# "You can't expect to go straight back to normal, it's no gonnae happen"

How the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on lone parents using Fife Gingerbread's services, and how family support can be adapted to meet these changing needs as we focus on recovery.

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# Introduction

The collective worked with Fife Gingerbread over the summer and autumn of 2021 to find out how the pandemic impacted on lone parents and families in need in Fife, and to offer recommendations on how support can be adapted to meet the needs of vulnerable families. The needs of families during the pandemic have changed, and so it's important that services need to adapt and innovate.

Within this report we will outline how we did the research, what we found and what recommendations we've pulled together from what staff, volunteers, stakeholders and, importantly, people who use Fife Gingerbread's services told us.

In the first section, we talk about how we did the research: what tools we used to hear from people and how we understood what they shared. We then move on to looking at any shared themes that emerged in our surveys and focus groups with people who use Fife Gingerbread's services, staff and volunteers as well as other organisations who work closely with them. In the final section, we provide recommendations around the themes.
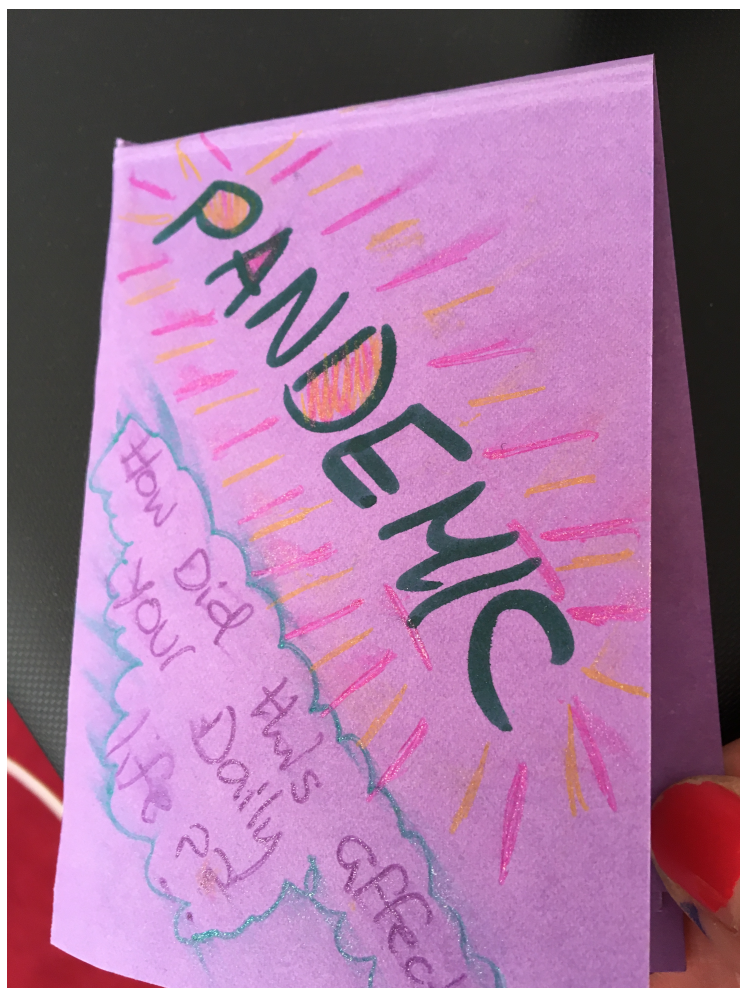
We hope the outputs from the research will provide Fife Gingerbread with a solid platform from which to reshape current projects, progress recommendations and challenge systems. We hope this report will also be useful to other organisations locally to ensure that all lone parents, accessing all services, will benefit.

We want to thank everyone who took part in this project for their time and valuable insights. We also want to particularly thank the parents, carers and young people who shared their thoughts,  experiences and time with us during an incredibly challenging period.

## How we did the research

### Desk based review

We read local and regional service evaluations, local authority strategy papers and research reports identified by ourselves and Laura Millar (Fife Gingerbread), looking at what the situation is in Fife: who lives there, what the needs are, and what services currently exist. We also analysed this against the national picture on the impact of COVID-19 and the wider needs identified by national organisations focused on support for  lone parents.

### Surveys

We surveyed 44 people who use Fife Gingerbread's services, which were developed by The Collective with feedback from Fife Gingerbread staff. We also surveyed 28 stakeholders to find out how their organisations worked with Fife Gingerbread during the pandemic, and what gaps they've identified in their own work, and we surveyed 28 members of staff and volunteers.

## Workshops

We hosted two focus groups for parents and carers, with 12 people attending. Working with colleagues at Clued Up, we hosted a face to face focus group with 5 young people, and asked them to design a mini zine to explore the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, any benefits that came out of the pandemic, how they feel about the future and how Fife Gingerbread can help.

We also used the zine making exercise as a tool to speak informally with the group about these issues. For working with parents and carers, we hosted two online sessions, using discussions, jamboards and drawing as tools to understand more deeply the issues raised, and to identify any themes not within the initial survey responses. Images of the zines are threaded through the report.

We also hosted two discussion groups with staff and volunteers; 8 staff and 4 volunteers attended these. We hosted one focus group with stakeholders, with 13 individuals attending.

## Analysis

After an initial read through of the surveys, we were able to get a better understanding of what the impacts of COVID-19 were, and how Fife Gingerbread can adapt services to support recovery from the pandemic. We then noted when each survey response mentioned these themes, and took these recurring ideas from the surveys in order to design the workshops. During and after the workshops, we analysed the quotes and insights shared, in order to highlight any themes that emerged and any recommendations that were becoming apparent. In this report, we outline what we found as well as present some recommendations for Fife Gingerbread to take forward.

In the following section, we review what we know about the local and national context.

# Rapid review

Lone parents experience some of the highest levels of poverty, exclusion and stigma, across Scotland. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2020), 40% of children living in poverty are from lone parent families (90,000 children).

In a recent report by Shahnaz and Yaqoob (2021), commissioned by One Parent Families Scotland and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, it was found that lone parents (the majority of whom are women) experienced significant barriers in accessing well paid, flexible and sustainable work, pushing them further into poverty and/or debt. The escalating costs of childcare also prevents lone parents from accessing work or leaves them working to pay for childcare with little income left to pay for living costs, transport and more (Citizens Advice Scotland 2021).

According to Citizens' Advice Scotland's report on "Working on the Edge: Childcare", the average cost of childcare in Scotland is over £5,000 for only 25 hours of care per week for children under five years. The report states that "*parents in Scotland spend 27% of their household income on childcare, while the average of parents in OECD countries is just 12%*". These circumstances are not new. Poverty levels in Scotland (particularly for lone parents) have been rising yearly.

In February 2017, the Scottish Parliament passed the Child Poverty Bill with the mission to radically reduce the number of children living in poverty by 2030. The 2030 target is for fewer than 10% of children to be living in relative poverty and fewer than 5% living in absolute poverty. An interim target has been set for 18% by April 2024, and all indications thus far tell us that Scotland is likely to miss this and fail to deliver for children living in poverty in Scotland.

Interventions are required across a range of policy areas including: affordable and flexible childcare, access to flexible employment and improvements across the benefits system. This is further emphasised by Fife Gingerbread's involvement in numerous sector-wide campaigns to increase (or prevent cuts to) benefits entitlements.

The most recent Department of Work and Pensions briefing states that **49% of children in lone parent families now live below the poverty line**. According to Shahnaz and Yaqoob (2021), who researched lone-parents' experiences (including a cohort in Fife), lone parents stated they regularly experience stress and poor mental health, feel stigmatised by employers, are more likely to be working in lower-paid and under-valued roles (which have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19) and find childcare unaffordable and/or inflexible.

## The impact of COVID-19

The pandemic has had a clear and disproportionate impact on lone parent families. Over 90% of lone parents are women, and women have been more likely to lose income since the start of the pandemic as they are more likely to be working in sectors where redundancies or reductions in hours have been experienced; these sectors include retail, hospitality and care work (Close the Gap 2021).

