisor, hosted in One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS), who co-ordinated a lone parent advisory group. The project was overseen by a multi-agency steering group, consisting of representatives from OPFS, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (NHSGGC), GCC, NHS Health Scotland, Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) and the Wheatley Group. It was collaboratively funded, with various steering group organisations funding the Development Manager post and the Wheatley Group funding the Lone Parent Advisor post.

The project aspired to provide a strategic focus to issues facing lone parents by influencing existing systems and improving services, rather than applying a more traditional service delivery project. Stakeholders discussed the innovative, unconventional, progressive nature of the model which was described as "*community development within strategic programme leadership*".

The aim of the evaluation (commissioned in 2017) was to understand the processes undertaken to engage and influence service providers and the barriers and facilitators to implementation. The methodology involved a review of documentation and qualitative research with 21 individuals.

Engaging and Influencing Service Providers

Effective engagement with multiple service providers was a key project facilitator. This involved a considered process of embedding, scoping, engaging, influencing, and always, championing the needs of lone parents. The placement of the Development Manager in a senior post within a statutory organisation was viewed as critical to the ability to achieve change and facilitate quick and effective engagement with stakeholders. Despite this, challenges included the ability to advocate for change while working within established organisational programmes and governance structures.

The structure of the project consisting of a dedicated Development Manager and Lone Parent Advisor was a key facilitator to engagement. The project staff were persuasive and committed, having a real desire to facilitate positive change for lone parents, supported by a strong knowledge base. This

commitment to continually raise the profile of lone parents, with the hope that better informed service providers would refine and improve services accordingly, was a significant focus of the project.

The issue of stigma was a recurring theme, and considered a barrier to some stakeholder engagement. The use of accurate, relevant and up-to-date evidence on lone parents, informed by the lone parent advisory group, was a method used to overcome stigma.

Key Successes and Outcomes

Outcomes specifically contributed to by the project included:

- Automatic award of School Clothing Grants
- Provision of hard copies of Scottish Welfare Fund applications to remove barriers to completing forms over the phone or internet
- Improved feelings of empowerment and increased self-confidence amongst lone parents involved in the advisory group
- Work undertaken in relation to overcoming stigma
- National influence via a subgroup of The Scottish Government's Welfare Reform & Health Impact Delivery Group (HIDG)
- The lone parent voice informing pieces of work including the GCC Poverty Leadership Panel; the choice of split payments under Universal Credit; the Gender Based Violence Strategic Action Plan which will inform the development of the Glasgow Strategic Action Plan; the Review of Lifelong Learning undertaken by Glasgow Life; The Cost of the School Day and The Cost of the School Holidays; and Quality Standards for Employability within GCC.

Further softer outcomes included enhanced collaborative working and facilitating relationships and raising the profile of lone parents.

Collaborative Working

Collaborative working - bringing people from different disciplines together to self-reflect and improve their knowledge of lone parents - was a key success of the project. The positive communication and collaboration among the multi-agency steering group was a project facilitator. The most significant aspect of collaboration was the hosting of the project team across both GCC and OPFS. This was considered extremely valuable as the project benefitted from the operation of both types of organisation and allowed the 'campaigning' voice of the third sector to penetrate the statutory sector.

Co-Production with Lone Parents

A critical aspect of the model was ensuring the priorities and direction of the project was driven by lone parents, thus funding a Lone Parent Advisor and establishing a lone parent advisory group. A key characteristic of the advisory group was the non-judgemental, comfortable, informal and supportive environment created by the Lone Parent Advisor, as was basing the Advisor within an established third sector organisation for the target group, partly as it provided continuity for lone parents involved with the project.

Barriers and Challenges

As would be expected, the innovative and ambitious nature of the project was associated with some barriers and challenges. The project was always intended to be short term, however, there was common consensus that given the scale of the challenge involved in encouraging stakeholders to understand and support the project aims, as well as influencing them to alter their practice, the length of the project was insufficient.

There was an additional challenge of obtaining ongoing funding for the project to support implementation of key initiatives that arose from discussions with lone parents and stakeholders.

The importance of both the Development Manager and Lone Parent Advisor has been highlighted already. However, an unintended consequence of this was experienced when the Development Manager left her post within GCC and stakeholders described how the momentum and strength of the project diminished considerably.

Finally, limitations in terms of evaluation including the lack of an evaluation framework from the outset and the lack of a cost-benefit analysis were acknowledged.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The evaluation has provided evidence of the strength of the project in influencing service providers to improve provision and work to achieve positive outcomes for lone parents.

This Glasgow Lone Parent Project was effective for several reasons:

1. The multi-agency, committed, progressive steering group;

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2. The cross-sectoral management of the project with the Development Manager hosted in a statutory organisation and the Lone Parent Advisor hosted in a voluntary organisation;
 3. The lone parent advisory group ensuring the lone parent voice infiltrated the project;
 4. The skills, commitment, experience and passion of the project team to continuously push the lone parent agenda through a range of channels;
 5. The number of specific outcomes achieved;
 6. The overarching aim to overcome stigma and dispel myths about the target group through providing up to date information and statistics, and allowing the lone parent voice to be campaigned for through a statutory organisation.

It is recommended that the model is shared widely beyond Glasgow to help raise the profile of groups known to experience poorer outcomes and who may require a more tailored response from mainstream services to better meet their needs.

Chapter 1 Background and Methodology

1.1 Background

The Glasgow Lone Parent Project (GLPP) was a short term funded partnership project which ran from April 2015 – March 2017 and aimed to improve the way services in Glasgow supported lone parents, encouraging collaborative practices in order to do so. The current report outlines the results of an evaluation of the GLPP commissioned by the Project Steering Group in 2017.

