Scottish
Anti Poverty
Review

EDITION 42 | SPRING 2025

IN THIS ISSUE

Is the Child Poverty Act making a difference?

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EDITORIAL TEAM

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The Poverty Alliance

DISCLAIMER

ABOUT THE
POVERTY ALLIANCE

The Poverty Alliance exists to combat poverty in Scotland by working with people and communities to affect change. We act as the national anti-poverty network in Scotland, engaging with voluntary organisations, policy makers and politicians. Our vision is of a sustainable Scotland free of poverty, with dignity and social and economic justice for all.

We will tackle poverty by working with individuals, organisations and communities to affect change in the distribution of power and resources. To do this, we will:

- support the development of policies and practices which promote social justice and combat poverty
- work with people and communities experiencing poverty to help them challenge poverty
- build a strong anti-poverty network in Scotland
- raise awareness and change attitudes about poverty

Welcome

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Editorial

Peter Kelly, Chief Executive, Poverty Alliance.

Amidst a slew of really very bad news in March and April this year – from massive cuts to social security in the UK, to a trade war that will ultimately hit the poorest hardest – it was perhaps easy to overlook one very consequential piece of information that emerged at the end of March. The poverty statistics for last year were released which showed that interim targets to reduce relative child poverty to 18 per cent in Scotland by 2024 were missed.

These were targets that were agreed by the Scottish Parliament and set in law in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act in 2017. At the time that this legislation was passed it was rightly seen as a landmark. It showed that the Scottish Parliament and Government were serious about turning rhetorical commitments around poverty into meaningful action. They were so serious that they were willing to commit their efforts in law.

No one who lobbied and campaigned for the Child Poverty Act believed that meeting these targets would be easy. Child poverty is the result of a complex set of powerful interlocking social, economic and political systems and undoing the damage of these systems would not be a straightforward task. What all of us who campaigned for this believed though, is that achieving these targets and affective the transformation that their achievement would represent, was entirely possible.

The articles in this edition of SAPR set out in different ways just how progress may be made. Angela Bradley, General Secretary of the EIS, reminds us of the vital role of education in the battle against child poverty, whilst Laura Millar, CEO of Fife Gingerbread highlights the importance of working alongside parents and supporting them on a journey out of poverty. Sarah Patterson shows that youth work, a consistently underfunded area, is vital not only in mitigating against the experience of poverty now, but also in providing routes out of poverty in the future.

What is also clear from this edition, though, is that all these vital efforts will be undermined without investment to ensure that everyone has access to an adequate income. Investing in our social security system is a prerequisite to delivering reductions in child poverty. Without it, teachers, youth workers, family support workers will be continually faced with a rising tide of poverty that is outside their control.

Not only is that investment a prerequisite for delivering change, but it also works.

John Dickie of CPAG Scotland shows that the investment made through the Scottish Child Payment has driven the fall in child poverty that has taken place in Scotland. Whilst child poverty in England has risen from 30 to 31 per cent in 2024, it has fallen from 24 to 23 per cent in Scotland (using the three-year average figures).

These statistics illustrate clearly what happens when significant investment is made. What they do not capture is what happens to those who are impacted by this investment. From mental health to diet, security of housing tenure to ability to plan, the benefits of more towards a more adequate income should not surprise us. The benefits of a decent income on individuals, communities and society are well evidence from research over many decades. The changes are meaningful and impactful and should be celebrated. What the Scottish Government has achieved should not be underestimated or dismissed.

But despite the evidence, the political leadership that has existed in Scotland and the strong levels of public support for efforts to address child poverty, we still fail as a society to invest sufficiently in those things that will make a difference. What is more, there are some who suggest we have been too focused on investment in social security in Scotland to drive down poverty, and that we need to re-prioritise other forms of support.

At a time when public finances are increasingly stretched and when social security budgets are being slashed by the UK Government, we can expect those kinds of arguments to achieve even greater prominence than they already have. However, now is the time when we need to redouble our efforts to invest to tackle child poverty and to reach the targets in Scotland.

Whilst many politicians in Scotland are committed in principle to ending child poverty, what they are delivering is in practice falling well short of the mark. Scotland's children and young people should demand better, Scotland's parents should demand better. All of us who want to see a genuinely compassionate and caring Scotland, should demand better. Over the coming months, as the Scottish Government begins to prepare the Child Poverty Delivery Plan for 2026-2031 and as politicians get ready for the elections in May next year, the Poverty Alliance will be working hard to mobilise our members and wider civil society to demand better from all of them. As civil society we need to demonstrate to our political leaders that we will no longer accept half measures when it comes to addressing poverty. We hope you will join us in raising your voice to demand better.

Is the Child Poverty Act making a difference and can its targets be met?

...it is clear from the recent experience in Scotland, and from experience across the UK and internationally, that high level leadership is critical to progress on child poverty...

John Dickie is Director of the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland.

March 27th 2025 was an important milestone on the road to meeting the 2030 child poverty targets that Holyrood's political parties unanimously enshrined in law in 2017. That is the date we found out the 2023/24 interim targets had not been met.

Those interim targets required Scottish Ministers to ensure that the proportion of children living in poverty is less than 18%; that the proportion of children living in material deprivation is less than 8%; that the proportion of children living in absolute poverty is less than 14% and that the proportion of children living in persistent poverty is less than 8%.

The latest figures show that 23% of children are living in poverty after housing costs; that 9% of children are living in combined low income and material deprivation; that 20% of children are living in absolute poverty.

The failure to meet the interim targets must act as an urgent alarm bell for all Scotland's politicians as the clock ticks ever closer toward the 2030 target that less than 10% of our children are living in poverty. We know that the current policy package falls far short of what is needed to get from the interim targets to the final targets.

These targets and statistics are important because of the children that lie behind them. Children whose education is being undermined, health and wellbeing damaged and life chances blighted purely because their parents do not have the income and resources they need to give their children a decent start in life.

The harsh reality is that for many children and families the passing of the 2017 Child Poverty Act has made little impact on their struggles to get by. The impact of the covid pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis have exacerbated the hardship too many families were already facing. 240 000 of our children remain locked in poverty.

In the face of this bleak picture for so many families it is still important to recognise the very real progress that has been made, and even more important to learn from and build on that progress.

Since the Act was passed tax and benefit decisions made by the Scottish government have boosted the incomes of low-income households with children by "a sizeable £2000 a year", compared to families in England and Wales, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies. The Scottish child payment alone, according to all available analysis, is lifting between 40,000 and 60,000 children out of poverty. And we know that the additional financial support provided in Scotland is being spent on children both on essential items and on enabling them to participate in social and educational opportunities. CPAG analysis forecast that Scotland is the only nation in the UK that will see child poverty falling over the next five years – a projected "large fall" of six percentage points. The subsequent commitment to effectively scrap the two-child limit in Scotland would lift between 15,000 and 23,000 more children out of poverty. Joseph Rowntree Foundation analysis also forecasts falling child poverty in Scotland at the same time as child poverty (in the absence of policy change) continues to rise across the rest of the UK and recent Resolution Foundation analysis reinforces the pictures of a real divergence in child poverty trends as a result of measure put in place by the Scottish government.

The gap between the minimum cost of raising a child in Scotland and the income available to low-income families is now already substantially smaller than in the rest of the UK.

But it is not just modelling and data that tells us the difference Scottish policies introduced on the back of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act are making. Parents and carers themselves are clear about the benefits of policy interventions, especially the Scottish child payment. As Lisa, a participant in the Changing Realities project writes, the Scottish child payment, "has enabled me and my son to participate in more social and educational activities which normally we would have struggled to afford. It alleviates some of the financial pressure and gives me and my son more breathing space to enjoy life. The Scottish child payment has been a 'game changer' for me. It has enabled me to invest in a more nutritious diet that fuels my son adequately during his school day. We all know diet impacts both cognitive behaviour and performance, which is really important to me. We also all know there is a correlation between finances and mental health. Receiving the Scottish child payment has definitely helped improve my mental health, which of course not only impacts me but my family too."