Multiple organisations including the Fawcett Society and One Parent Families Scotland, have highlighted the impact of homeschooling and increasing levels of caring work on lone parents who have to deal with this without the advantage created through shared parenting experienced by others. Research by the University of East Anglia (2020) found that women and lone parents were most affected by the impact of COVID-19 on social housing, with lone parents more likely to reduce working hours to deal with home-schooling and therefore experiencing a reduction in income.

"The Caring without Sharing" report by the Institute for Employment Studies and Gingerbread (2020) found that 46% of lone parents (compared to only 26% of coupled parents) worked in sectors most impacted by COVID-19 and were twice as likely to be on zero-hour contracts. Flexible and at-home working created by the pandemic were less advantageous for lone parents with only 22% of lone parents able to do their jobs from home, and 51% of lone parents stated they experienced poor mental health (including anxiety, stress and depression) compared to 27% of coupled parents.

Furthermore, the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people has been well documented by many organisations including the Scottish Youth Parliament, Young Scot and YouthLink Scotland. Their report, "Lockdown Lowdown" (2021) found that over 70% of young people were worried about the impact of the pandemic on their mental health and 75% were concerned about their financial situations. The Children's Parliament report (2020) found that older children between 12-14 were doing less well, particularly in regards to worries related to their schooling and general mood. Across those who participated in the study, children were struggling with boredom, loneliness and a lack of energy as a consequence of spending more time than normal at home.

This is, of course, also interlinked with the impact of the pandemic on their parents' potential loss of income, employment, poverty and the consequences on the levels of stress within their homes.

During the pandemic, a UK wide grassroots group was formed called "Single Parents Rights". It was originally created to push the UK Government to allow household bubbles to be formed to allow lone parents to access more informal childcare and support during lockdown measures and to add lone parents to the list of protected characteristics under the Equality Act (2010). It has since published a report with over 1000 respondents which found that 59% of lone parents had experienced employment discrimination, and 51% stated

that lockdown measures had added to the discrimination they experience.

This is echoed by Fife Gingerbread's own research on the impact of COVID-19 on lone parents (2020), which found that the pandemic has had a negative impact on lone parents' health (including experiences of heightened anxiety, loneliness and low mood), their incomes and their ability to access resources for their children (including toys). Homeschooling was emphasised as a difficult experience due to a lack of key resources including digital technology and access to the internet for children to attend classes online.

## Lone parents' experiences and child poverty in Fife

In June 2019, Fife Council launched their first Child Poverty Action Plan as a strategy to tackle the inequality across the Fife area where 1 in 5 children live in low-income families: this is around 13,000 children. 17% of children in Fife are living in absolute poverty, which
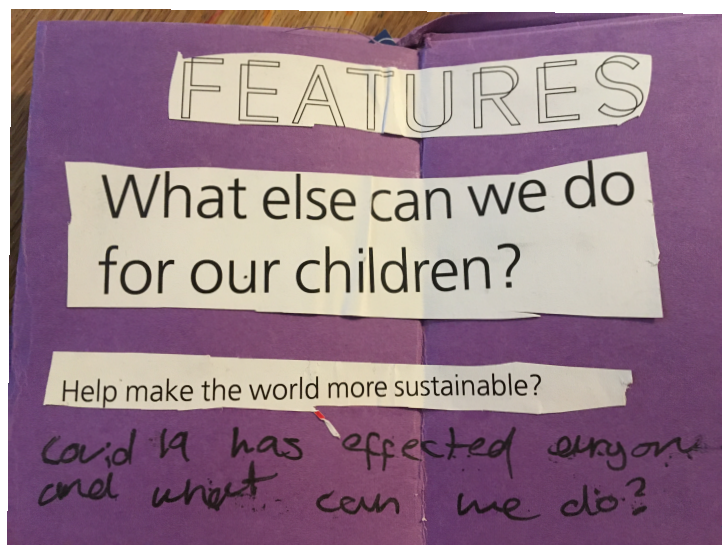


is higher than the Scotland average (15%), according to the Council's own Child Poverty Action Plan. The geography of Fife and its make-up of rural and urban areas make the data on poverty more complicated; 1 in 3 people live in rural Fife with rural poverty being prevalent in remote villages. Child poverty is highest in Kirkcaldy Central & East, Buckhaven, Methil and Wemyss Villages, and lowest in Tay Bridgehead and St Andrews (Fife Council Research Team, 2019).

From the Child Poverty Action Plan (2020) housing and energy costs were the biggest influencers of poverty levels in Fife with 19% of families experiencing fuel poverty. 26% of overall households in Fife experience fuel poverty, with the national average being 28% of households.

Fife Council published an online survey for residents to better understand the financial consequences of COVID-19, finding that lockdown periods increased use of, and therefore costs of,  fuel, energy and childcare. It also found that, for some, a loss of income was experienced as a consequence of homeschooling or increased caring responsibilities. All of these were found to be key factors in increased levels of poverty. 40.5% of respondents to this survey stated that their household incomes were influenced "negatively", "a great deal" or "a lot" by COVID-19.

Figures related to the number of children in lone parent households living in poverty in Fife are not available; however, it is estimated that this may be approximately 6900 children (from the Fife Child Poverty Action Report). Indeed, across the Know Fife knowledge hub, as across other local authorities,  data on the economy, child poverty or analysis by SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation)  do not provide any further breakdown of information to tell us about the experiences of, or numbers, of lone parents. According to Public Health Scotland (2020) there are 11,900 lone parent families in Fife currently claiming Child Tax Credits or Child Benefit (data from 2016). The lack of consistent and detailed data on child poverty has been noted in multiple anti-poverty reports. Most recently,  the missing gaps in local authority specific data and data on ethnicity, were highlighted in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report, "Ethnicity, poverty, and the data in Scotland" (October, 2021).

The plan further outlines the disproportionate impact of poverty of lone parents with this group experiencing higher levels of poverty (if they have dependent children) and cited "lone parenthood" as an

influencing factor of living in poverty, along with disability and ethnicity. A report by Fife Gingerbread and the Poverty Alliance (2012) cited in the Action Plan also stated that a third of lone parents were experiencing financial difficulties despite being employed. The report also expressed the concerns they have for their mental health and feelings of isolation as a consequence of not being able to enter the labour market as they would prefer.

In 2021, Fife Council worked with the Scottish Government and the Centre for Local Economies Strategy to analyse how Fife could develop a more robust approach to wellbeing and economic growth. The paper makes clear that Fife has a higher than national average child poverty level, a small rise in its share of Scotland's most deprived areas and an increase in health deprivation/inequalities. This is all further impacted by COVID-19.

Fife Council has created the "Plan for Fife" which includes in it specific activities focused on tackling poverty and preventing financial crises. Whilst this is welcome, the plan currently has no mention of lone parents and does not include any specific interventions to tackle poverty within a population group most likely to experience it. Within the "Plan for Fife", there is an acceptance that the majority of Council investment to date has been on "crisis management" in other words, short-term, immediate support. However, the ambition is to move to preventative delivery and systemic change which prevents people reaching a crisis point and experiencing poverty. Whilst this is necessary and welcome, without a focus on lone parents, this will not be achieved and neither will local or national targets to reduce poverty.

## Support for lone parents in Fife

### Third Sector and Community Support
Alongside the services delivered by Fife Gingerbread, there are also national support services which lone parents can access, such as the

One Parent Families Scotland helpline. Locally there are a number of organisations providing family support; however, they do not have a specialised lone parent focus. These include, for example, Aberlour Options, Barnardo's Stronger Families Services Fife, The Cottage Family Centre and a number of Home-Start centres.

## Council level support

Fife Council provides support in line with other local authorities; these include access to financial assistance, housing, employability support and advice services to provide information related to benefits and social security. Fife Council also works with third sector providers, including Fife Gingerbread, to create referral points and to fund crisis support, employment and wellbeing services (for example, the funding provided through the Edinburgh and South of Scotland City Regional Deal's Intensive Family Support Service).