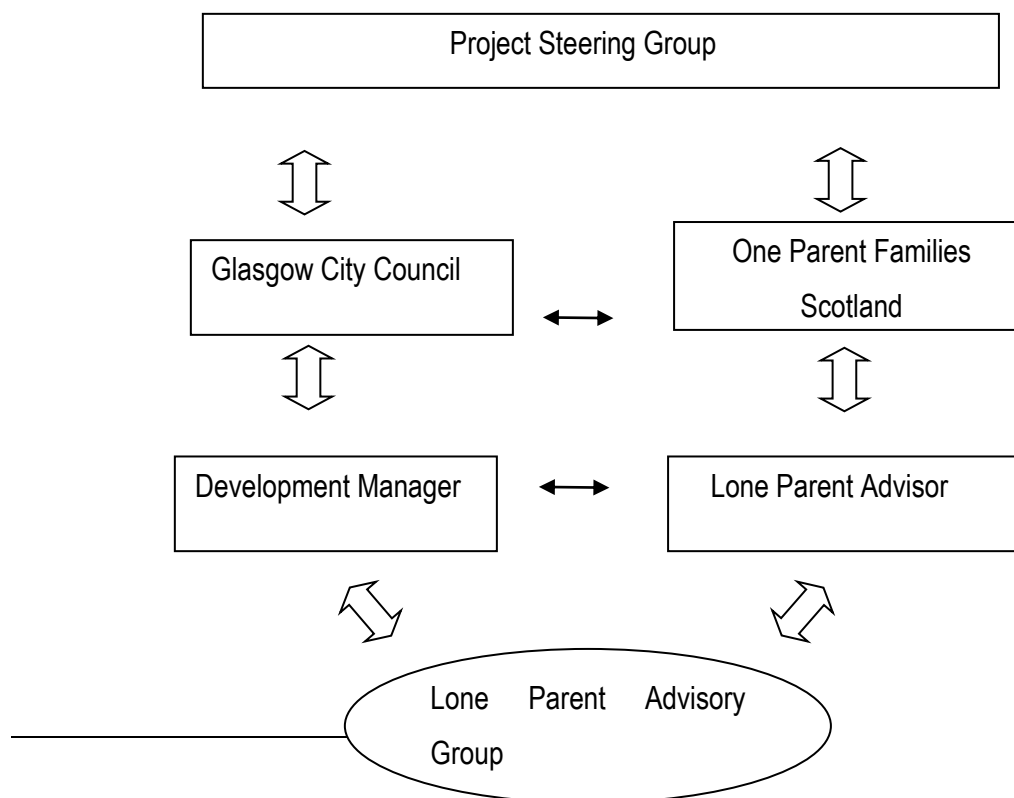
A lone parent is defined as a parent with a dependent child living in a household with no other adults (whether related to the dependent child or not). In 2015, approximately three in ten families across Scotland consisted of lone parents with dependent children, with Glasgow having the highest rate of any Scottish local authority with four in ten¹. Lone parents are more likely to experience a range of issues in comparison to couple families such as poverty, (including in-work poverty) and work in low-status occupations. Lone parents are also more directly affected by various UK welfare policy changes, particularly changes to Income Support eligibility. To illustrate, it is estimated that lone parent households are set to lose £1,800 per annum². This makes lone parents a particularly vulnerable group.

In 2013, the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH), alongside One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (NHSGGC) commissioned mixed-method research into the impact of welfare reform on lone parents in Glasgow. This supported the development of a range of outputs that included a literature review, a research report that captured the views of lone parents

¹ National Records of Scotland (2016) <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/>

² Beatty, C, S Fothergill, S (2015) The Cumulative Impact of Welfare Reform on Households in Scotland, Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh. Available at: <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/87136.aspx>

moving into work as part of the welfare changes, a GCPH briefing paper, a partnership seminar event, blogs commenting on the work and a short film that captured the voice of one lone parent.³ In 2014, this research led Glasgow City Council's (GCC) Poverty Leadership Panel to develop an 18-month funded partnership project – the Glasgow Lone Parent Project. The project consisted of a Development Manager to take forward the recommendations of the research and a Lone Parent Advisor to support the work of the Development Manager and to engage effectively with lone parents. The project was overseen by a multi-agency steering group, consisting of representatives from OPFS, NHSGGC, GCC, NHS Health Scotland, GCPH and the Wheatley Group.



³ More details on the various lone parent outputs can be found at:

http://www.gcph.co.uk/work_themes/theme_3_poverty_disadvantage_and_the_economy/family_and_child_poverty/lone_parent_famili

1.2 Project Aims

The aims of the project were to

- improve the way in which the city's services supported lone parents; and
- increase collaboration across relevant service providers.

While improving services for this target group based on their specific needs, it was anticipated that the standard of services would improve for all parents. The project aspired to provide a strategic focus to lone parents by influencing existing systems and improving services, rather than applying a more traditional service delivery project model.

Stakeholders discussed the innovative, unconventional, progressive nature of the model which was described as "*community development within strategic programme leadership*".

1.3 Project Evaluation and Methodology

The aim of the evaluation was to understand the processes undertaken to engage and influence service providers and the barriers and facilitators to implementation of the project. The steering group produced a Theory of Change which outlined the aims of the project, the activities and what they lead to including the overall projected achievements of the project, assumptions, context and unintended consequences (See Appendix 1). The evaluation focused on five main areas:

- Engaging and influencing key service providers
- Co-production between lone parents and key service providers
- Collaborative working
- Project implementation; and
- Early learning and impacts.

The evaluation consisted of:

- Documentary analysis
- Qualitative research with members of the steering group (n = 6)
- Qualitative interviews with project team (n = 2)

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- Qualitative interviews with key stakeholders including representatives from Glasgow Life, GCC, the Wheatley Group, Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Community Safety Glasgow (n = 10)
 - Focus group with lone parents (n = 3)

The interviews and focus groups were either digitally recorded then fully transcribed or comprehensive notes were taken. Thematic analysis was undertaken using an analysis framework. In the report, all respondents other than lone parents are referred to as stakeholders.

1.4 Structure of the report

The following chapter outlines the process of engaging and influencing service providers. There is then a chapter on the key successes and impacts of the project, followed by a chapter on the other evaluation themes – collaborative working, and co-production with lone parents. The next chapter discusses barriers and challenges involved with the project, followed by the last chapter which outlines the limitations, conclusions and recommendations from the research.

Chapter 2 Engaging and Influencing Service Providers

The range of positive outcomes achieved by the project was largely due to effective engagement with multiple service providers. This involved a considerable process of embedding, scoping, engaging, influencing, and always, championing the needs of lone parents. Key elements of this process are outlined in this chapter.

2.1 Organisational Placement of Development Manager

The Development Manager was based in the Financial Inclusion Team within GCC. The placement of the Development Manager in a senior post within a statutory organisation was viewed as critical to the ability to achieve change and was considered a key facilitator to quicker and more effective engagement with stakeholders. The Financial Inclusion Team was regarded as a valuable place for the Development Manager to be, as other members of the team had responsibility for the Poverty Leadership Panel and were supportive and interested in proactively aiding the project.