So there is no doubt real progress is being made. But it is also clear that progress, and the existing policy package, looks likely to fall short of what was needed to meet the interim target, and falls even further short of what is needed to meet the 2030 targets. At the same time UK policy, despite the very welcome Labour government commitment to develop a UK child poverty strategy, continues to actually increase child poverty – over 100 children a day are pushed into poverty by the two child limit alone , and recent cuts to disability benefits likely to further increase poverty given the disproportionate risk of poverty in families that include a disabled person.

The next Scottish Child Poverty Delivery Plan, a requirement of the Act, will cover the period 2026 to the final target year of 2030 and is currently under development. 2026 also see the next Holyrood elections. Whoever forms the next Scottish government will be under a statutory obligation to meet those targets. All the political parties need to be setting out how they will meet them. So, what can the next delivery plan, the party manifestos and the UK government's forthcoming strategy learn from the experience in Scotland since the Act was passed. The first key lesson is that investment in social security works. The biggest driver of progress in Scotland has been the investment in the Scottish child payment, just as the biggest driver behind falling child poverty under the last UK Labour government was investment in child benefit and tax credits. Further progress in Scotland will require further investment in the Scottish child payment. Increasing the payment to £40 a week by the end of this Parliament must be the first step on the way to doubling its value by the end of the next Parliament. These increases would pull another 15 000 children out of poverty by 2026, and by 2030.

Furthermore, if child poverty is to be tackled across the UK the two-child limit will need to be abolished at source as the first step toward restoring the value of UK family benefits.

Secondly, social security alone is not in itself sufficient to meet the targets and ensure child poverty is eradicated and remans eradicated beyond 2030. Alongside further increases to the Scottish child payment there needs to be much more action to increase income from employment, and to reduce the costs especially housing and childcare costs that families face. We need to see the current government at the very least deliver on the childcare and employability commitments set out in the existing child poverty delivery plan, and all parties must set out policies that will tackle the labour market inequalities that undermine the incomes of lone parents, parents in families affected by disability and minority ethnic families. Action is also needed from the current government to deliver the funded offer of early learning and childcare for children under three and system of school age childcare already committed to in the existing child poverty delivery plan. This then needs to be built upon toward a system that ensures every parent can access up to 50 hours of childcare per week. Further investment in affordable housing, and action to ensure house-building prioritises family properties in areas where housing costs are a significant driver of child poverty must also be a priority.

Thirdly, as recent research on delivering child poverty strategies by CPAG with Save the Children has highlighted it is clear from the recent experience in Scotland, and from experience across the UK and internationally, that high level leadership is critical to progress on child poverty. Since the 2017 Act was passed all three First Ministers have made tackling child poverty a top priority for their governments. It is vital that this level of leadership is maintained and build on both at Scotland and UK level.

In summary the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act has helped drive real improvements in the lives of children and families across Scotland, and progress is being made toward meeting the child poverty targets. However, the current policy package falls far short of what is needed to achieve the final targets. It is now vital that all the Holyrood parties hold the current government to account to deliver the further action on social security, employment housing and childcare that is needed, at the same time as demonstrate themselves the leadership and policies they will bring forward to build on the progress already made.

We're not looking for slight trends up or down - we want significant and sustained child poverty reduction

... investment in social security works. The biggest driver of progress in Scotland has been the investment in the Scottish child payment...

Lily Humphreys is policy manager at Children First.

Scotland is not a poor country, so it's deeply frustrating that child poverty is such a consistent, pervasive issue. At the time of writing, we are waiting in anticipation of new data that will show us the latest numbers. It is widely acknowledged that the scale of child poverty is unacceptably high and has been for many years. We are hopeful that the numbers will go down - in what would be a very welcome change in trajectory – but we do not expect that the interim target to reduce child poverty to fewer than 18% of children will be met.

Even though tackling child poverty has been a priority for successive First Ministers, levels have remained stubbornly at around quarter of a million children. The ultimate target set by the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, which aims to see fewer than 10% of children in relative poverty by 2030 seems a long way away.

From Children First's work across the country, we are seeing worrying levels of financial uncertainty affecting children and families, with serious consequences for children's health, education, wellbeing and safety. Last year Children First worked with more than 1,000 families to provide financial wellbeing advice and support. This has been an evolution for our services in response to a clear and urgent need from the families we support.

Lots of time will be spent picking apart the new numbers and explaining the reasons behind them. In the build-up to the next Scottish election, they will be debated over and over in pursuit of one political argument or another. Each argument will be true to some extent because the reality is that child poverty is one of the most complex issues facing governments.

There are many different reasons children and families are forced into poverty, and many ways in which it can be mitigated or avoided altogether.

There is no way to boil it down to one policy solution. There have been important moments of progress that should be celebrated. The establishment of the Scottish Child Payment, introduced by the Scottish Government in 2021, is undoubtedly making a real and practical difference to families' lives. There are still obvious barriers, like the two-child cap on child tax credits which the UK Government appears reluctant to give up. The Scottish Government's recent announcement that it plans to mitigate this may help some families in the future, but for families experiencing poverty right now the last few years have yielded very few new policies or initiatives to shift the dial.

While it is important to acknowledge the good work that has been done, governments at every level need to be looking to do much more. We are not looking for slight trends up or down. What we want to see is a significant and sustained reduction in the number of children facing poverty. For each and every child, the impacts may well be lifelong, or even multi-generational. We can already see the cost of the inaction of years gone by, it is evident in the immense pressures health, education and social security systems are buckling under.

At Children First we recognise the scale of the challenge governments face. But the real danger lies in people in power giving up. With that in mind, missing interim child poverty targets should not be a moment to feel discouraged, or an excuse for more time spent politicising the issue. It should be a moment that triggers an even greater effort to understand the reasons for Scotland's child poverty

problem, and take the action needed to tackle it once and for all. We need to find new ways to cut through the complexity.

Taking a children's rights approach to tackling child poverty might be the key to unlocking action.
As Professor Aoife Nolan, an expert in human rights law, recently said: "To think about child poverty without thinking about child's rights is to only consider a very small part of the picture."

There is a cycle around child poverty where children's rights breaches can lead to child poverty, and child poverty can lead to children's rights breaches. Putting a stop to children's rights breaches could – and should – help put an end to child poverty.

Rights breaches often snowball, and sometimes a failure to uphold one right might lead to a succession of other struggles. For example, where families' personal circumstances change and leading to them losing a home (a right under Article 27 of the UNCRC), this can lead to disruptive and distressing temporary accommodation placements. Poor housing and the upheaval involved can make it more challenging for children to attend school (a right under Article 28), and for parents to find work. Children and families are drawn into poverty, as crises compound and their ability to cope reduces.

We see this vicious cycle play out again and again through our services. Children's rights to adequate health and healthcare (Article 24) continue to go unmet with thousands of children languishing on waiting lists for diagnosis and support.