Fife Council has taken the decision to continue funding all current third sector providers of services as we recover from the pandemic; however, this has only been confirmed for a further 12 months. Whilst this has been welcomed, it is shadowed by the current Children Services recommissioning process being pursued by Fife Council, which seeks to make savings on how it funds children's services and deliver more "partnership working". Although third sector partners have been involved through roundtable discussions and consultations, the recommissioning process has been described as "disappointing and frustrating" (Fife Today, September 2021). The process involves a number of current third sector children's services organisations, including Fife Gingerbread, who have only been awarded "transition arrangements", as a consequence services may face decreases in their funding and significant challenges in how they deliver their services (such as difficulties with staff retention).

Given the ambitious national and local child poverty targets, and the commitments in the "No One Left Behind" strategy, creating further

challenges and restrictions to how services are delivered (particularly for those families most in need and facing multiple, compounding discriminations), are likely to only exacerbate the problem and create barriers in meeting these critical targets.

Fife Council is also responsible for delivering specialist Scottish Government support programmes including the Parental Employability Support Fund and the Young Person's Guarantee. These funding streams have been subsumed into the No One Left Behind Framework (2021-2022). Under the Parental Employability Support Fund guidelines, lone parents are considered one of the priority groups. The No One Left Behind Strategy for Fife states that delivery will focus on those who experience inequality based on their protected characteristics (as per the Equality Act 2010) and those with life experiences which cause inequality (which includes lone parents). The strategy specifically mentions Fife Gingerbread, as the main (or only) organisation focused on lone parents, and states that lone parents are likely to be under-served in Fife currently.

## Generic delivery, multiple discriminations and minoritised groups

The No One Left Behind Commissioning Framework from the Opportunities Fife Partnership states that those who are most likely to need services are not simply those who have adverse life experience *or* fall under certain protected characteristics. It acknowledges that people are likely to fall into multiple categories and therefore services need to understand that and respond to those needs, for example, services meeting the needs of lone parents *and* those who are Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) *and* whose first language is not English. We know this from the work of organisations such as Close the Gap (2019) which has analysed the intersecting discriminations faced by BAME women, finding an increased gender pay gap, higher levels of unemployment and under-employment. Taking an intersectional approach in service

design and delivery will mean that support services are fit for purpose for those that need them the most.[1]

However, from analysis of what is on offer in Fife at present, an intersectional approach to services is currently not commonly used. Services are siloed, which is likely to mean that lone parents are accessing some services, but not all that they require. A lack of an intersectional approach will have the consequence of reinforcing some of the inequalities faced by residents in Fife. Whilst there are resource challenges in delivering the depth within services this requires, it is likely to be more cost-effective across the longer-term by tackling child poverty and meeting regional targets.

Like many local authorities there are programmes delivered (both in the third sector and by the local authority itself) which focus on tackling poverty or unemployment or provide advice but do so assuming a homogenous population who will utilise these services.

This is particularly true for lone parents. Whilst they may be encouraged to engage in Department for Work and Pensions programmes or others, these are not always designed with the needs of lone parents in mind, and therefore the demands on participants, timings of delivery or access to work opportunities are not appropriate or realistic for lone parents. To meet the needs of lone parents in Fife, particularly those experiencing multiple discriminations by being part of other marginalised groups, programme design and delivery should be *with* them, not simply *about* or *for* them.

In the next section, we outline what we found in our workshops and surveys with service users, volunteers, staff and stakeholders.

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[1] An intersectional approach provides a framework to deliver work through a lens which understands compounding and intersecting inequalities of protected characteristics (for example; how well does a service deliver for those who experience discrimination/inequality based on their disability **and** their race, or their race **and** their gender)

# What we found

Through our focus groups and surveys, we found the following themes come up time and time again. In this section we'll talk through what folk told us about the challenges of the pandemic, what worked to help people, and what was missing.

## The challenges: "How can I deal with that, when I couldn't deal with it for myself?"

### Mental Health - Parents, carers & children

As within our review of the literature, poor mental health, stress and emotional turmoil were also strong themes with the people we spoke with.

Within the service users survey, 17 parents noted that the biggest challenge during COVID-19 was occupying their children, with 14 noting isolation and loneliness and 9 people mentioning homeschooling. People's own mental health was also noted by 8 people. What we found in the survey and in our focus groups was that **children's needs were placed above parents and carers' own needs**.

We found that **children's mental health and parents' and carers' mental health are intertwined.** People told us that "[it was] really hard with three children, middle child had bad mental health, but there was support from school", and that it was hard "trying to motivate the kids, when you had no motivation yourself". They talked explicitly about their own, and their children's, mental health as "children's mental health really took a hit. How can I deal with that, when I couldn't deal with it for myself?". There was a sense of being "left" by services, and, to a certain extent, society, with one parent

sharing "I was [going to lots of baby groups, then] I felt like I'd been dropped. How can I teach this child when she's got no input?"

With the young people we spoke to, **mental health impacts were also raised** by a number of them; with a sense of being "trapped" or "cooped up".

**Emotional turmoil hugely impacted on parents' and carers' mental health, and fear and guilt were identified as strong emotions during this time.** Although not mentioned in the surveys, in the focus groups, people shared that they experienced the huge **emotional burden of fear**: "Fear of COVID - panicking and worrying", and "fear and isolation - everything impacts on your mental health, not in a positive way!" This also then impacted on their ability to access necessary services as there was a "fear of going to hospital when there's COVID all around". Parents also shared that they felt "guilt, I'm not doing a good enough job", with an expectation that "as the parent, you're supposed to be the person who knows how to do stuff, but how are you supposed to help them [when you're struggling]". This then carried with it comparisons with other families whereby, "you think it's only you, and all these other parents are doing fantastically". The parents and carers also felt that the "kids [were] seeing everything" emotionally, and that they "saw and heard more than I'd like them to - with my emotions".

People also spoke about there being a **"triple" burden of being a lone parent** during the pandemic, and described it as having "to be both mum and dad" and "mak[ing] all the decisions on your own". There was a shared sense of isolation and resilience, "as [as a lone parent] you've got to push yourself regardless".

As with the survey results, **isolation and loneliness were a huge impact of the pandemic,** which were mentioned by a number of parents, exacerbated in part by being "both mum and dad". They told us that the "first lockdown was horrendous". One parent also shared

that "loneliness was a big factor... knew no-one, it was a terrifying experience".

Two families we spoke with also went through breakups; one left just before lockdown with only the bare essentials to survive. For this period the children and the parent had no toys, "no stuff". The only interaction for one parent before lockdown was at the school gates, and during the pandemic that stopped. The group also spoke about the impact of the pandemic on friendships, in part the lack of friendships due to the demands of parenting, as well as the pandemic and "bad relationships".

The staff and volunteers we spoke with also raised concerns about the **deteriorating mental health and wellbeing of parents.** During the volunteer discussion group, one participant noted that they were "going the extra mile to provide even more support for people already at breaking point with their pre-existing mental health and social isolation issues".

Both the survey responses and the discussion groups with staff and volunteers suggest that, in the main, **the needs of the families they were supporting increased during the pandemic,** with respondents noting an overall increased need but also specific increased needs around mental health support (particularly around isolation and social anxiety), financial difficulties and struggles around home-schooling and dealing with children with existing and exacerbated behavioural issues alongside sustaining employment.

Similarly, 32% of the stakeholders we surveyed told us that supporting people's mental health and wellbeing should be the top priority for recovering from the pandemic.

## Food and finances

**The pandemic also negatively impacted on food and finances:** which was raised by both the service user focus group and survey respondents. 11% of respondents commented that shopping itself was one of the most challenging parts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and 11% commented that financial worries were challenging. In our focus groups, people told us that they "couldn't afford all the food" or that "I was a shielder, the food we were given was the same thing every time, it was a nightmare trying to not eat the same thing". Similar to the findings outlined in our rapid review, one parent also shared the financial burden of occupying children at home, telling us they bought "so many board games, and they're expensive".