“Being based within the Council was one of the biggest influencing factors...A senior manager role in the Council was sufficiently strategic, being able to engage with officials at quite a similar level, and that opened doors...someone in the inside changing approach was more effective than someone in third sector”. (Stakeholder)

Despite this, there were reported challenges with the project being hosted by a statutory organisation. These included the ability to advocate for change while working within established organisational programmes and governance structures.

“There were limitations to being hosted within the Council – “you can’t have your campaigning cake and eat it as you’re one of us now” - which is an interesting learning point about how we reform public services”. (Stakeholder)

2.2 Scoping, Engaging and Influencing

The Development Manager spent considerable time, particularly at the beginning, engaging with key stakeholders to establish interest in the project, determining the key influencers, accessing useful information, and considering realistic achievements within the timeframe. The establishment of a network of key people within significant organisations (e.g. Glasgow Life, DWP etc.), and fostering positive relationships, supported several project outcomes. The ability to be opportunistic and remain flexible within an agenda/action plan to react to possibilities as they arose was also a facilitator. Consequently, the outcomes of the project were very closely linked to those service providers/individuals who engaged.

“The project had very high-level outcomes, with a lack of specific objectives which was arguably a key strength of the project, as it allowed for organic growth and opportunities and outcomes to be led by the organisations involved. However, this also presented some initial challenges in respect of formulating an action plan”. (Stakeholder)

2.3 Attributes of Project Staff

The structure of the project, consisting of a dedicated Development Manager and Lone Parent Advisor, was a key facilitator to engagement. Staff within the project were persuasive and committed. They had a real desire to facilitate positive change for lone parents which was supported by a strong knowledge base. Stakeholders reported that the importance of having the right people in place could not be underestimated, and that many of the outcomes achieved were a “*testament to the tenacity*” of the project team. This commitment to continually raise the profile of lone parents, with the hope that better informed service providers will refine and improve services accordingly, was a significant focus of the project.

“She was impossible to say no to as she was so passionate about it... and that passion comes across and made it hard for people not to buy in to.... Also, the fact she was knowledgeable about the subject matter and barriers that lone parents face, she was very engaging and flexible and had ability to take the strategic view and try to turn it into something operational that would have made a difference”. (Stakeholder)

2.4 Stigma

The issue of stigma was a recurring theme, and was considered a barrier to some stakeholder engagement. The extent to which lone parents “*deserved*” a specific response was said to very subtly infiltrate conversations about improving service provision. Overcoming stigma was perceived to be a significant and difficult objective to achieve, with the recognition that the issue was complex and cut across organisations. However, having the Development Manager hosted within GCC was viewed as a significant facilitator.

One of the methods used to overcome stigma was the use of accurate, relevant and up-to-date evidence on both the demographic profile of lone parents and the issues they face. The lone parent advisory group was said to play a crucial role in this process.

“Trying to get the stigma message across might have been harder had we not had [the Development Manager] hosted in the Council. There was something about the dynamic that made it much more effective”. (Stakeholder)

"{The Development Manager} spent a lot of time, more than anticipated, dispelling some of these myths with people she was working with in the Council both through informal consultations and presentations". (Stakeholder)

2.5 Project Ethos

The positive ethos of the project was a facilitator to engagement. The ethos included positive collaboration, encouraging services to come together to self-reflect, avoiding a blame culture and instead promoting mutual benefit:

"There were no heroes or villains. It was all very messy; people are coming with different perspectives and histories and it's a learning process for everyone". (Stakeholder)

"It's about positively working together, so about empowering – 'how we can address this gap collaboratively?'...selling it as it makes better sense for them". (Stakeholder)

2.6 Service Improvement

Another means by which service providers were encouraged to consider the needs of lone parents, was to emphasise that improving service provision for lone parents would ultimately result in improved service provision for all parents.

"We can't treat everybody the same because everybody isn't impacted the same. Sometimes you need to take a different approach as they [lone parents] face different barriers, but if we improve something, we improve it for everyone". (Stakeholder)

Chapter 3 Key Successes and Outcomes

3.1 Outcomes

Outcomes specifically related to the project are detailed below. Involvement and influence in these various pieces of work was said to be a true legacy of the project.

- Automatic award of School Clothing Grants. This is a grant of £52 provided by GCC to children whose parents are in receipt of particular qualifying benefits. The Lone Parent Advisor and the advisory group outlined difficulties with the existing system of applying for school clothing grants via a paper application and based on this information, GCC removed the application process which led to the automation of clothing grants. The timescales were also amended to open applications in May rather than June to better suit the needs of parents. This resulted in an additional 5,407 children receiving the school clothing grant before Christmas which equated to 97% uptake. In addition, the grant was increased from £47 to £52 for all children, including the 22,000 already in receipt of the benefit who also received the additional £5 before Christmas. This resulted in a total added investment from GCC of £354,608 per annum. This was a key success of the project, as well as an effective process which could be implemented nationally, or for other types of benefits. It should be noted that there are ongoing challenges with this benefit, as the amount provided is regarded as insufficient and significantly below the estimated cost of £130, thus indicating the need to ensure the needs of lone parents (and more disadvantaged parents) continue to be considered⁴.
- Provision of hard copies of Scottish Welfare Fund applications. The Scottish Welfare Fund is a discretionary scheme administered by local authorities involving two different types of grants (1) Crisis Grants which aim to help those in crisis because of a disaster or an emergency and (2) Community Care Grants which aim to help people who either may have to go into care unless they are supported to stay at home, or are leaving any form of care and need help to

⁴ http://www.gcph.co.uk/assets/0000/6096/Briefing_paper_BP49_cost_of_school_day_WEB.pdf

set-up their own home. Completion of application forms was done online or over the telephone. By providing hard copies of the form and support to complete the form via OPFS, this helped remove barriers to applying.