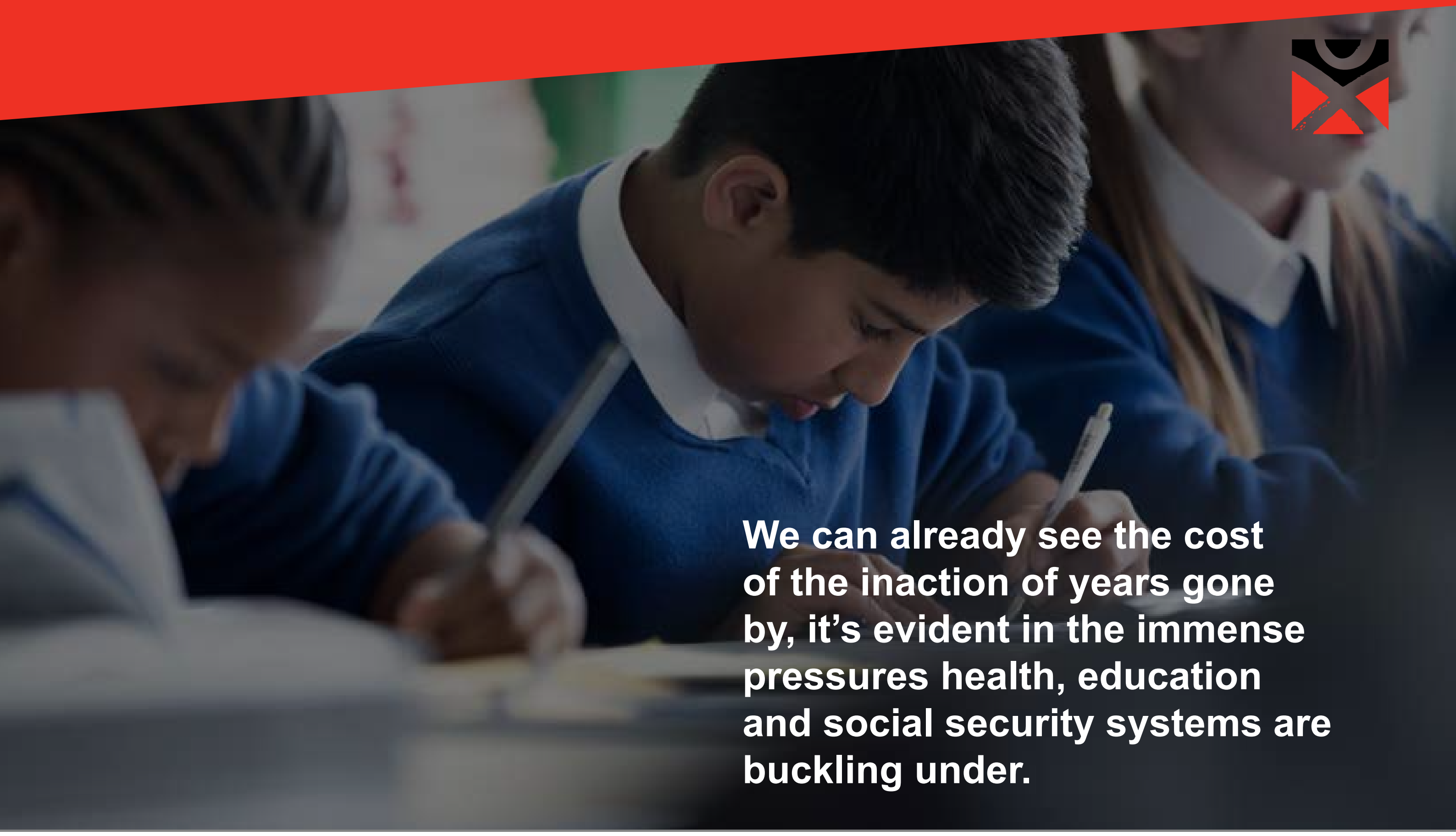
We see services so overwhelmed that children have no option for support unless they are in the most serious distress.

A lack of good, safe homes mean that children are growing up while being bounced between temporary accommodation placements, undermining children's right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27). Temporary accommodation can lead to food poverty and creates barriers to accessing education.

Children and young people are facing violence every day - in their homes, schools, relationships and local communities. Their rights to be protected from harm, including sexual abuse and exploitation (Article 19) and to have the support they need to recover (Article 39) are repeatedly not met. Exhausting delays in the justice system mean that fear and anticipation about going to court lasts years. Without support to recover, traumatic experiences can have a long-term impact on children's lives.

If children and families do not have support they need to get on with their lives – for children to go to school, for parents to go to work, for children's mental health to be cared for, and for families to have safe, warm homes with food on the table - children will remain locked in poverty and these problems will become entrenched.

We also know that the perception that help isn't available, because of the well-publicised pressures on public services, can be hugely damaging in the long term, meaning that



We can already see the cost of the inaction of years gone by, it's evident in the immense pressures health, education and social security systems are buckling under.

smaller challenges for children and families develop into something much worse, leading to terrible health outcomes and intergenerational trauma that costs in the long term.

Children's rights, as set out in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (the UNCRC), now has a stronger legal backing in Scotland since the Convention was incorporated into Scots law last year. Drawing on the model that brought the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law through the Human Rights Act 1998, the UNCRC can now be relied on directly in some situations, when children's rights have not been upheld by public bodies.

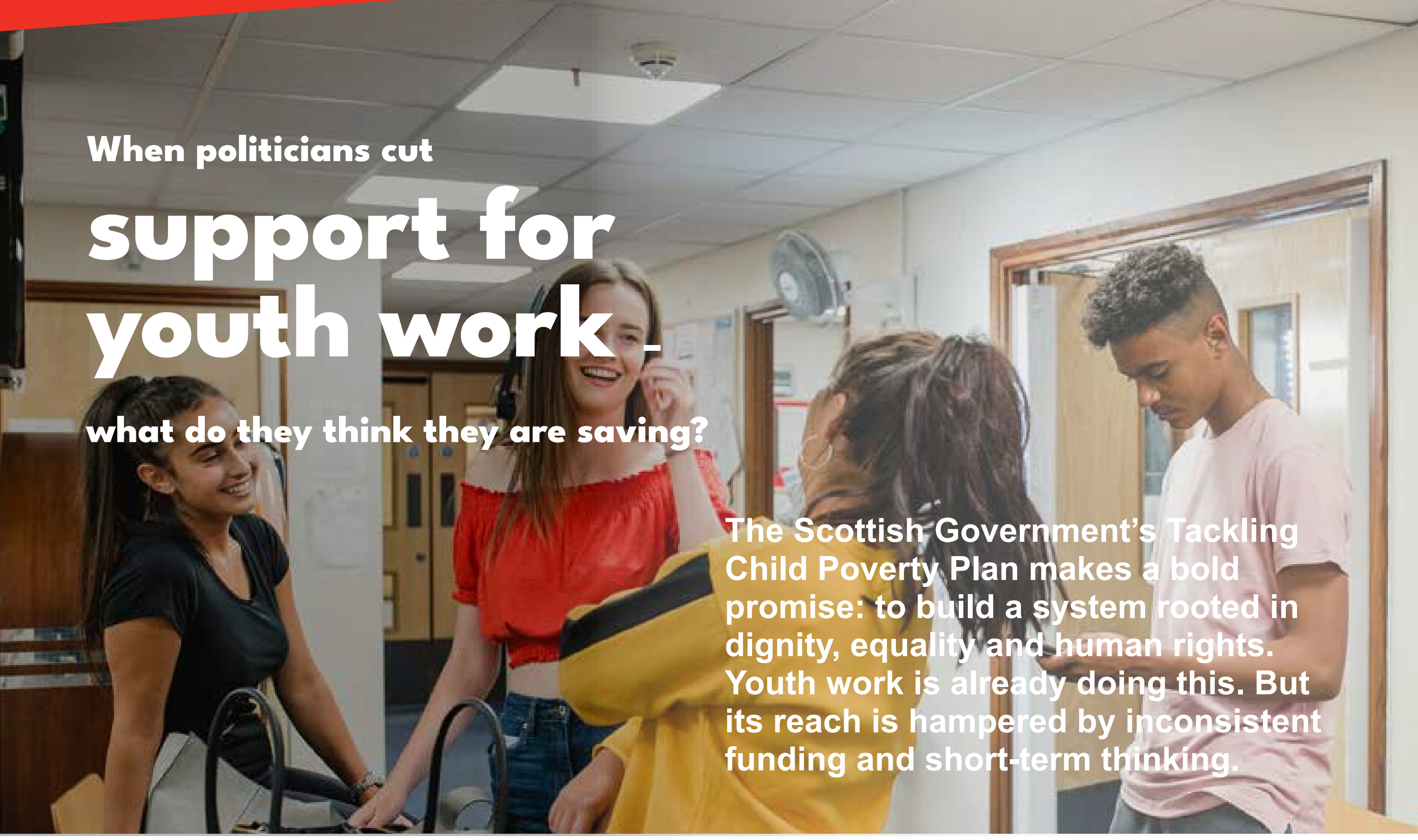
Recognising child poverty as a children's rights issue, with a legal duty to respond, will mean that children's best interests can be put at the centre of decision making across public services. Stopping those initial rights breaches, be that around access to timely health care or safe homes, will help prevent further challenges for families in the future.