## Physical health

Another impact noted by parents and carers in the focus groups was around physical health, which initially was only raised by 1 person within the surveys. For the focus group, **the pandemic negatively impacted on their physical health.** This ranged from feeling as though they were "eating too much!" or "put[ting] on weight" to "my physical health really suffered as I couldn't get appointments".

In our second focus group, **lack of appointments and the resulting impact on their own, and their children's health,** was raised, for example not being able to see their GP and not getting to hospital. **Young people were less concerned about health impacts than parents**, and shared that, although it "impacted on all of us [they] didn't really mind, because none of my family got the COVID".

## Education

In terms of the impact on children, the survey showed that parents' and carers' main concerns of the impact of the pandemic on their children were mixing with children their age (52%), education (31.8%)  and seeing other family members (15%). However, unlike parents, **missing school wasn't raised as a concern** for the whole

of the focus group with young people, with it only being touched upon by one young person.

Adults' experiences of **homeschooling ranged from positive interaction with schools, to little or no support.** In our focus groups, we heard that: "12 year old has additional needs, and with the 15 year old, I didn't understand what she had to do!" and that "home schooling was a write off". Responses from schools were noted as: "primary school was good, secondary school didn't push, which was good in a way as there was less stress" and that the "class teacher was really good [primary], high school wasn't great".

## ICT challenges

Many of the stakeholders, staff and volunteers raised concerns around the lack of ICT software and hardware to enable families to get online, particularly around homeschooling. One respondent in our staff and volunteers survey commented "we could not support isolation with those who had little access to social platforms and internet initially"

For staff and volunteers, making sure families had access to technology as well as getting people comfortable and used to using online communications were key challenges mentioned frequently by both staff and volunteers, though these were definitely challenges that appeared to have been overcome.

Initially, problems included parents not responding to texts and calls (running out of battery or credit: forgetting the arrangements in place), parents not being keen on Zoom or social media platforms, parents struggling to manage home-schooling and being online for Fife Gingerbread sessions, struggling to maintain contact with families with little to no internet access: and helping people fill out online forms over the phone. "There was a huge drop in families that were engaging with support" in the early stages of the pandemic, said

one participant. However, one survey respondent said that "perseverance with families brought most online or at least in touch by telephone".

Staff and volunteers also noted that there were difficulties around doing group work online, particularly for the staff working with young parents, who found that it was really hard to engage young parents with online group activities, even though they tried a variety of different approaches. "It's really hard traditionally to get them [younger parents] to come to groups anyway and I found it was much harder to get them to come to something online when you couldn't physically be there with them", said one staff member, noting that it also felt like it was going against their previous tone of discouraging use of phones and screens prior to COVID. However, similar to general online activities, it was felt that older parents started embracing group online work more during the second lockdown.

## Impact on young people was mixed

In our focus group, young people's concerns did not always match those of the adults using Fife Gingerbread's services. **The impact on this group of young people was much more mixed,** with some saying it was "normal life 24/7" and others telling us their mental health had been hugely impacted on.

Some shared they didn't stick to the regulations, and carried on meeting friends throughout. For others though, they felt that even for those who "didn't stick to the rules or
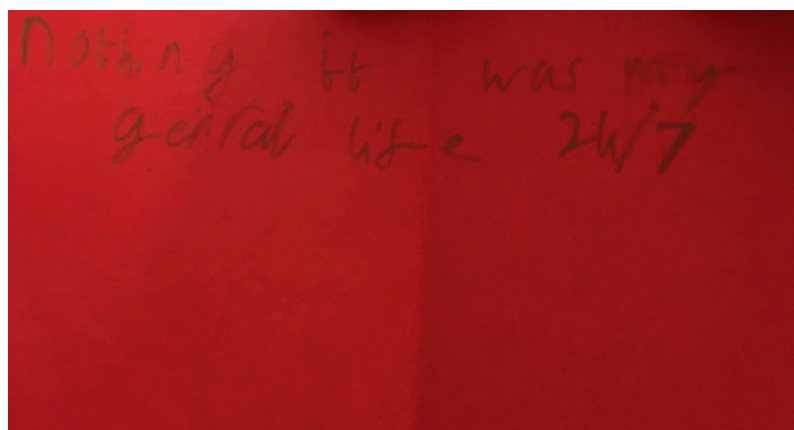
isolate", there was still an impact. For some, being "cooped up" with family was particularly challenging.

We found young people's worries were quite different from parents' worries too around isolation, with this group of young people finding ways to connect with each other (both online and through non-adherence to regulations), and for them, the health and education impacts were seen as less important. Conversations around use of the internet and social media did flag some opportunities for further conversations with young people about healthy phone use and sleeping patterns.

## Impact on staff and volunteers

Throughout our discussion with staff, volunteers and stakeholders, many people shared the challenges of supporting families when volunteers (and staff) were also struggling with similar issues. This was particularly difficult for staff who were maintaining the levels of emotional commitment to the families they supported while trying to navigate the same issues at home.

"Everybody had the kids at home you know it was really difficult we were still trying to provide support for families or volunteers", said one discussion group participant, with another adding, "my mental health wasn't doing particularly well and then you've got to go and support families and volunteers who are also really struggling and because they're already socially isolated or they've already got pre-existing mental health issues. They're at a breaking point, you're not feeling particularly great. You've got to just suck it up and get on with it and then come home and do more home-schooling with kids who aren't who are struggling as well". "Trying to actually do your job and offer emotional support whilst at the same time offer the availability to your

own children, **it's not emotionally safe for anybody involved in that**" said another.

The potential burn out of staff and volunteers is something that all organisations involved in the COVID-19 response should explore and reflect on, to ensure the mental health and wellbeing of the whole organisation: service users as well as staff, volunteers, management and board.

## Positive impacts: "You think you know your child… you got to know them better"

### More family time

When we asked service users in the survey, as well as in the focus groups, to tell us about any benefits that came out of the pandemic, most people (63%) shared that **more family time was beneficial.**
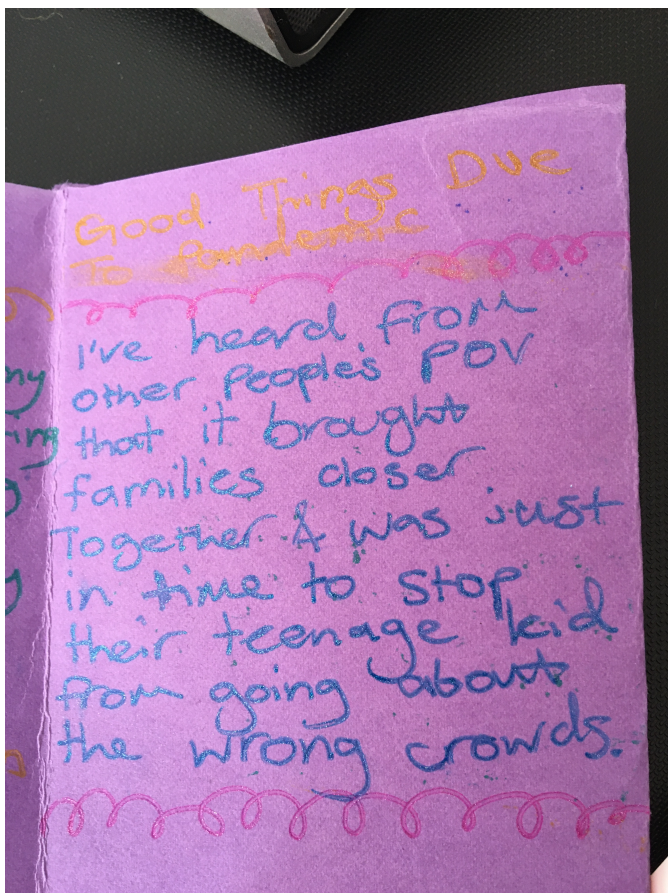


In the focus groups, people strongly reflected this, telling us: "You think you know your child… you got to know them better" and that they "became a good referee!" One parent told us, "the one to one with children was really beneficial, one child with autism, he came on with literacy - It was a challenge, but it was good".