- The positive impact on lone parents involved in the advisory group (as outlined in Chapter 5) including a sense of empowerment, and increased self-confidence.
- Work undertaken in relation to overcoming stigma which emerged as an underlying issue impacting hugely on the life of lone parents. Challenging stigma was seen to infiltrate all activity linked to the project, as well as there being many specific pieces of work specifically undertaken to challenge stigma. Examples included a presentation delivered by the Development Manager and the Lone Parent Advisor to the Poverty Leadership Panel to raise awareness of how poverty and health impact single parents in Glasgow, training provided to 40 work coaches and managers at DWP under the Glasgow Fairer banner on challenging myths and stigma around lone parents not wanting to work; training to new staff who were training to become mentors⁵ at the Wheatley Group delivered by the Lone Parent Advisor, and Wheatley Group anti-poverty Co-ordinator; and perhaps most significantly, the #ProudSingleParents campaign created by the lone parent advisory group which aimed to raise awareness of issues facing lone parents, challenge myths and celebrate the positive aspects of being a lone parent⁶⁷. Stakeholders did consider the impact of this work alongside the significant challenge involved in overcoming stigma, and the need for a long-term approach, but felt that the project had made significant inroads to challenging stigma surrounding lone parents in relation to Glasgow service provision.
- The project also had national influence via a subgroup of The Scottish Government's Welfare Reform & Health Impact Delivery Group (HIDG). The group aims to understand the unintended, adverse consequences of welfare reform on population health and health inequalities – including the impact on health services – to mitigate their effects and plan

5 <https://www.aol.co.uk/money/2017/07/06/money-mentors-being-offered-in-glasgow-financial-project/>

6 <http://www.opfs.org.uk/201605-striving-to-thrive-not-just-survive>

7 Linking #ProudSingleParents and #FairerGlasgow17; <http://www.opfs.org.uk/single-parents-exploding-myths/>

service responses effectively. The Development Manager and Lone Parent Advisor presented at this group to provide an overview of the project. This resulted in the creation of the multi-agency Lone Parents and Welfare Reform Sub-group of the HIDG in 2016/17. This group is chaired by a member of the Glasgow Lone Parent Project steering group and aims to consider how the public and third sectors in Scotland could support lone parents whilst in receipt of benefits and, when appropriate, support them into good, sustainable employment by identifying good practice and what can be scaled up across Scotland to improve the situation better for lone parents and their children's wellbeing. One of the outputs of this group included the publication of a paper that was co-authored by the Development Manager and Lone Parent Advisor⁸.

- The lone parent voice informing pieces of work including:
 - Choice of split payments under Universal Credit. Universal Credit is a monthly payment which replaced 6 previous benefit types (Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, and Working Tax Credit). The Scottish Government had proposed that for couples living in the same household, payment would be made to one account. Alongside other organisations including Women's Aid, the lone parent advisory group was consulted on this proposal which led to the production of a detailed report on concerns of financial control. As a result, a representative from the Scottish Government conducted follow up consultation with the advisory group. The decision was then made that couples will have a choice of split payments paid to each individual which was described as an "incredible achievement" in part due to the voices of lone parents in Glasgow being heard. There is also an important gender dimension to this, given that around nine out of ten lone parents are female, and evidence indicating that mothers are more likely to spend income on their children than fathers⁹.

⁸ <http://www.scotpho.org.uk/downloads/scotphoreports/scotpho161123-lone-parents-scotland.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/does-money-affect-children%E2%80%99s-outcomes>

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- The GCC Poverty Leadership Panel which is a multiagency group comprising organisations, as well as individuals who have been directly affected by poverty, to contribute to significantly reducing poverty and exclusion over the next decade. Through attendance at these meetings, lone parents became a theme in the Panel's anti-stigma campaign (#FairerGlasgow17¹⁰).
 - The Gender Based Violence Strategic Action Plan which will inform the development of the Glasgow Strategic Action Plan and identify how Glasgow will implement Equally Safe (Scotland's Strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls). This was undertaken by the strategic, multi-agency Glasgow City Violence Against Women Partnership.
 - Review of Lifelong Learning undertaken by Glasgow Life.
 - The Cost of the School Day which was a Poverty Leadership Panel project involving qualitative research with children, young people and staff in Glasgow, delivered by the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland in partnership with GCC Education Services. The project provided learning and recommendations, along with resources to support poverty proofing in other schools and local authorities. The Cost of the School Holidays which was a mixed method research project involving parents and young people living in Glasgow, and was supported by the Child Poverty sub-group of the Poverty Leadership Panel. The project was designed to inform a Glasgow Life feasibility study exploring ways in which holiday provision could better meet the needs of families living in poverty and ensure uptake by children and young people from low income households. The lone parent voice helped to influence the steering group for the Cost of School Holidays adjusting the age range of funded holiday provision from 5-12 to 3-12 years.

¹⁰ <https://www.gha.org.uk/about-us/media/blogs/poverty-is-not-inevitable>

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- Quality Standards for Employability within Glasgow City Council (European Social Funding). OPFS had previously been involved on consultation with users of employability services to determine how to improve services, and found that user experience was inconsistent. Thus, the employability pipeline working group decided to introduce quality standards which involved a significant consultation process, of which lone parents were identified as a key target group.

As well as the outcomes highlighted above, there was a range of softer outcomes associated with the project, including enhanced collaborative working and facilitating relationships (as discussed in Chapter 4) and raising the profile of lone parents.

“The greatest impact and influence of the project was putting lone parents on the agenda within so many different organisations and pieces of work”. (Stakeholder)

3.2 Challenges in Evidencing Outcomes

The project also had several inferred outcomes such as an increased profile of lone parents and attitudinal changes amongst service providers. However, these were difficult to evidence for several reasons. Some of the difficulties were linked to the overall project objective of changing mindsets and influencing services to consider the lone parent voice. This objective naturally leads to longer-term objectives, such as changing attitudes and practice.

“The difficulty with these initiatives is that you don’t get the big bang effect as services don’t change overnight”. (Stakeholder)

“Changing hearts and minds...subtly allowing the campaigning voice to complement policy decisions, that’s not easy thing to do or show that you’ve done”. (Stakeholder)

A further difficulty was the timing of the evaluation being commissioned at the end of the project, meaning outcome measures were not monitored throughout the project. A related challenge was the lack of evaluation activity within activities to measure outcomes, e.g. the training conducted for DWP.

The progressive nature of the project also led to difficulties separating the work and outcomes of the project from work undertaken by OPFS as an organisation. Some stakeholders did not attribute pieces of work to the project specifically, which also meant they did not feel they could contribute to the evaluation. Other stakeholders were unaware that the work undertaken by OPFS was funded by the project until it was explained, e.g. the lone parent voice influencing the Quality Standards within Glasgow City Council. Once they did realise, stakeholders were particularly positive about the nature

of the project and the resource dedicated to raising the profile of lone parents in relation to pieces of work.