Prioritising children's rights - a home, a bed, food on the table and an education – will help shift the dial towards the preventative ways of working that have been the ambition for Scotland since 2011 when the Christie Commission pointed out that "a cycle of deprivation and low aspiration has been allowed to persist because preventative measures have not been prioritised."

Focusing on children's rights can break the cycle around poverty and help move Scotland towards that real and meaningful reduction in child poverty rates we are desperate to see.

Children First is Scotland's national children's charity. We stand up for children, keep them safe and support them to recover from trauma and abuse through our national and local services.

If you know a family who is struggling or you are worried about a child, call our friendly support line team for a confidential chat on 08000 28 22 33 or visit www.childrenfirst.org.uk/supportline.



When politicians cut support for youth work – what do they think they are saving?

The Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Plan makes a bold promise: to build a system rooted in dignity, equality and human rights. Youth work is already doing this. But its reach is hampered by inconsistent funding and short-term thinking.

Sarah Paterson is policy and communications manager for YouthLink Scotland, the national agency for youth work.

"Poverty is not an accident. Like slavery and apartheid, it is man-made and can be removed by the actions of human beings." Nelson Mandela

These words ring louder than ever as Scotland prepares for the first interim targets of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017. We find ourselves at a critical juncture. The political will is there, the Scottish Child Payment is evidence of that, but the scale of change required demands intensified, cross-sector effort.

In truth, we are not on course to meet the Act's ambitions. The recent report from Holyrood's Social Justice and Social Security Committee urges the Scottish Government to "intensify its efforts" and to maximise impact by working more effectively across government and with local partners. The message is clear: some targeted actions have made a dent, but we need more. Much more.
Yet as we look to intensify efforts, Scotland's councils are contending with real-terms budget cuts, impacting critical public services delivered by local government and the charity sector. And too often, youth work is among the first casualties.

When it comes to budgets being cut for youth work, I ask this question: What are we really saving?

Every parent knows instinctively that a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work. We adapt, constantly, to meet the unique needs of our children. Why should our education system be any different?

A growing number of children are not thriving in the classroom. That's not a failure of individual effort, it's a systemic gap. A whole education approach must be our goal, one that includes a well-resourced youth work sector as an equal partner in supporting young people to learn, grow and thrive.

Instead, core funding for youth work has declined dramatically in recent years. In some communities, it's almost disappeared entirely.
In our latest workforce survey, the loss of youth workers and youth work volunteers are shocking statistics. From 2016 to 2024 we have lost 50.5% of paid youth work staff and volunteer numbers have dropped by 78%.
This isn't just a workforce crisis; it's unravelling the very infrastructure that supports young people in our communities.

Youth work is the ultimate form of preventative spend. As the research consistently shows, it reduces mental health issues, youth offending and substance misuse. It increases attainment and opens up pathways to positive post-school destinations. In financial terms, it contributes up to £2 billion per year in social return on investment in Scotland.
And yet, in an age of austerity, local and national governments often default to reactive spend. We pour resources into crisis response instead of building the infrastructure that prevents crisis in the first place.
It's a false economy. And one that punishes young people, especially those who already face barriers.

Scotland is clear in its ambition to be the best place in the world to grow up.

That ambition is not rhetorical. It's backed by policy commitments such as the UNCRC Incorporation (Scotland) Bill and the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022–2026. The Government's own delivery plan states that "upholding rights is the foundation for improving wellbeing."

Poverty is a child rights issue. It impacts the right to education, to play, to health and wellbeing. It undermines the principle of non-discrimination at the heart of the UNCRC. And with incorporation, those rights must be considered in every decision taken at local and national level. Although how this will play out in practice remains to be seen.

When youth work is cut, young people lose not just services, they lose access to environments where their voices are heard, their rights are respected, and their potential is nurtured.

Youth workers are often the first trusted adult a young person speaks to about their mental health, their family struggles, or the pressures they feel to conform or disengage. They build relationships over time. They are nimble, rooted in the community, and attuned to the lived experiences of the young people they support.

They are also deeply connected to the families behind those young people. Youth work doesn't just support individuals, it supports the wider ecosystem. It connects education with childcare, mental health, and employability. And it plays a critical role in tackling poverty-related stigma, often providing essential support (food, clothing, safety) in ways that are non-stigmatising and empowering. The evidence is overwhelming. YouthLink Scotland's evaluation of the Youth Work Education Recovery Fund shows:

- 82% of participating young people developed new skills.
- 79% experienced improved health and wellbeing.
- 78% overcame barriers to learning.
- 61% became more engaged in education.

This is not "nice to have." This is an essential public service.

With an ageing population and an uncertain economic future, we cannot afford to have a single young person left behind. They are our future workforce. They are the ones who will drive forward our vision of a fairer, greener, more equal Scotland.

Those who argue that demographic shifts justify diverting resources from young people and youth work should think hard about the long-term consequences of that logic.

As the Christie Commission warned more than a decade ago, we will pay more, financially and socially, if we don't invest in prevention now.

On the policy horizon, the Scottish Government's Independent Review of Community Learning and Development has been welcome, and we wait to see how the recommendations might enhance youth work provision across the country. Labour MSP Martin Whitfield has brought forward a member's bill, the Youth Work (Scotland) Bill, which is currently out for consultation. The proposed bill would make youth work a legal right for young people to access. Both offers an opportunity to rethink the way we deliver support for young people. and it is part of the wider conversation about the rights and needs of our young people, and how we value them.

The time for piecemeal funding and project-by-project survival is over. We need a national commitment to a youth work sector that is sustainable, professional and within every community.

The Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Plan makes a bold promise: to build a system rooted in dignity, equality and human rights. Youth work is already doing this. But its reach is hampered by inconsistent funding and short-term thinking.

We must change that.

Every young person in Scotland should have the right to access youth work as part of their education and the services that support them.

We need stable, long-term funding for a workforce that is transforming lives. And we need political courage to reallocate resources from reactive to preventative spend, because that's what long-term change requires.

As we approach the first Child Poverty Act targets, let's be honest with ourselves. If we are serious about achieving them, we cannot keep cutting the services that are most embedded in the lives of our children and young people. Now is the time to double down, not scale back. Let's invest in youth work, not as a luxury, but as a vital instrument of social justice. As Chris Birt from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation said: "Youth Work is a vital anti-poverty tool." And I will finish with this observation. When the new Scottish Parliament building opened in 2004, the words of the Canadian poet, Dennis Lee were engraved on the Canongate Wall: "Work as if you live in the early days of a better nation." Let's make that better nation real, for every young person in Scotland.

Becoming a change-maker on child poverty

means inspiring systemic change

Laura Miller is chief executive of Fife Gingerbread.

Poverty is an enormous and overwhelming challenge that belongs to all of us. At Fife Gingerbread, it would be easy to allow ourselves to become desensitised to the challenge of child poverty as our team see the effects daily. It is essential that organisations like ours continue to acknowledge and fight the injustice of poverty, and the inequalities and trauma that growing up in poverty brings. Fife Gingerbread is a grassroots charity supporting lone parents and families in need. Last year, through our projects, staff and volunteers engaged with 834 families in Fife. Poverty and trauma are the common threads connecting families we work with, and our most recent snapshot survey told us that 74% of families were surviving below low-income thresholds and over 30% had Adverse Childhood Experiences. These statistics should shock you, but the stories that accompany these stats provide us with a clear sense of purpose as an organisation.