Having more time with children in general was seen as beneficial with this then impacting on relationships, cooking and eating and being able to offer more support to children with additional support needs. What was raised was the **benefits of having good, sustainable and safe housing with access to outdoor space.** The links then between sustaining the benefits of the pandemic (more time together) with ensuring good housing was very much made clear by the group.

**Spending more time with friends and family was also noted as a positive** from some of the young people we spoke with, as was the use of media streaming and phone use. One young person commented that they stayed up all night talking to friends, with another commenting it was good to have "me time".

For staff and volunteers, one or two respondents in our focus groups and surveys said that they felt their families coped better during the pandemic due to lessened demands on their time (no school runs, for example), or that life did not change that much for some families, particularly long-term unemployed parents whose lives had always been very local.

## Fife Gingerbread's support

When we asked parents and carers to tell us more about how Fife Gingerbread helped, the response was overwhelmingly positive, with **100% of respondents saying the organisation had responded well to their needs.** One participant in the focus group told us "they help you realise you're worth something"

Just over a third of service users who responded to the survey shared that the general "support" that was offered was beneficial (34%), with online groups particularly noted (20%) as well as "everything" the organisation did to support people (18%). Only one particular service was mentioned: making it work for families. This

service also came up positively in the focus group with service users as well as stakeholders

Similarly, the sense from the staff and volunteers is that Fife Gingerbread did a lot to try and keep as much support and service running as possible throughout both lockdowns, despite the difficulties of doing so, and that by the time of the second lockdown, Fife Gingerbread had adapted well and were in a very strong position to support their families.

"In later months we really picked up and delivered great support" said one survey respondent. The team were quick to ensure that doorstep deliveries continued (including dropping off food parcels, items running out at supermarkets, fuel vouchers, holiday gifts, refurbished phone and laptops, handwritten cards and letters) and that a variety of methods were used to make sure that they kept in touch with all the families (including doorstep chats, walks, social media, email, phone calls, facetime, Zoom etc).

Over time, lots of new online activities were introduced, including online cooking classes, coffee evenings, quizzes, bingo, etc. A number of respondents felt that Fife Gingerbread "met the response of the pandemic head on" and were in fact ahead of the game compared to other organisations in Fife. "FG did a fantastic job during lockdown and were quicker than most to respond online and found innovative ways to get provisions and support out to people that needed it", said one survey respondent.

Overall, staff and volunteers praised Gingerbread's adaptable and flexible approach to handling working and continuing to provide services during the pandemic, both in responses to the survey and during the discussion groups. The words "adaptable", "flexible", "committed" were used frequently in the survey responses, alongside "innovative", "resilient", "responsive" and "willing to learn new skills". "I was actually very impressed with the way we went through covid, I

think we adapted a lot quicker than most other organisations", said one discussion group participant. "I think we were really quick off the mark in the helping hands project and bringing food deliveries and other essential deliveries to families that we support". "I was really really impressed about how we worked as an organization, how we adapted as an organization," said another discussion group participant. "I realised how far ahead we were in comparison to the majority of other organisations. I think the families really benefited".

For stakeholders, 21.4% told us **wrap-around support was the most helpful aspect of Fife Gingerbread's services**, with 14% specifically noting online support and meeting outdoors. They also told us "Fife Gingerbread's ability to adapt their traditional delivery and create opportunities for meeting clients outside and in public areas during the periods of lockdown to ensure a continuity of service. But also the innovative approaches to make resources available online, so those with digital capability can still participate in activities and learning".

## Holistic support and partnerships

As noted, Making It Work For Families was consistently raised by service users (parents, carers and young people) as an example of good, joined up, holistic service provision. This service was seen to take into account the needs of the whole family and support them in the ways that worked for them. This included being heard and listened to, which was seen as particularly important to the young people we spoke with. This experience was seen as very different to how they interacted with statutory services, particularly schools.

For staff, volunteers as well as service users, a number of organisations were named as being particularly impressive during the early stages of the pandemic, including Helping Hands, Aberlour Assistance Fund, the Culloden Community Centre, Enable, FRASAC,

Home Start, Square Start and Starcatchers. One participant in the staff and volunteers' focus group talked about just being able to pick up the phone and have a conversation with Culloden Community Centre, and they would get things out to the families who needed food or other forms of support, while another mentioned that they had a better understanding and working relationship with other agencies as a result of the pandemic.

The stakeholder discussion group was very positive about the collaboration between organisations that took place during the pandemic. Participants talked a lot about how responding to a crisis freed their teams and organisations from their mandates and created a more permissive environment for working together, as there was a new set of clear priorities that everyone needed to respond to urgently and "just get it done".

"There was a clear set of priorities and a freeing up of constraints" said one participant. "People were told just to get on and do what mattered". "Because a local response was required, people felt enabled to decide what was right for their area", said another participant. "Not having a 'Plan for.........' meant the response was immediate and focused".

The group also talked about how responding to the pandemic was "bigger than us: bigger than me, bigger than our organisation" and there being a lot of goodwill to collaborate, as well as an immediate necessity to do so. **Collaboration was also felt to be possible because of good pre-existing networks and partnerships, flexibility over both service delivery and communication methods, and regular meetings between partners and agencies.** One participant said that they would "pick up the phone to talk to each other, [hold] regular meetings and ask each other for support". One participant mentioned that it will be important not to go back to old ways of working.

However, whilst the partnership picture here was very positive with the organisations Fife Gingerbread already knew, in terms of working with new partners, this experience was very mixed, as we'll explore further in the following section.

## What was missing

In the next section, we outline what gaps emerged in our surveys and workshops. All service users spoke positively about service responses, and almost a third of stakeholders who responded (31.4%) also shared that there were no opportunities missed during this time. This highlights how well Fife Gingerbread, as well as other services in the area, adapted to the needs of people they were working with during the pandemic. However, through more in-depth discussion within the focus groups, we were able to identify some areas of provision and practice that weren't filled during this time.

### Early intervention

During the stakeholder discussion group, many participants talked about the need for more joined up services around mental health and social isolation in particular as well as the need for more crisis prevention. One participant talked about how health and social care will soon only be working with people in crisis because of the backlog, and the exhaustion this is causing. "Health visitors struggle to engage unless it's got to a certain point", said one participant, "**you can see a family heading towards crisis, but there's only so much you can do to stop it getting there".** One participant noted that mental health services are actually becoming quite a crowded area, and that others (rather than Fife Gingerbread) are better placed to deal with complex cases, though they might be well suited to focusing on wellbeing. However, another participant disagreed, saying that people underestimate how much non-specialist organisations can contribute to conversations around mental health.

Within the staff and volunteers' survey, additional mental health support was raised in 60% of the surveys, and, as outlined above, was also identified by service users as a growing need. In terms of other aspects of prevention and early intervention, preventative mental health support was also noted alongside preparations for the end of furlough, the end to Universal Credit uplift and energy changes, as a tool to prevent increased poverty.

This issue was discussed in depth with the stakeholder focus group, with participants reflecting that there are difficulties for making a case for more **preventative work when it is less visible, more longer-term and more costly than most funding cycles allow for and more difficult to measure outcomes**. Participants also talked about a need for a shift in consciousness about what prevention is and "how effective a small intervention like a youth work program or a summer program or a healthy eating initiative can[be]" when you can only monitor for the life of the course. One participant talked about how difficult it is to convince local authorities or funders to invest in preventative work when this investment would see funding lessen for other services: "we have to trial things to demonstrate that the savings that can be made through prevention measures actually outweigh the cost of dealing with the crisis [and] that's a hugely difficult thing to do".

The staff discussion group also had a long and in-depth conversation about the structural causes of poverty and what potential role Fife Gingerbread can or does play in challenging the drivers of, and preventing, poverty. Although no firm conclusions were reached, interesting discussions took place around the relative merit of long-term public campaigns, writing to politicians, and challenging the prevalent narratives around poverty, particularly the language being used around people being expected to choose between 'luxuries' and 'necessities'. In particular, the right to define what financial 'independence' can look like for a family was brought into question.