“I hadn’t realised that they {OPFS} were involved in the piece of work because of the lone parent project...They were able to be involved because of the funding [of the Glasgow Lone Parent Project] and that has made a big difference to this piece of work, both in the long and the short term”. (Stakeholder)

Chapter 4 Collaborative Working

4.1 Legacy of the Project

Collaborative working was seen to be central to the project. A key success of the project was bringing people from different disciplines and organisational cultures together to self-reflect and gain knowledge of the issues affecting lone parents.

Overall, the project facilitated and enhanced collaborative working amongst a range of organisations. The positive communication and collaboration among the multi-agency steering group was another project facilitator, with stakeholders continuing to work together since the project completion. The project was deemed to have either strengthened existing relationships or created new ones and allowed for ongoing partnership working. In almost all cases, the project was said to have provided additionality in terms of positive working relationships and partnerships. This was considered the legacy of the project. Some stakeholders advised that they had previously established links with OPFS and the GLPP was said to have added to these relationships.

“The project brought two worlds together that hadn’t typically spoken to each other despite their joint issues... One parent organisations, we hadn’t had a lot of communication with them, so we started to break down barriers and there’s a lot more communication and that still continues”. (Stakeholder)

“There’s been ongoing links with OPFS before this, and whilst we did some additional pieces of work with [Development Manager], it doesn’t take away from the ongoing work we are doing in terms of improving our services for lone parents”. (Stakeholder)

4.2 Collaboration between Statutory and Third Sector

The most significant aspect of collaboration was the Development Manager hosted in GCC and the Lone Parent Advisor based in OPFS. Overall, this collaboration appeared to be extremely effective, with the project experiencing the benefits of operation from both types of organisations. To illustrate, the Development Manager holding a senior post within GCC allowed for brokering change and engagement with decision makers; while the Lone Parent Advisor, based in OPFS, ensured the project was heavily influenced by the lone parent voice and could benefit from the contacts and experience of a third sector organisation with expertise in relation to lone parents. Stakeholders discussed how the operation of the project had allowed for the ‘campaigning’ voice of the third sector to penetrate the statutory sector.

“OPFS have always had that voice but it could be seen in the bureaucratic and public-sector cultures as a campaigning voice, through the journey of the project, we’re getting structures to not have that slight animosity but instead think how can we use voices to complement policy decisions. The project has subtly done this”. (Stakeholder)

“OPFS has the trust of client group, and the Council has power to make the changes”. (Stakeholder)

As would be expected with any project involving significant collaboration, there were some challenges faced within the project in terms of both members of staff being able to contribute to presentations and meetings in their preferred way. There was some perception that at times the strategic overview had the potential to overshadow feedback from the lone parent advisory group.

“Sometimes there wasn’t always an easy relationship between the single parent voice and the Council. Sometimes presentations would focus on results from [the Development] manager so even within the project there could be an imbalance”. (Stakeholder)

4.3 Gaps

There were some identified gaps in the steering group which would have added further dimensions to the project. This included a representative from GCC’s Education department, the private rented sector (housing), a charity supporting women (e.g. Women’s Aid), Glasgow Life, and NHSGGC services such as mental health and addictions. Having an evaluation partner in place from the beginning of the project to develop an evaluation framework or logic model and put measures in place to allow for the clear measure of outcomes was another suggested improvement.

“If we had agreed that evaluation was going to be part of the project, then it would have been good to have someone in place from the beginning...to have a theory of change or logic model at the beginning so we knew what we were going to measure rather than trying to evaluate it at the end of the process. So, what is it we’re trying to measure, what would success look like to everyone in the room, what are we trying to evidence...doing it at the end we are backtracking and looking at what would be valuable, to do it retrospectively it is quite difficult”. (Stakeholder)

Chapter 5 Co-Production with Lone Parents

5.1 Role of Lone Parent Advisor and Advisory Group

A critical aspect of the model was ensuring the priorities and direction of the project was driven by the views and experiences of lone parents. The funding of a Lone Parent Advisor was perceived as fundamental, and allowed the project to be strengthened by the lone parent voice. The Wheatley Group specifically funded this element of the project through their commitment to engaging service users and previous work with OPFS which had been strengthened by lone parent engagement. The Lone Parent Advisor formed an advisory group of approximately 10 lone parents who were already engaged with OPFS. Consultation was undertaken with the group via informal meetings throughout the project (not all members attended each meeting) including at the beginning to inform the priorities.

The aims of the innovative co-production model were to:

- enable organisations to understand the specific challenges faced by current and potential lone parent service users;
- increase their ability to reach out, engage and retain 'hard to reach' lone parents, by providing services that are grounded in their everyday lives. Services proofed by lone parents are more likely to be trusted;
- highlight that proofed solutions that work for those that single-handedly care and work, are likely to work for all parents;
- show that One Parent proofed solutions facilitate more effective services and practices, as solutions that make sense and fit the reality of those who they affect are more likely to work;
- provide a framework to demonstrate that an existing service can meet inclusion targets/outcomes; and
- provide services with concrete solutions that can succeed by making small changes that are not necessarily costly.

The model applied a participatory approach to inquiry and influencing. Parents in the advisory group defined issues, and their capacity was built to voice their experiences of these issues and define policy solutions and disseminate these directly to policy makers with the objective of influencing them. The direct evidence of experience highlights new issues and new connections: holistic support; risk of income and time poverty; and working hours. This helped to ensure that policy was both grounded in

their realities, that parents trusted these policy/services which made sense to them, while also instilling a sense of ownership and information that could increase uptake of services. As such, the lone parent advisory group generated new insights into the impact of current policies. Equipped with factual knowledge, they engaged in analytical group work and formulated a set of policy solutions grounded in their everyday lives that fit with their complex and specific needs. These solutions reflected a diversity of experience and need.

The co-production with parents was acknowledged as a challenge while simultaneously being recognised as a strength.

“It’s not an easy option to have the voice of people with experience and allow that to influence the project but that was at the core”. (Stakeholder)

“We needed the voice of lone parents. We wanted a community approach which was to continually gather views to sit alongside and ‘feed’ the strategic work of the Development Manager. {The Lone Parent Advisor’s} role was critical, the intelligence from the interviews she conducted with lone parents directly fed in to the action plan...they gave us (a) road map to follow.... This aspect of the model is recognised as good practice, viewing individuals as experts in their experience so it’s not about us making decisions about what we think would help, but asking lone parents themselves as experts....it enabled us to have more strength when discussing recommendations. (Stakeholder).

