

PEN PICTURE: One Parent Families Scotland

One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) is Scotland's national organisation working with and on behalf of one-parent families. We are acutely aware of the needs of one parent families in an ever-changing environment, both in terms of practical services and, importantly, in terms of being able to access those services.

The principles of GIRFEC and Curriculum for Excellence are embedded in all our activities. Engagement is with families – parents and children; a strong emphasis is placed upon child development and family learning. At structural level, we continue to work closely with partner organisations, locally and nationally, influencing policy, contributing to service design, and ensuring that the voices of single parents are heard by policy makers and planners alike.

To illustrate our work our Braes Project father's worker has provided an example of his work where he was able to support a father to improve the learning outcomes for his frequently excluded 15-year-old son.

Dad shared that he was receiving letters from school about his son's behaviour in his maths class, these letters were causing a lot of stress at home. Dad's own problems with reading made it difficult for him to know exactly what was happening, but it was clear that his son was displaying behaviour that was seeing him excluded from class.

Initially our father's worker liaised with the Pastoral Head at the school to agree that in future Dad would get texts rather than letters, which helped improve the communication between Dad and school.

As the learner's exclusions from class continued, the OPFS worker and the Pastoral Head arranged a meeting to bring the teacher, Dad, the child, and the OPFS worker together in a supportive environment.

Father and son were then able to hear from the teacher and a positive strategy was devised to help the learner achieve his potential. Dad better understood the situation and with improved communication was better able to help support his son with the work at home.

Our father's worker supported Dad to access support with his own reading/writing and the young learner responded to the belief that the adults placed in him, and did in fact achieved his National 4 qualification in Maths at the end of the term.

We asked our school colleague to tell us about the school's view on the role which the worker from One Parent Families Scotland had played:

"The impact and importance of this work could not be higher. In our setting it was initially about advocacy. We had not realised we were dealing with a parent who was virtually non-literate. Rather than our on-going communications about the child being helpful they were a source of considerable anxiety and stress that helped make the situation worse. When the Children and Family Worker was able to share this with us we were able to stop the unhelpful actions and start to build the positive. The worker's role changed at this point from simple advocacy to mediation. He was able to work with both father and child to help them understand what the school wanted and how best to support this. In this situation there has been a huge turnaround in attitude, behaviour and attainment." Pastoral Head, partner High School.