Parents fleeing violence and accepting poverty as a result were also discussed.

It was recognised by the group that working with individuals to maximise their work opportunities and the amount of benefit they can claim can only go so far – that it "taps out" – and that **there's a pressing need to change the system, but few levers by which to do so**. Concern was raised around the reductions in Universal Credit, particularly for unemployed people for whom nothing has changed: "now they're expected to live off less of that money and nothing's changed for them so you get used to what you're earning and you spend what you're earning" said one staff member.
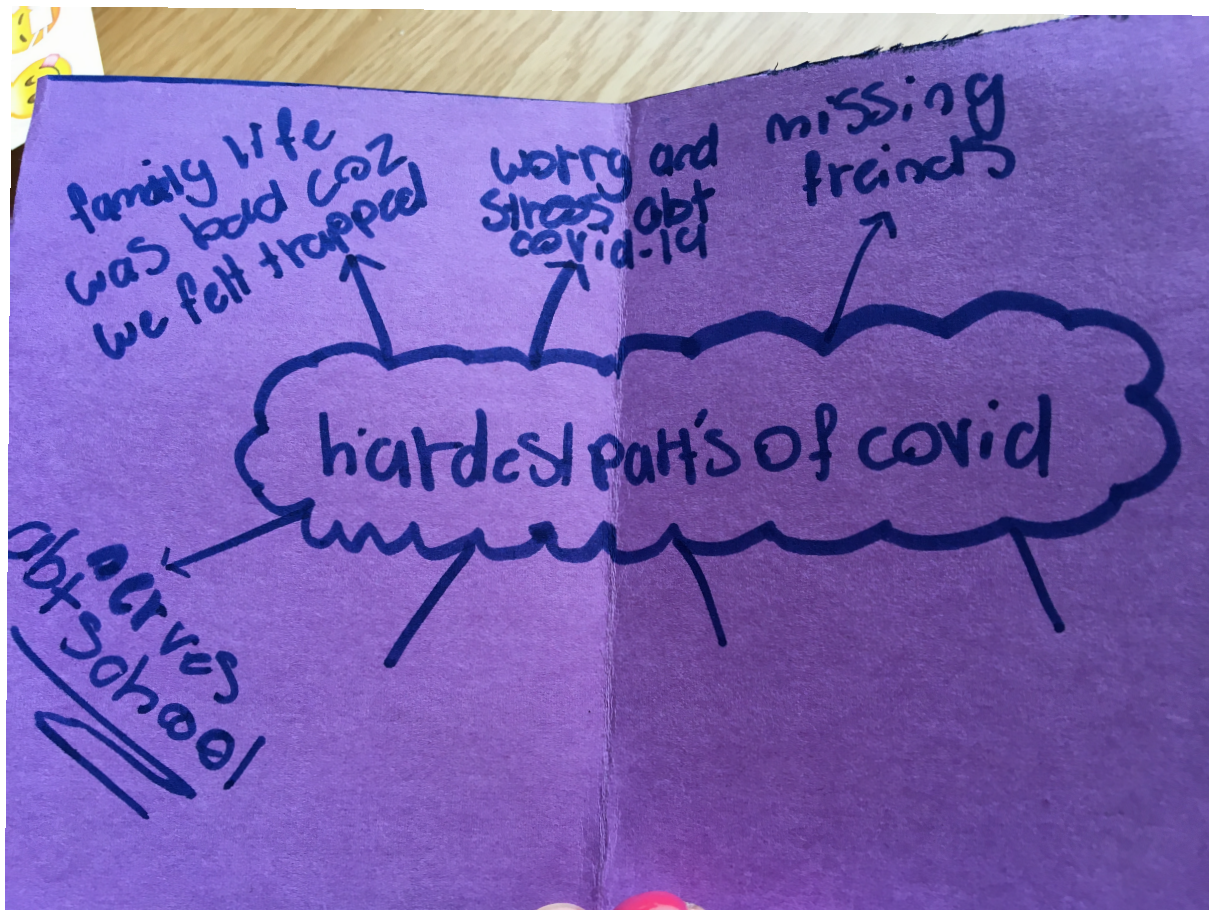


## Face to face work

Across almost all the focus groups (with the exception of young people), **lack of face to face contact** was, not unsurprisingly, noted as one of the gaps. Staff and volunteers fed back that they were providing the same level of emotional support, exacerbated by the lack of face to face opportunities, resulting in a sense that: "we were not able to give the level of emotional support that we would normally give".

Similarly, service users told us that loneliness and isolation were exacerbated by the fact that "support can't come in the house". People who noted this in the survey also provided the caveat, "Would have been great to have had groups but new [sic] we couldn't". However, many of the stakeholder respondents to the survey (32%) also noted that, within their provisions, they were still offering face to face support with PPE and other health and safety precautions in place, and 14% believed the lack of face to face support was one of the biggest challenges to service delivery during the pandemic. For staff and volunteers, one survey respondent noted that it might be useful to have "more outdoor activities" - walk and talk, groups etc".

## Delivering for parents and families from marginalised backgrounds

Participants were asked whether services were inclusive to families from Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds, disabled parents, LGBT parents, those whose first language is not English and those living in rural Fife. Overall staff and volunteers were unaware of specific efforts to engage these groups but, felt that Fife Gingerbread being an inclusive organisation, which is open to all, was enough to engage those who needed their services; only 27% of survey respondents stated that opportunities for minoritised communities were *not* met during the pandemic and 29% felt that services in Fife were not meeting the needs of parents from these backgrounds. This was similar to the feedback given by parents and carers, with some

identifying that children with additional support needs were well supported within the organisation.

However, given the majority of staff, volunteers and service users within Fife Gingerbread are not from these backgrounds, it is important that a **more critical review of the extent of outreach to minoritised communities is taken forward to provide a more accurate analysis which is informed by lived experience.** One staff and volunteers' survey respondent explicitly noted that partnerships with both the "Fife Migrants' Forum and Fife Equalities Centre" could be improved.

We also asked stakeholders to share how well Fife Gingerbread responds to the needs of marginalised groups of families who are at risk of discrimination. This includes where English was an additional language, LGBTQI families, people with disabilities and Black and Ethnic Minority families. Whilst 42% said well or very well, 50% said they were unable to comment, with 7% sharing that the service poorly met the needs of these groups.

A number of people who said they were unable to comment said "we also don't know what the hidden needs are" and that "services are not funded to help families in need".

It was identified that there is a need for a Fife wide understanding of the needs and numbers of families across the region; as one stakeholder noted, "it is not possible to comment as the families describe[d] are very small numbers". This flags up a potential gap in terms of an intersectional approach as described in our rapid review as well as a gap in knowledge and understanding of the needs of all lone parents and families in need. As one staff and volunteer survey respondent noted, "In these areas we don't take a targeted approach but focus more universally on lone parent families". However, as outlined in our rapid review, a universal approach often misses the

needs of all families. One stakeholder commented that "there needs to be more for asylum seeking families".

During the discussion group with stakeholders, one group focused particularly on opportunities for greater collaboration in order to make sure more diverse families are being reached. They noted that mainstream services can be less accessible, that not all families are being picked up by the various services, and commented on the fact that BAME, migrant and refugee families are likely underrepresented overall in the families receiving support in Fife.

Stakeholders in the group also reflected that the impact of COVID-19 is more severely felt by those from BAME backgrounds, disabled people, women lone parents and migrants. As such, it is likely that more support and access to services are required by these communities, and organisations such as Fife Gingerbread will need to respond through this analytical lens. Staff and volunteers highlighted that the main barrier to delivering this work well was a lack of funding and the closure of previous services which specifically focused on rural families. Service users in particular highlighted the lack of provision of services across rural North East Fife and the need for difficulties in delivery to be overcome to meet families' needs, through use of bus services or different funding strands.