From a stakeholder perspective, there was a desire for the group to provide a real opportunity for lone parents to feel valued as experts in their experiences, and to gain a sense of control over how they could improve services for themselves and other lone parents.

“People need to have the experience of being listened to and the user led approach is really important, so their voice is loud and effective and strong...they need to feel they have some control and are respected for who they are”. (Stakeholder)

5.2 Facilitators to Positive Engagement

A key characteristic of the advisory group was the non-judgemental, comfortable, informal and supportive environment created by the Lone Parent Advisor. Members of the group mentioned how comfortable they felt contributing to group discussions, and enjoyed the process of having their opinions heard. The parents appeared to benefit from the peer support offered through the group. The transparency of the project, and the fact that the lone parent advisory group were continuously provided with updates about progress was another positive. However, they suggested that written feedback or updates on progress would be even more beneficial.

“I can share my experiences freely and not worry about people being judgemental as I am in the company of people who are experiencing the same issues as me, so I don’t worry now. It feels like a really nice place to be”. (Lone Parent)

“I think it’s perfect as a model...just the fact that your opinions were being asked for, they were followed up and then fed back to us in terms of what they were able to do to change a situation...the transparency of the project, we were always informed”. (Lone Parent)

The lone parents strongly appreciated efforts to make meetings accessible, such as holding meetings during school hours and ensuring childcare was provided, if required. This heightened their sense of feeling respected and valued.

“There was childcare provision at these meetings so that barrier was removed...and the timings were right as well, so the staff really made the effort to allow us to attend and contribute. (Lone Parent)

Basing the Lone Parent Advisor within an established third sector organisation who has contact with the target group was a key project facilitator, partly as it has provided continuity for lone parents involved with the project. Although the project has now ended, the advisory group continue to be involved with OPFS, and so did not feel bereft and unsupported, as can happen when short term funded projects come to an end. This was an important advantage of involving a voluntary organisation who offered services for the target group. The fact that the Lone Parent Advisor is continuing to work with the organisation in a similar role is particularly fortunate. Further advantages include being able to utilise the organisation’s networks and contacts, and the Lone Parent Advisor being identified as a staff member in a respected and well-known organisation.

“I am aware that the project has ended but I don’t feel as if we are out on our own now. I feel like we have formed a lasting relationship with OPFS and that’s so important because sometimes projects sweep in and then out again when the funding ends and that can be more harmful”. (Lone Parent)

5.3 Positive Impacts

As well as the views of lone parents informing the project, an additional outcome of the project was the range of positive impacts and experiences it provided for the lone parent advisory group. Overall, the project was described as a fantastic opportunity for lone parents to contribute to informing recommendations about adapting services to better meet their needs. It appears to have been an incredibly positive experience for the parents involved.

“Being given the opportunity was such a powerful thing because it’s not everybody that gets that, to share your views and say something that you know is going to be taken forward and will be acted upon, that’s amazing”. (Lone Parent)

Empowerment

The project was said to be empowering for lone parents who appreciated being listened to and their opinions and experiences being trusted and valued. They reported it to be a unique experience to attend a group where sharing their views was all that was required, and where they felt respected for what they go through daily. This sense of empowerment was partly attributed to the awareness that their views were being fed back to senior individuals in GCC and Government; that their views were actually shaping recommendations and being included in reports that were being shared with decision makers.

“There was something about these meetings that was so fulfilling. Just being asked your views and opinions and sharing your experiences and maybe helping someone else out because we really do have a wealth of knowledge about how to survive as a single parent.... other groups, they always had a different focus, so this gave us a space where there was no pressure to be talking about getting back to work. It was more about how you are coping and what can we do to help each other and what other recommendations can we make for others....it was a lot more proactive”. (Lone Parent)

“It was good to be able to share my views...what us parents go through....and the fact that councillors were involved, so whatever you were going through, you were telling it to the right person... [the Lone Parent Advisor] was always taking notes and then following things up, so you always thought things were getting taken forward”. (Lone Parent)

Positive experiences and opportunities

The project provided many positive opportunities and experiences for the lone parent advisory group including events at the Scottish Parliament and working lunches at the City College to launch reports which they had influenced.

“It was so nice to attend these events and feel like a valued member. I’m not used to having these opportunities, so I really appreciated it and enjoyed it”. (Lone Parent)

Increase in self-confidence

For some parents, membership of the advisory group led to increased self-confidence, and in fact provided them with the confidence to pursue career options including college.

“When I first started I was shy, but I have become more involved in stuff. I am starting college in August doing childcare...It was meeting other parents in similar circumstances to share our experiences and be listened to and it’s really helped”. (Lone Parent)

5.4 Managing Priorities

Despite this co-production process, not all the priorities (namely childcare) identified by the lone parent advisory group were taken forward. This was because simultaneously, the Scottish Government had issued a consultation on childcare and OPFS was already in the process of consulting single parents and gathering evidence for its submission. Moreover, the OPFS Glasgow service had supported single parents to submit their views into the GCC consultation. As such, it was decided that much work was already being done in relation to childcare and so instead areas were focused on where the expected impact would be greater (e.g. stigma, conditionality, school clothing grants etc.)

The lone parent advisory group discussed the fact that childcare, although identified as a priority, was not actioned to any great extent. Although it was described as frustrating, respondents highlighted the other positive impacts of the project which they were very proud of:

“Their priorities helped lead the way as much as possible although there were some things that we decided that we couldn’t tackle such as childcare...they were already ongoing processes, and it was almost too major an issue for us to have an impact, so we looked at other areas that we felt were achievable...so pragmatism was required - what were the priorities and what can we achieve?” (Stakeholder)

“I still feel that childcare is my own personal issue that I have to sort out, I don’t think that much progress has been made...that is disappointing, but we’ve gained so much other stuff from the project, and I think projects often don’t achieve what they set out to but achieve by products”. (Lone Parent)

Chapter 6 Barriers and Challenges

There was a range of barriers and challenges faced during the life of the project, many of which were perhaps unsurprising given the innovative and ambitious nature of the project in terms of influencing service provision.