Stories about the lives of families budgeting every penny, escaping domestic abuse, living with damp & mould in their home, struggling with their mental health and feeling judged every time they need to retell their story when they reach out for help.

Our approach through all our projects is simple:
Fife Gingerbread spend time engaging with families, building relationships, celebrating their strengths and understanding the challenges in their lives. At these early stages this includes crisis support where needed, often around food, fuel and resources. We offer support at a pace that suits each family's needs, with the wellbeing of children and young people at the heart of our approach. Progression for every family looks different. For some this might be connecting with their community, others might progress to become a volunteer with us, some will get jobs… The model creates space for families to feel empowered from the beginning of their journey. This creates autonomy for workers to ensure that we are outcomes focused rather than falling into the trap of being service led. This results in an array of creative, fun opportunities for families.

Through our work we have realised that to lift families out of poverty in a sustainable way, we cannot continue to simply deliver more services and crisis support through our projects.

All too often we are stuck in a loop of firefighting. We offer short term solutions to poverty and trauma which is focused on the immediate challenge or crisis that is ablaze in front of us and as organisations we can lose sight of the accelerants i.e. the deeper root causes. Systems that were designed with the intention of supporting families are all too often end up holding them back, and we must make sure that Fife Gingerbread is part of breaking this cycle.

We made a conscious decision to become change-makers. All too often charities like ours underestimate our impact beyond service delivery to inspire systemic change.

A member of our Board often uses a quote from Shakespeare to describe Fife Gingerbread 'though she be but little. she is fierce'.

With that quote ringing in our ears, we embarked on a Stargazing Journey last year. We reflected on where we have been, where we are now and where we would like to be in the future. Families, volunteers, staff and our Board all contributed to the Journey. This resulted in a new ambitious Strategy focused on immediate priorities, long term goals, manifesto commitments and reimagined values.

Our approach will continue to be centred around delivering high quality family support services to lone parents and families in need locally. Alongside this, we will grow our impact with a more purposeful focus on the systemic changes needed to create better todays and brighter tomorrows for lone parents and families in need.

Through our Stargazing Journey we identified our first Manifesto Commitments.

These are commitments to ourselves and the community we exist to serve, to be unapologetically courageous and amplify their voices. The five Commitments are all connected to tackling child poverty and have emerged through listening to families.

Multi Year Funding:
We know that short-term time limited support does not work for families facing multiple and complex challenges. A trauma informed approach requires the space to build relationships, and we are committed to securing and campaigning for multi-year funding to enable this. The structure of funding is part of solution to tackling child poverty.

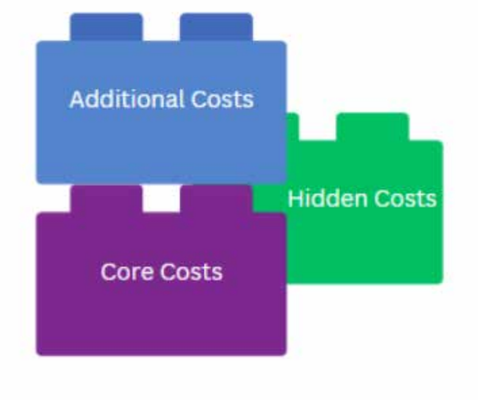
If we want to progress beyond firefighting and move towards prevention, where we can change the trajectory for children & young people, then we must invest in long term solutions grounded in outcomes. The third sector our critical to tackle child p

Housing:
Over recent years we have noticed a growing trend affecting more families we work with facing challenges connected to their homes. Last year, a survey told us that a third of our families were experiencing challenges, with the most common being damp & mould and overcrowding. Inevitably, this means that our team are spending an increasing amount of time supporting families with processes and systems connected to housing. Fife Gingerbread could be described as tertiary organisation in the housing eco-system. We are not directly a housing provider or specialist, but we do have an important role to play in this space which is often overlooked. We are committed to being a good partner organisation and recognise the policy/implementation gaps that exist.

Lone Parent Positive Workplaces
Work is an important part of the solution to tackling child poverty, and since 2013 we have delivered projects around parental employment in Fife. Through this time, we have embedded a whole family approach to the 'employability journey' with a focus on working towards good, well paid and healthy employment. Within employability we often focus on 'fixing' individuals, but we believe the solution to closing the gap requires change in the workplace. Lone parents are a key child poverty priority group, and we are on a mission through a new project to create lone parent positive workplaces throughout Scotland in partnership with Strathclyde Business School and OPFS.

Child maintenance has a critical challenge facing lone parent families, and it is overlooked as an important lever in tackling child poverty.

Transforming Child Maintenance
Child maintenance has a critical challenge facing lone parent families, and it is overlooked as an important lever in tackling child poverty. The current system encourages family-based arrangements, but where this is not possible the Child Maintenance Service should ‘step in’ to provide the support needed to ensure children have fair financial support from both parents, wherever possible. We are currently part of a national project with OPFS and IPPR Scotland to identify key policy recommendations.



Cost of the School Day
Education is critical to the future of our children and young people, but their attendance, participation and engagement in School is inevitably affected by poverty. There is a wealth of research about the cost of the school day, yet we see a postcode lottery in our communities. The understanding of poverty varies wildly across Schools, with a lack of guiding principes to ensure that every child can participate fully. There are some supports around the core costs of school such as meals and uniform.

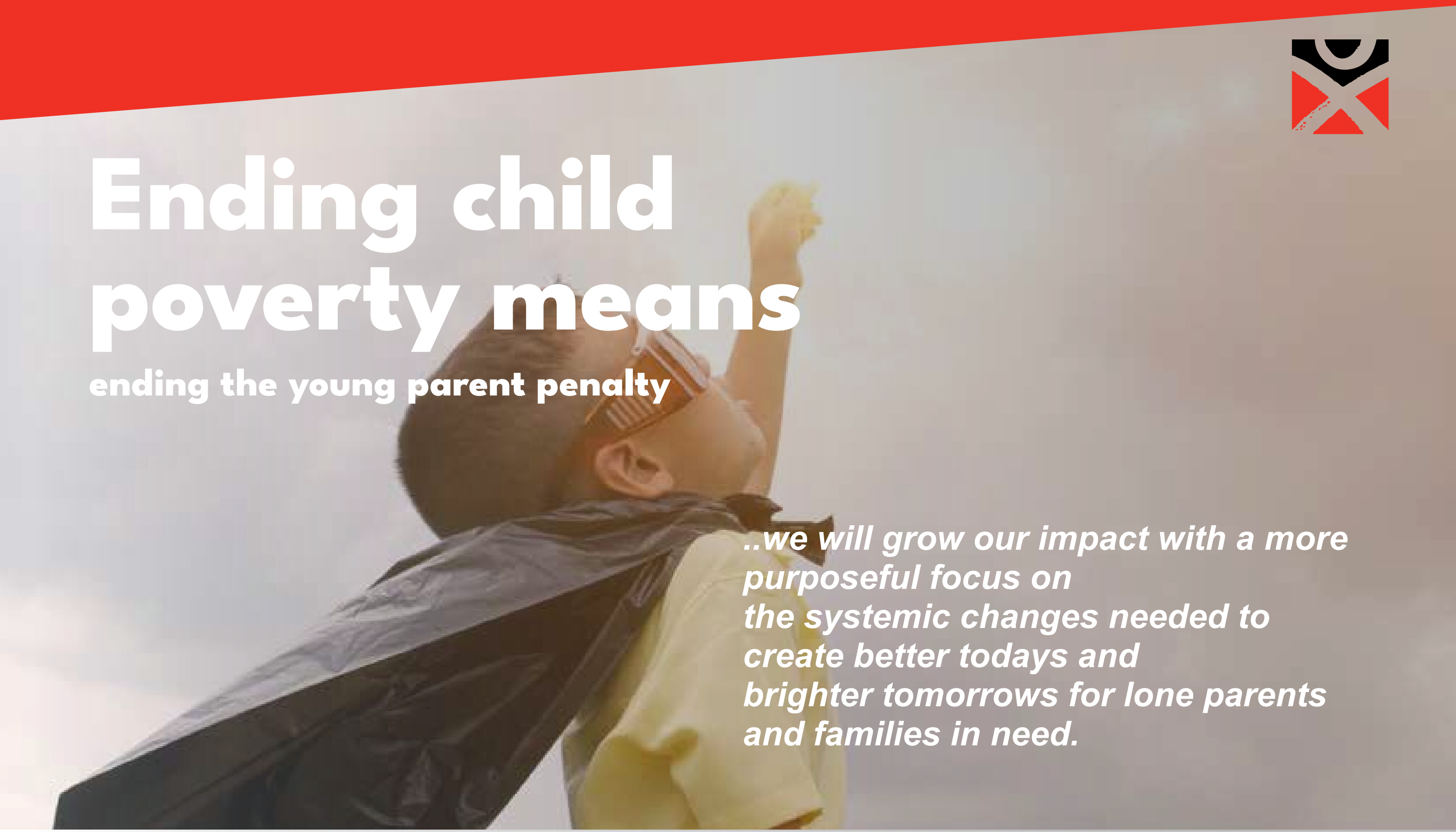
The additional costs such as school trips add pressure to households and the hidden costs that pop up are impossible to budget for.