## Partnership work with new partners

Whilst 85% of stakeholders were keen to work with Fife Gingerbread on partnership projects, working in partnership with other organisations was not raised that frequently through the survey with staff and volunteers, suggesting that partnership working was not high on people's radar at the time of filling out the survey. The responses received about partnership were also relatively mixed with just under half the respondents (45%) saying they think more could have been made of working with new partners during the pandemic.

One respondent mentioned that when Fife Gingerbread were not able to respond in person that they worked in partnership with others to support families, while another believed that as Fife Gingerbread "led the way" during COVID other organisations learned from Fife Gingerbread rather than vice versa. There is also a sense from the responses that **Fife Gingerbread's approach to partnership working can be quite reactive:** "if opportunities arise we take them"; "[we are] always open to working with new partners"; "[we are happy to work with] any that can support the families we work with" rather than that staff and volunteers are thinking more proactively and strategically about the partnerships that would work best. This is likely also due to Fife Gingerbread staff being focused on crisis response, with little time to think longer term or bigger picture.

However, during the two discussion groups, partnerships were raised more frequently, both in terms of positive engagement and issues around coordination. A number of staff noted that partnership working was less available and that there was a lack of information sharing and coordination.

Some of the key issues that were mentioned by staff and volunteers with regard to working in partnership with others included:

- Lack of coordination between different agencies, particularly at the beginning of the lockdown. One discussion group participant talked about how they discovered that five different agencies were dropping supplies off each week to one of the families they supported. "Under normal times we would have just picked up the phone", they said, though reflected that they "could have still picked up the phone to other places but it was just kind of gung-ho - it's crisis mode and you're responding quickly and as practically as possible and a lot of that kind of coordination and thinking time actually gets lost".

- Other organisations believed Fife Gingerbread to be closed even though it was open all the way through the pandemic, and **the need for Fife Gingerbread to be more visible to potential partners.** On the flip side of this, some sister agencies work actually came to a full stop during the pandemic, and there were difficulties in trying to recognise "who was doing what and what were they still doing the same or doing differently, and so on" (staff discussion group participant).
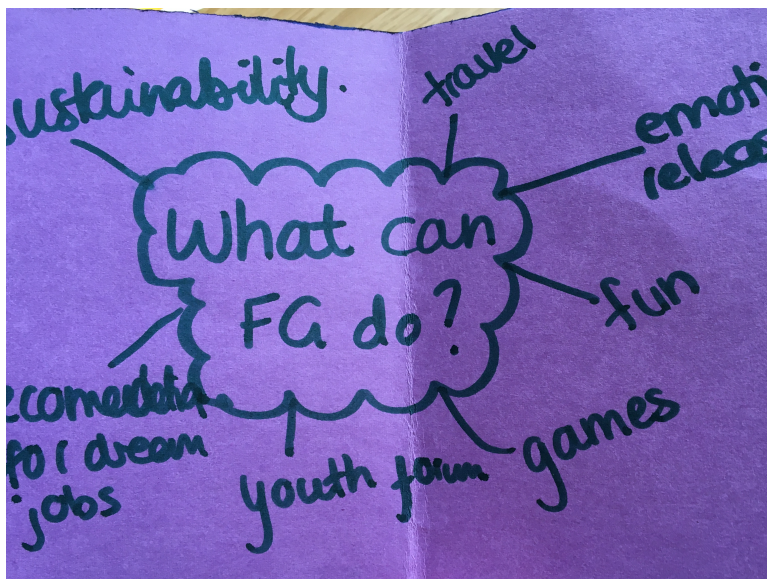
Staff and volunteers fed back that although the Gingerbread teams are working towards more partnership work, often **this is happening in silos and with known partners,** rather than seeking out new partnerships.

Similarly, in terms of who is missing, and why, 10% of stakeholders noted the need for better partnerships when working with new partners. One survey respondent told us "Fife Gingerbread support was not regular enough for the parent to build a relationship with the worker and develop confidence with the service [and] how accessible and local the services are", with another sharing, "one mother contacted us because of the ongoing racist abuse she and her family were suffering at school and where they live. The mother explained that it was her worker at Fife Gingerbread that gave her [our] number". This was also reiterated in our stakeholder focus group, with people sharing that there is a need for "less signposting" and more relationship building.

One stakeholder also spoke about the importance of a holistic approach being supported by good partnerships, whereby "**the other major challenge for families will always be the fragmented nature of support,** where members of the family are linked into a variety of supports due to complex circumstances, but these support agencies are not aware of each other, or are able to work together." This was also raised during the stakeholder discussion group in

terms of making sure to understand peoples' whole lives, as well as creating multi-disciplinary teams and linking together services, particularly within localities, though one participant did warn against trying to be "all things to all people".

The need for user-informed and user-led services was also raised during the discussion group, alongside the need to ensure that the voices of lived experience are at the heart of all service provision. Fife Gingerbread is seen by some participants as a particularly good example of an organisation which engages service users who are on a positive trajectory themselves as "guiding lights" for others, as peer support and volunteer mentors, and in helping inform strategy and policy. This was also reflected in feedback from parents and young people, who valued participating in the Parents' Forum as well as their role as experts by experience. However, one participant mentioned the need to ensure that frontline staff are given the skills to support 'user-led' working "because the habit to help and solve and fix people's problems for them is VERY strong in us all". This was echoed by a respondent to the staff and volunteers' survey who commented that they have heard other workers who were "suggestive of the in-ability of families to make their own decision and choices for the best interest of their children and it is very uncomfortable for me, and not in line with our values".

In the final section, we provide recommendations of how Fife Gingerbread can respond to these needs and gaps and build on the successes they have achieved during a very challenging time.

## Going forward - recommendations

We asked service users in our surveys to tell us what they would like to see continue or see newly created; 18% of people wanted to see the sense of community and togetherness continue, 11% wished to continue to have more time with family and 9% wanted to "get back to normal". Specific services or groups were less likely to be mentioned. Interestingly, 2 people also mentioned wanting to keep some of the restrictions, specifically social distancing and better hygiene. This also ties into our findings with the focus groups around "getting back to normal", which is detailed below.

Within focus groups with service users, we asked people to share where they would like to be in 5 years' time. Both groups shared aspirations around;
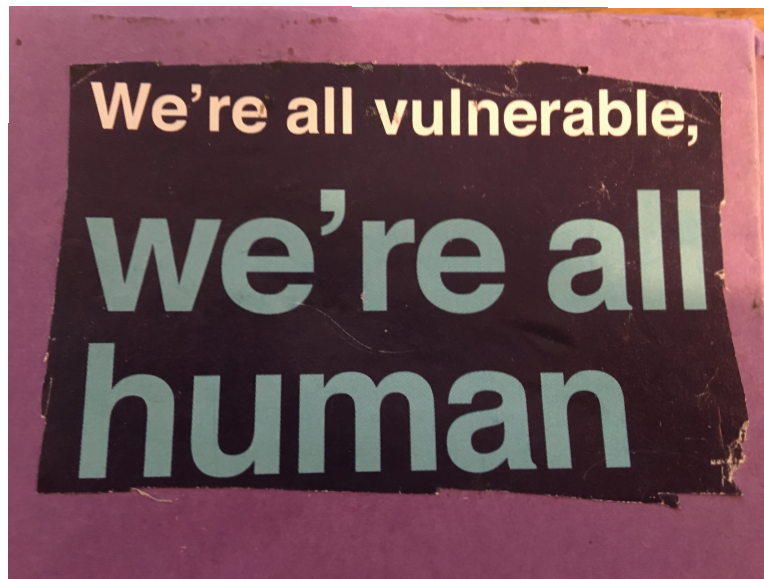
- Having happy children

- Having good quality and safe housing

- Being in secure employment and having access to training

- Having more time for themselves; hobbies; no more stress; friendships

- Being healthier

- Having positive relationships

Drawing on these aspirations of where people want to be in the future, as well as through conversations with staff, volunteers and stakeholders, we now turn to provide specific recommendations.