6.1 Timescales

The project was always intended to be short term, and as such, there was pragmatism among the steering group as to what could realistically be achieved within the timeframe. However, there was common consensus that given the scale of the challenge involved in influencing service providers to alter their practice, combined with a need to embed the new role in the statutory sector with all the requirements and regulations that come with that role, the length of the project was insufficient. There was a sense that the length of time was long enough for establishing relationships and sharing knowledge regarding lone parents with many stakeholder groups, but not for implementing and measuring intended change. The relatively short timescale was also said to limit the level of evaluation that was possible which would have been incredibly valuable for mainstreaming approaches or evidencing the need for further funding.

“It is what it is, we didn’t set it up as a permanent post, we set it up to have some short-term gains. It has improved collaboration but that won’t last forever as it never does”. (Stakeholder)

“It was quite a short timescale, it almost got to the stage of implementation then ended...it would have been brilliant to demonstrate outcomes which mitigated the needs of lone parents, put in some real cost benefit analysis to determine the impact with view of mainstreaming it, but we would have needed another couple of years to do this”. (Stakeholder)

The importance of both the Development Manager and Lone Parent Advisor has been highlighted already. However, an unintended consequence of this was experienced when the Development Manager left her post within GCC and stakeholders described how the momentum and strength of the project diminished considerably. Respondents described how the project had ‘partially’ opened some doors, but that without the dedicated, funded posts there were a lack of gravitas or sustainability in relation to raising the profile of lone parents. Stakeholders also spoke of pieces of work that had been initiated but then came to a halt once the Development Manager left post, such as initial discussions with GCC and Glasgow Life on creating a similar model to ‘Carer Positive Employers’¹¹ for lone parents. The level of collaboration required to continually improve services for lone parents highlighted the extent of the challenge in terms of engagement with a wide range of organisations.

“Buy in is only effective if it is continually supported and engaged...because the achievements of the project show you the power of working with agencies relentlessly...so buy in has suffered as a result of the project ending”. (Stakeholder)

“The biggest issue about the project is that a year was absolutely never going to be long enough, if been there for 3 years would have been able to influence a lot more. By the time we got round to trying to change services, [the Development Manager] was leaving so some of the potential projects fell by the wayside, some of her work as transferred to OPFS and some of it has just been parked which is really unfortunate. (Stakeholder)

6.2 Constraints within the Hosted Agency

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of the aims and structure of the project being fully supported within the hosted agency at the management level. The Development Manager experienced some issues during the project in relation to some aspects of partner organisations fully understanding and buying in to the overall aims and ethos of the project being about influencing change.

¹¹ <http://www.carerpositive.org/carers-positive-employers/>

“Whoever is head of service needs to understand what it is the project is trying to achieve and be comfortable to allow the project to develop freely”. (Stakeholder)

6.3 Lack of Funding to Support Development Work

A need for funding to support the Lone Parent Advisor/OPFS to support new initiatives proposed by the Development Manager was identified. This was a need that arose during the project, when pilot work on digital inclusion being undertaken by lone parents in partnership with Glasgow Life, was deemed unfeasible due to the level of resource required to support lone parents. This lack of funding was said to have limited the impact of potential pieces of work.

“We could have had a lot more success if from the outset we had thought about and identified funding to allow for supporting developments that came out of the project”. (Stakeholder)

6.4 ‘Woolly’ Nature of Project

An important characteristic of the project was its overarching remit of raising the profile of the needs of lone parents to improve service provision, and reacting to opportunities that developed and collaborations that were formed in order to do so. The project brought together different organisational cultures to agree common aims, and as such, the project was intentionally flexible and ‘woolly’ to some extent. However, there were some suggestions that this flexible approach could have been mitigated by the development of a detailed action plan or framework with high level objectives but retaining an element of flexibility within that. Suggestions were made for more planning, co-production of agreed action plans, roles and responsibilities, preferred communication methods, outcomes and targets, and governance arrangements. The development of an action plan or framework was also said to have improved measurement and evaluation of the project.

“Everything was a bit woolly which could be frustrating as we had to ensure we achieved key outcomes without much of a framework of how to do so”. (Stakeholder)

“It needs tidied and tightened up to make it a bit clearer. In some way, it is a benefit, but it would be too difficult to replicate so maybe more focus, a stricter action plan so it doesn’t get lost – more of a beginning, middle and end”. (Stakeholder)

Chapter 7 Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

The current report highlights the complexity of operating a project such as the Glasgow Lone Parent Project which has high level, ambitious objectives of influencing service providers to improve provision for a vulnerable target group. It also highlights the need for, and the challenge in creating, an effective, multi-agency steering group overseeing passionate, knowledgeable and committed staff working collaboratively in statutory and third sector organisations who continuously ‘bang the drum’ for a target group who often feel forgotten.

Overall, given the relatively small timescale and budget, the project achieved considerable positive outcomes which have had a direct impact on lone parents, with the hope that efforts to change opinion and dispel myths will continue to affect service provision in the future. It is acknowledged that without the dedicated staff in place to continuously raise the profile of lone parents there could be limitations to the extent to which the voice of lone parents will continue to inform service developments, but the legacy of the project (through the strategies and pieces of work which were informed by the lone parent voice, and the established partnerships created throughout the project) should help ensure some continued impacts.

Given the considerable achievements of the project, this approach does appear to have been effective for a number of reasons, namely (1) the multi-agency, committed, progressive steering group, (2) the location of the Development Manager in a statutory organisation working in partnership with a Lone Parent Advisor in a voluntary organisation with expertise of the target group which allowed for mutual understanding and integration of perspective to achieve more rounded and achievable policy change, (3) the inclusion of a lone parent advisory group to ensure the lone parent voice infiltrated the project, (4) the skills, commitment, experience and passion of the Development Manager and the Lone Parent Advisor to continuously push the lone parent agenda through a range of channels, (5) the number of specific outcomes achieved including the lone parent voice influencing strategy and (6) the overarching aim to overcome stigma and dispel myths about the target group through providing up to date information and statistics, and allowing the lone parent voice to be campaigned for through a statutory organisation.

7.2 Limitations

There were limitations to the project, including the lack of a detailed logic model and evaluation framework which would have allowed for the easier and more effective evaluation and creation of a greater evidence base. However, there appeared to be a desire within the steering group to allow the project to grow organically, and allow for opportunities to be embraced in order to drive the direction of service improvements.

The researcher faced some challenges achieving engagement in the evaluation. Namely, some stakeholders were unsure about their role and involvement in the project, or in fact, unaware that the project existed as such but instead thought they were simply working in partnership with OPFS or GCC. The steering group facilitated engagement by contacting certain respondents and explaining about the project and evaluation. In terms of stakeholder lack of project awareness, it could be argued that this was unimportant in terms of the outcomes of the project, as the project's main aim was mainstream change rather than high project visibility.