We are excited to bring our new Strategy to life; by focusing on the systemic challenges facing families, we will have a greater impact. It is critical that we not only deliver services to meet the needs of families, but we must also shift some of our focus to transforming the systems that hold families stuck in place. We will be relentless in our pursuit of creating better todays and brighter tomorrows for lone parents and families in need. It is an exciting time for us as we might be a small(ish) grassroots charity, but we have big ambitions to be change-makers in Scotland.

You can read more about the Fife Gingerbread strategy at fifegingerbread.org.uk/stargazing-strategy

Ending child poverty means

ending the young parent penalty



..we will grow our impact with a more purposeful focus on the systemic changes needed to create better todays and brighter tomorrows for lone parents and families in need.

Leah Duncan-Karrim is policy and influencing lead at One Parent Families Scotland

As I enter my first month as Policy and Influencing Lead at One Parent Families Scotland, I have been taking some time to reflect on the work undertaken by my predecessor in recent years to raise awareness and expose the harsh reality of the Young Parent Penalty on families across Scotland, and how this story has evolved since the 'End Young Parent Poverty' campaign began in 2021.

When the campaign started out, families told us that they were struggling to make ends meet. In the wake of the pandemic, and with a rapidly emerging cost-of-living crisis, rising costs had placed additional pressures on household budgets; leading many families to make tough choices between purchasing essential items or paying their heating bills. However, for some of Scotland's poorest families, these constraints were being further exacerbated by a policy which many did not even realise existed. A policy which has since been described by OPFS as a "Young Parent Penalty".

So, what is the Young Parent Penalty, and where did it come from?

In 2013, the UK Government introduced Universal Credit as a new system of social security, replacing an array of legacy benefits such as Jobseekers' Allowance, Income Support and Employment Support Allowance and Tax Credits. While this new system did bring a range of benefits under one unified umbrella, it also added aged-based eligibility rules for parents under 25. This meant that young parents would now be entitled to a lower amount than their older counterparts when compared to the legacy system.

Now in 2025, the result of this discriminatory policy has ensured that young single parents under the age of 25 are £83.16 (20%) worse off every month than their older counterparts, with that amount rising to £130.55 for couples. Yet, despite this lower income, we know young parents do not actually have lower costs than other families. The DWP's provided rationale that young parents are more likely to live with their own parents clearly falters in the face of evidence from OPFS work with families across Scotland, which found young parents were considerably less likely than other young people to live with their own parents. This injustice of income disparity is then further deepened when considering young parent's reduced access to alternatives to social security. They may experience multiple barriers to employment such as a lack of affordable, flexible childcare, lower educational qualifications and work experience, and pregnancy and maternity discrimination.

Child poverty does not exist within a silo. With 24% of Scottish children living in poverty in 2024, the case for utilisation of all possible levers to move the dial on child poverty is a prominent and urgent one. As we enter into the first full calendar year of a new UK Government, and the last year of the current Scottish Parliament, it feels like now is the time to acknowledge that there is potential for system change. With strong cross-governmental commitments from across legislatures and Governments to tackle, or even eradicate, child poverty, it is important that we recognise that policies which drive young parents into poverty are the same ones which directly impact on their families. Estimated to be delivered at a cost of £200 million per year, an end to the Young Parent Penalty represents one significant policy change with the potential to lift an estimated 10,000 of the UK's poorest children out of poverty – and to help them to reach their full potential.

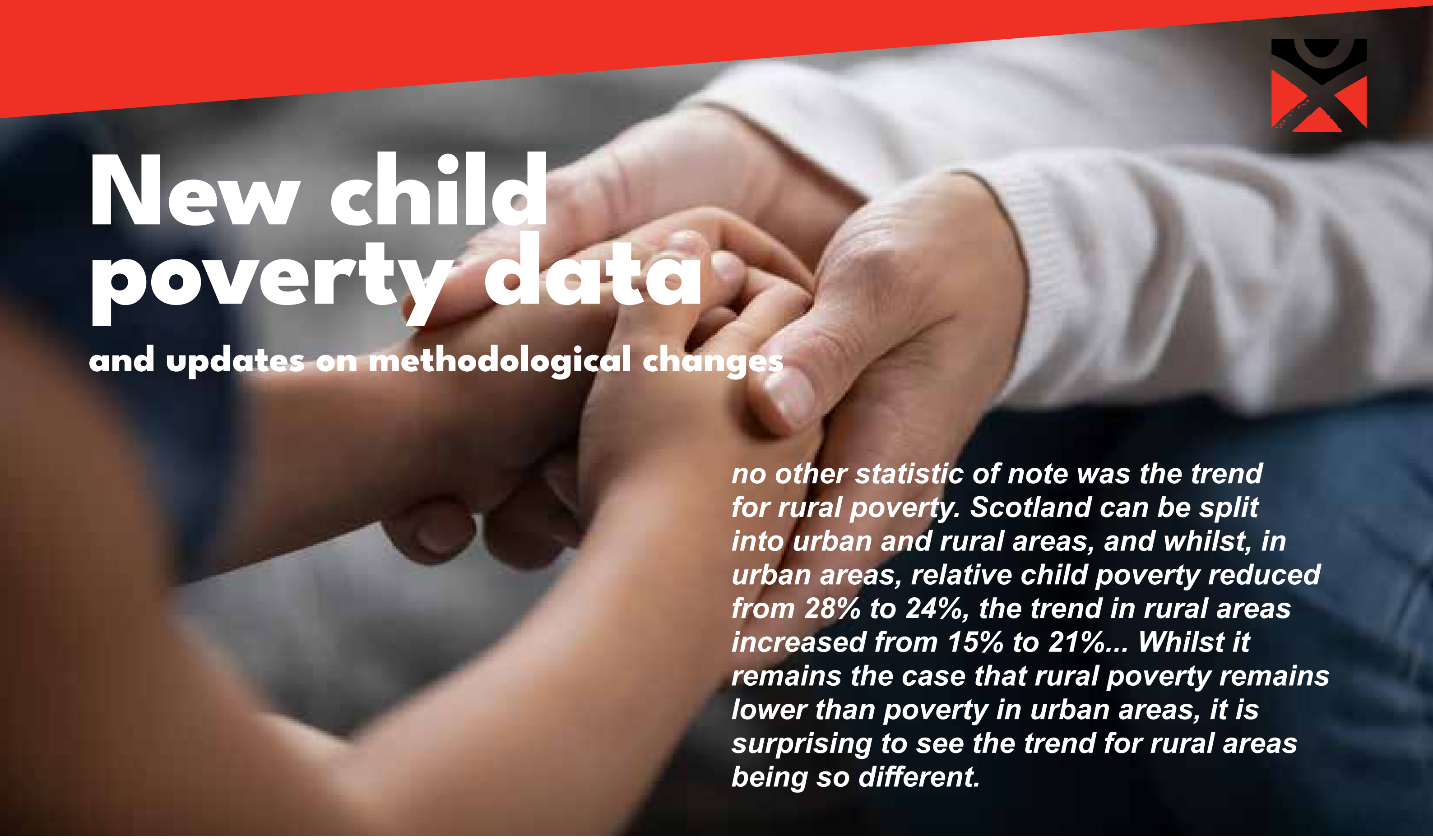
..tackling poverty for young parents is a direct way to contribute to realisation of The Promise in Scotland."