## Specific recommendations for Fife Gingerbread to take forward:

## Mental health and post COVID-19 reintegration support

The decline of the mental health of staff, volunteers and service users (both parents and young people) was repeatedly mentioned and was the most common response from all participants when asked to reflect on the impact of COVID-19. Participants shared anxieties regarding "getting back to normal" and meeting in large groups, hospital appointments, dealing with loneliness and the stress of having had no time to themselves. Fife Gingerbread should consider embedding more methods of emotional support in current service provision and partnering with community mental health services (including emotional support for children of lone parents). In particular, service users mentioned their anxiety about "reintegrating" into busy public spaces (a specific concern for those who became new parents during the pandemic), and as such Fife Gingerbread may want to provide specific support to meet this concern.

## Linking systems together

Stakeholders mentioned the need for a more holistic approach to support services, explaining that currently service users are referred to multiple different points, that this can be confusing and often means service users do not get all of what they need. Although Fife Gingerbread is not in a decision - making position to tackle the fragmented nature of service delivery across the local authority area, there may be scope for the organisation to create clear and accessible routes to all support services and create a potential entry point for service users to understand all of what is available to them and what rights they have. However, a contradiction was highlighted during focus groups, with stakeholders stating the need for more signposting to services and staff criticising the overuse of "endless signposting". A balance must be reached in linking services together, providing information but ensuring that service users see positive results/outcomes through this signposting rather than them being directed to multiple places which do not deliver for them. This is particularly important given that lone parents may need emergency support and may not have time or capacity to deal with this.

Integrated partnership working  across agencies is critical. Fife Gingerbread should consider how it can support this between third sector agencies (and beyond) as well as influencing Fife Council to invest further funding in partnership working (rather than seeing partnering as a method of cost cutting). This can also be supported by the development of better, more in-depth, and more robust information on lone parents across Fife, what their needs are, what the challenges are, and what their demographic make-up is. Similarly, working with Fife Council,  it is important that lone parents are included within the "Plan for Fife" with specific interventions to tackle poverty within a population group most likely to experience it.

## Celebrating resilience

Lone parents discussed how they had shown immense resilience during the pandemic in balancing all of their responsibilities, the added pressures and competing needs, on top of the considerable resilience they already had to display on a daily basis pre-pandemic. Fife Gingerbread should find avenues to celebrate the strengths of, and resilience of, their service users to enable them to feel more valued and respected.

## Practical support

Since the start of the pandemic, practical support and emergency interventions have been considered the most helpful way to meet the needs of lone parent families (for example, through food parcels). Fife Gingerbread should continue, and expand where possible, access to these interventions. Across focus groups and surveys the following suggestions were made for Fife Gingerbread delivery:

- Continue to support opportunities for lone parents to volunteer with the organisation, providing peer support and buddying

- Providing a toy bank

- Providing food support (either through food parcels or healthy ready-made meals which can be picked up by lone parents).

- Travel support (through expenses to participate in Fife Gingerbread activities or small grants to support families to get out and about)

- Multi-language resources (to provide families from a diverse range of backgrounds with access to information, especially in relation to Fife Gingerbread's services, their rights and access to support, and resources for their children).

- Awareness around gender inequality in parenting roles and employment (this could be supported through employability programmes reflecting on gendered roles, as well as building on the engagement with fathers and boys  accessing Fife Gingerbread's services)

## Enabling lone parents to enter or remain in  the workplace

Service users described in detail, the financial difficulties they faced, the stress of not being able to pay bills and the hardship of balancing all of this whilst either looking for work or being in work. When asked what they would like to see improve in five years, multiple focus group participants stated they wanted employment or training opportunities. The data is clear on the stigma and inequalities faced in the labour market by lone parents; as such, there is an opportunity here for Fife Gingerbread to work with lone parents, existing employability programmes and local employers to deliver a service user-focused employment initiative that provides high quality paid work, as well as training opportunities. This delivery should be designed with lone parents and prioritise the need for flexibility in where and when work takes place.

## Delivering for marginalised families and tackling inequality

As has been mentioned, a clear need was identified across Fife for further provision to be delivered for marginalised families, including those from BAME backgrounds, LGBTQI parents, those whose first language is not English, disabled parents and those living in rural Fife. Whilst this is a region wide issue, there is scope for Fife Gingerbread to provide more equalities focused delivery within their mainstream activities, for example, by securing funding for translation and interpreter services and working in partnership with community specific groups. Mentioned repeatedly was the need for more appropriate and responsive services for families from BAME backgrounds and the need for better provision across North East

Fife. Staff, volunteers and service users specifically mentioned the importance of meeting the needs of lone parents with children who have additional support needs (ASN); in particular, partnerships with organisations such as ENABLE were mentioned to support Fife Gingerbread to deliver this in the most appropriate and effective way.

In order to do this well, Fife Gingerbread should ensure there is a robust equality related understanding across the organisation, and deliver ongoing equalities learning and training for their staff and volunteers, to assist them to deliver their work in an inclusive manner. This will assist in understanding that simply opening the doors of a service to all does not mean that all will feel able to take part. Proactive outreach and delivery is required for those communities who experience systemic and overlapping inequalities and whose needs are not met by mainstream services.

Staff and stakeholders discussed the need for time and resources to do this strategic thinking, to build these partnerships and to develop the needed intersectional equalities analysis to enable a more inclusive delivery. Given that the majority of the capacity of the organisation is on providing much needed service delivery, consideration should be given to how this resource can be established, which will provide more effective delivery long-term.

## Participation and service user engagement

In order to deliver services which meet the needs of lone parent families, it is crucial to involve them as equal partners in the design, development and delivery of the organisation's work. To do this well, Fife Gingerbread should continue its journey of moving towards a collaborative approach. This means continuing to develop  a lived experience and participation strategy which shares power and decision making. This should include a wide and diverse range of lone parents  as well as children and young people and consider moving language and delivery methods from "supporting" individuals

to "enabling" individuals to pursue their rights and a high quality of life.  Once established, this should go beyond direct service delivery and work to both help inform Fife Gingerbread's research and influencing across local government, as well as enabling service users to lead awareness raising of the reality of in work poverty, the inadequacy of the social security net, the reality of inaccessible childcare costs and more

This work can, and should, join the dots between Fife Gingerbread's local delivery, the impact of national policy making and systemic inequality. The Fife Council's Children's Services Annual Report 2020-21 states that one of their key priorities for improvement is to centre the rights and participation of children, young people and families in decision making, planning and interventions. As such, this offers Fife Gingerbread the platform to deliver strategic participatory work and "lived experience" expertise (potentially through a lived experience policy panel) and be a conduit by which lone parent families can take the lead in decision making which affects their lives.

## Conclusion

Fife Gingerbread has worked incredibly hard during the pandemic to meet the needs of the people they work with. Overall, the picture is very positive; all service users agreed the support they received was good, with many commenting on how important it was to have contact with support workers, practical help and support for the whole family.

Whilst the pandemic has required all organisations to work reactively and rapidly in order to move forward within and beyond COVID-19, Fife Gingerbread now has the opportunity to build on these successes. The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities, it has negatively impacted on people's mental health,

their physical health and their financial health, but these inequalities existed before the pandemic. What COVID-19 has done is highlight the realities of in-work poverty, of isolation and of social marginalisation. Going back to normal isn't something that will change this. Working innovatively and proactively to co-create **a new normal** with parents and carers can enable them to genuinely have better tomorrows.

This can be supported with Fife Gingerbread working with new partners, building meaningful relationships with them and deepening their own understanding of inequality and participation. Making it Work for Families and the Parents' Forum are well received examples of how to enable participation, and by expanding on these models, Fife Gingerbread can continue to learn, to grow and to think strategically in order to move forward to people-led prevention, early intervention and support across Fife. Building internal capacity, and directing funding and resources to this will help Fife Gingerbread to continue to support and empower Fife's lone parents and families in need.

Finally, we would like to thank all the staff, volunteers, stakeholders, parents, carers and young people for sharing their thoughts, expertise and experience throughout this project.