7.3 Key Learning

The evaluation has provided evidence of the strength of the ambitious and innovative project in achieving desirable outcomes for lone parents, demonstrating the power of willing, committed collaboration between a range of voluntary and statutory organisations which allows for the relationship building and the development of mutual understanding and indicates the power of the lone parent voice. This model could be easily applied to other inequality groups as well as the outcomes achieved being used to refocus on lone parents, particularly considering current legislation including the Child Poverty Bill.

Analysis of the project's outcomes, characteristics and enablers have resulted in a list of critical success factors which are as follows.

- The multi-agency steering group (which included representation from the target group) who were willing and committed to embrace collaborative working.
- The dedicated project staff hosted across the statutory and voluntary sector, with the Development Manager holding a senior position within the statutory sector in order to have gravitas and influence service change and the Lone Parent Advisor hosted in a voluntary organisation with a tailored skill set and experience in terms of supporting the target group.

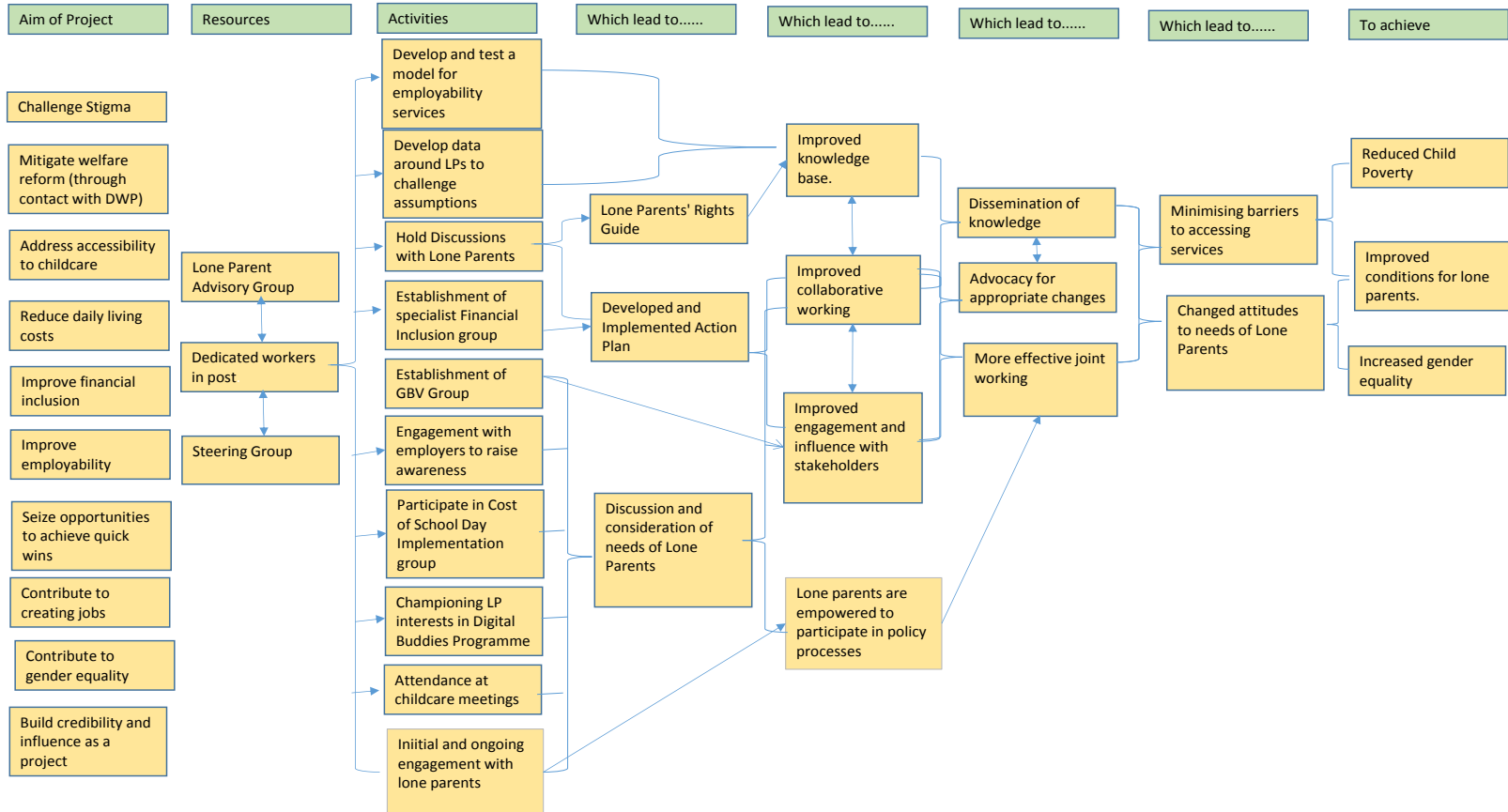
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- The remit of the Lone Parent Advisor to establish and liaise with the lone parent advisory group to ensure that the voice of the target group influenced the project. It is imperative that the target group voice is given equal ranking when determining priorities.
 - The project team had the required knowledge of the needs of the target group, and the passion, commitment, belief, ability to persuade and tenacity to raise the profile of those needs.
 - The remit of the project which was to continuously 'bang the drum', establish connections and embrace opportunities to develop the project and maximise partnerships, collaborations and the perspective of service users in policy and strategy development.
 - The high-level outcomes which allowed for flexibility.

If considering operating such a model to influence change in service provision for a particularly target group, it is also recommended that:

- The project is funded for at least three years which would allow for embedding, influencing, implementing, evaluating and applying an exit strategy.
- The project has a supportive management team who have belief in the premise of the model, and apply a flexible and creative approach.
- There is an evaluation framework which allow for the monitoring of the project and measuring of outcomes.
- The project has agreed governance structures in place.

To conclude, although it is recognised that the success of the Glasgow Lone Parent Project was dependent on many key factors including crucially having the "right people in the right places", it is recommended that the model is shared widely out with Glasgow (including the Scottish Government and other local authorities) to help raise the profile of specific groups who require a tailored response from services to better meet their needs.

Appendix 1 Theory of Change



Assumptions

- The 'right' stakeholders are identified.
- There are existing alliances and networks to tap into
- Small actions can make a big difference
- The Project was based in the right organisation