In particular, when we look at families most at risk of experiencing poverty, identified within the Scottish Government's six priority family groups for tackling child poverty, it is clear to see that young parents meet the criteria for enhanced support - with a quarter of all children with young mothers falling into three priority groups, and 11% falling into four. Additionally, while care experienced young women between the ages of 14 and 24 are not designated as a priority group, we know they are two to three more likely to give birth than their non-care experienced peers, with most doing so after they have left care. This highlights how tackling poverty for young parents is a direct way to contribute to realisation of The Promise in Scotland. Across the range of these groups, removing the young parent penalty would provide crucial financial support to some of Scotland's poorest households, ensuring targeted support reaches those who need it most.

As we look forward, the 'End Young Parent Poverty' campaign is as relevant as ever. In 2025, Scotland continues to acknowledge the need to lift children out of poverty. Yet, as they enter early adulthood, young parents are being pushed back into poverty simply because of their young age; in a cycle which has significant implications for their children and families. This needs to change and, while it is not in the power of the Scottish Government to amend at source, there are nonetheless provisions through Social Security Scotland which could provide much needed relief to families with young parents. Therefore, we are calling on the Scottish Government to provide a top-up through the Scottish Child Payment to all young parents in receipt of Universal Credit as part of its Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2026-2031. At a minimum, this payment should bring young parent families' support through social security in line with that received by parents aged 25 and over in the same circumstances. Going forward, we also need to see the Young Parent Penalty removed by the UK Government. As part of its 10-year Tackling Child Poverty Strategy, amendments should be made to Universal Credit regulations to ensure that all young families are given equity of opportunity to support them to thrive.

The implications of failing to act now are all too real for the families that we support. In their own words:

"We'll go without so we can buy our kids new shoes, feed them, whatever it takes. We will always make sure our kids are ok. But all this comes at a cost. The cost is getting into debt to pay for food and heating for ourselves and our kids. The cost is also our own mental health. Please don't discriminate against us. We are parents, all children deserve the best start in life."



New child poverty data

and updates on methodological changes

no other statistic of note was the trend for rural poverty. Scotland can be split into urban and rural areas, and whilst, in urban areas, relative child poverty reduced from 28% to 24%, the trend in rural areas increased from 15% to 21%... Whilst it remains the case that rural poverty remains lower than poverty in urban areas, it is surprising to see the trend for rural areas being so different.

Emma Congreve is co-lead of the Scottish Health Equity Research Unit (SHERU)

Families with young children are one of the population groups that SHERU are monitoring closely due to the evidenced links between child poverty and health inequalities. The Health Foundation's Independent Review of Health Inequalities in Scotland (1) listed rising inequalities in in relation to infant mortality, low birth weight, and risk of obesity amongst others as areas of particular concern and this finding has been carried forward into SHERU's workplan.

On the 27th March, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) published updated statistics on poverty for the UK (2) and the Scottish Government published its breakdown of the Scottish statistics (3). The new statistics cover the period 2023/24.

Scotland is unique in the UK in that it has a set of statutory targets for reducing child poverty. Progress towards these targets is therefore key in evidencing progress towards reducing health inequalities for that group.
The key headline from the new statistics was that Scotland had missed its interim targets on child poverty. However, there has clearly been some substantial progress towards reducing poverty which we believe is due to the Scottish Child Payment.

In SHERU's report 2024 Inequality Landscape (4) published in September 2024, we had a spotlight on the Scottish Child Payment (SCP). The SCP is a weekly payment to families with children who are eligible for UK means tested benefits (mainly Universal Credit).

The rollout of SCP began in 2021 at £10 for under-sixes, before expanding to all children under-16 and increasing in payment size to £25 a week in November 2022. In the intervening period, bridging payments were also started children over the age of 6. Our 2024 Inequality Landscape report noted concern that the payment was not impacting on the official poverty statistics, making it difficult to assess whether the payment was achieving its stated outcome of reducing child poverty. Our main concern was that we weren't seeing a divergence from the rUK child poverty trend, which we would have expected (given other parts of the UK have not rolled out similar benefits). We noted that we needed to understand why, and whether, issues with data collection were part of the problem i.e. whether the methodology was picking up fewer children on SCP than should have been the case.

Many groups, but not all, are seeing poverty falling.

Whilst overall relative child poverty levels are falling in Scotland there are some groups of children for whom rates have not fallen and rates are even rising for some. The Scottish Government has six 'priority groups' who face the highest risk of poverty. Data for 5 out of 6 of these groups was made available last week and show a mixed bag when comparing 2021-24 trend data to 2020-23 trend data.

One other statistic of note was the trend for rural poverty. Scotland can be split into urban and rural areas, and whilst, in urban areas, relative child poverty reduced from 28% to 24%, the trend in rural areas increased from 15% to 21% (the rise for all people, not just children, was 15% to 17%). Whilst it remains the case that rural poverty remains lower than poverty in urban areas, it is surprising to see the trend for rural areas being so different.

	Relative poverty rate (number of children in this group in poverty)	Trend in 2021-24 compared to 2020-23
Children in lone parent families	36%	Reducing
Children living in families with a disabled person	27%	Stable
Children living in a household where there are 3 or more children	41%	Increasing
Children living in a household where the youngest child is under the age of one	35%	Data not available. Last reported data was 2018-21 (34%)
Children living in household where one or more people from a minority ethnic group	37%	Reducing
Children living in a household where the mother is aged under 25	n/a	No data available

Table 1 – Poverty rates for Scottish Government priority families

This can also be seen when looking at a local area data (9) released by DWP on the same day which used data on incomes to provide local authority estimates on child in low income families (the definition of "low income" is the equivalent to the definition of poverty used in Scotland).

Chart 1 averages across the Scottish Government's fourfold urban rural classification (10), and shows an urban gradient: the more urban a local authority, the bigger the reduction in relative low income between 2023 and 2024.

The fact that child poverty is not uniformly falling across all groups and all parts of Scotland indicates that there are potentially other factors that are countering the Scottish Child Payment and pushing child poverty upwards. SHERU is planning on further work on this in the Summer once we have the full dataset from these statistics (typically available from UK Data Service a few months after the statistics are first released) to better understand the different factors impacting on child poverty in Scotland, and the wider UK. This knowledge should help policy makers make more effective policy decisions in their efforts to reduce child poverty further.

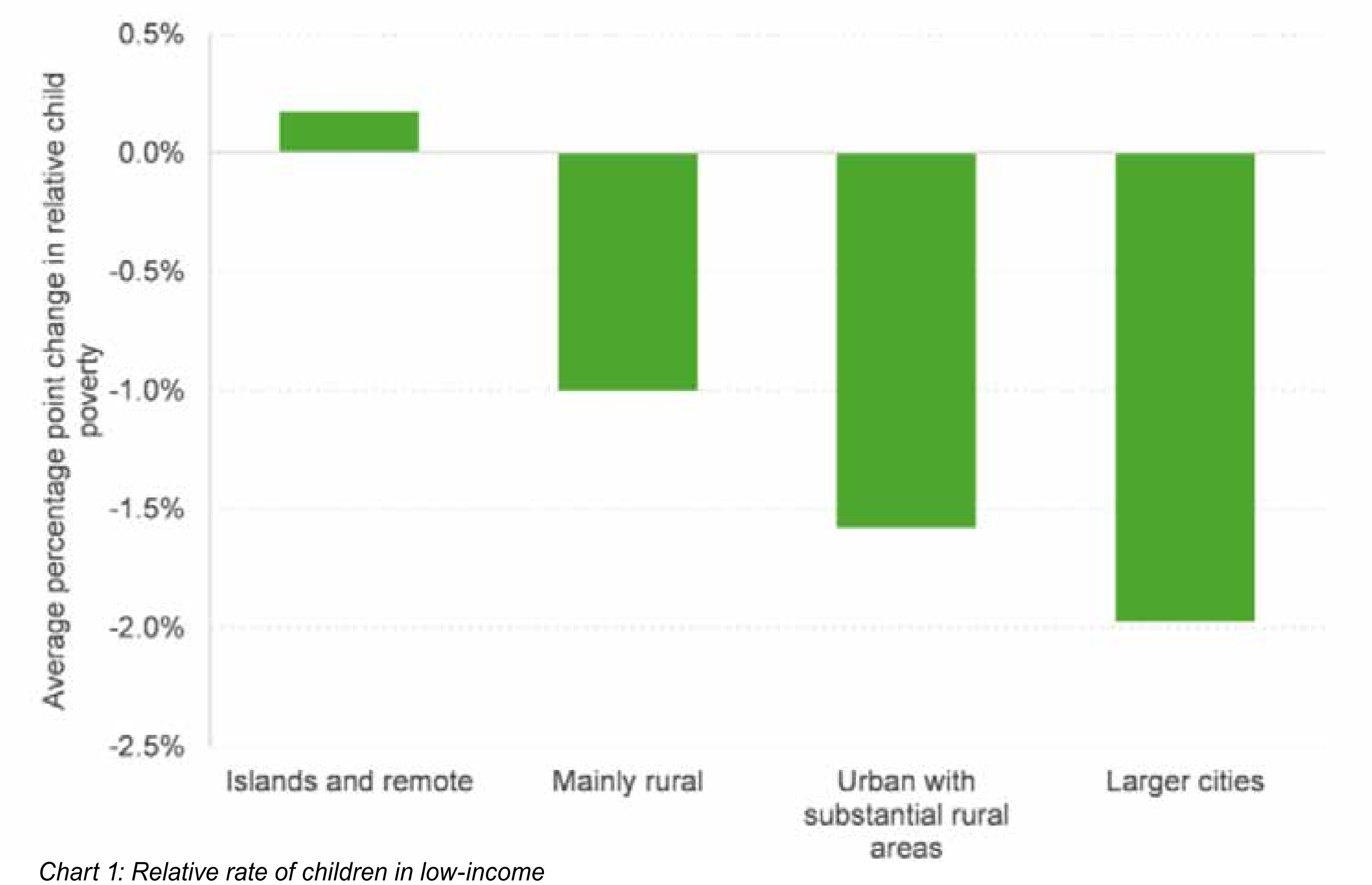
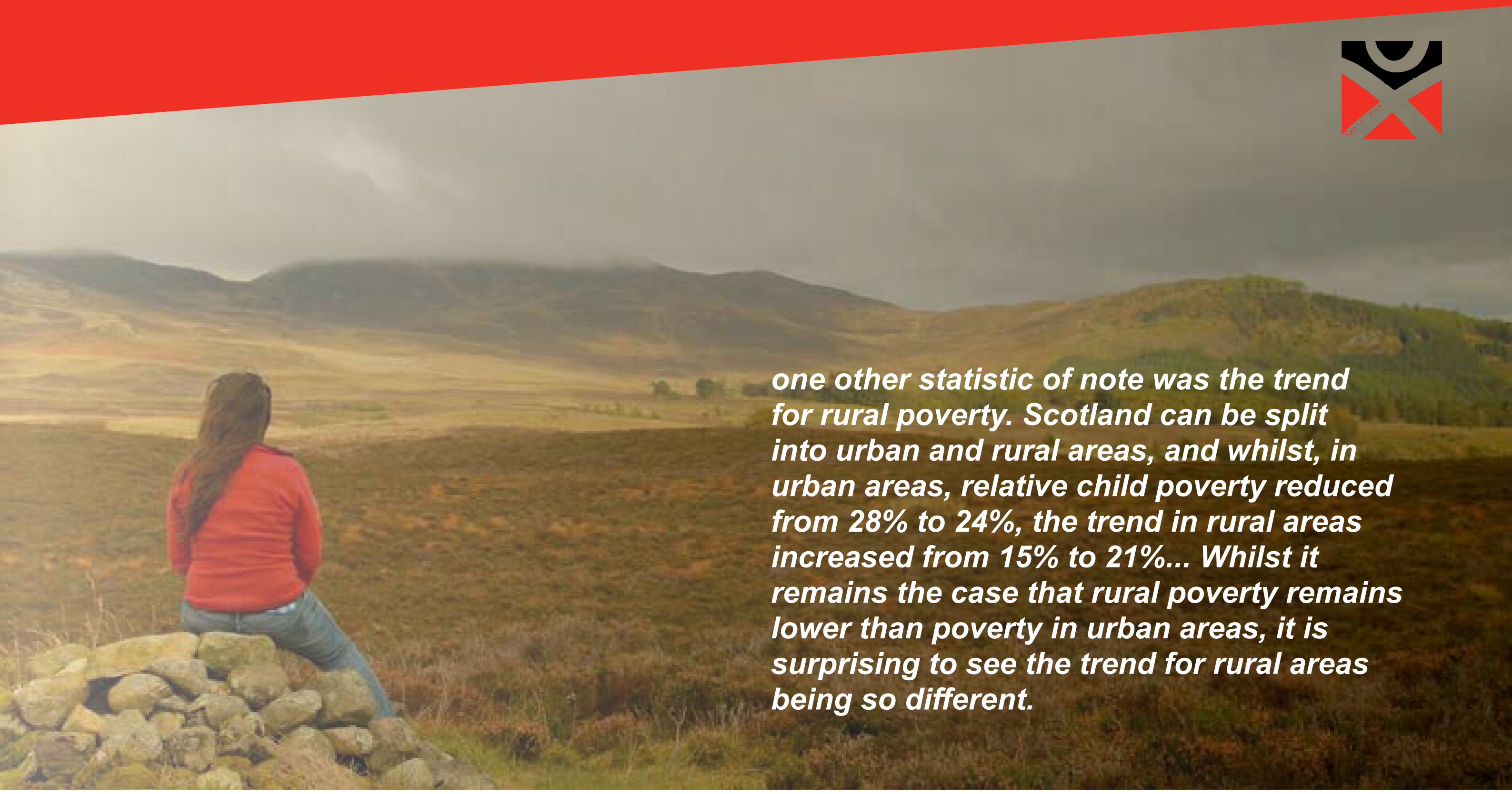


Chart 1: Relative rate of children in low-income families (child poverty) between financial year end 2023 and 2024, fourfold urban rural classification



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Enhancing the evidence base further

Our 2024 Inequality Landscape report also referenced improvement work that DWP had been undertaking in recent years to link survey records to administrative records to improve accuracy of income and poverty statistics. Last week, the DWP confirmed that they will integrate DWP benefit data into the new statistics for the 2024/25 statistics, due in March 2026. At the moment, we are unsure whether Social Security Scotland's administrative data records will also be incorporated to ensure consistency across the UK. We are also unsure whether linking of administrative data on earnings will take place at the same time. Ideally, the linking of earnings would happen at the same time as the linking of DWP benefits, and the devolved benefits administered by Social Security Scotland would also be included.

The most likely consequence of linking administrative data on benefits will be a reduction in levels of poverty. This is because lower income households are likely to have more of their earnings from benefits and the survey currently under-reports on benefit claimants – either because people don't report that they are receiving benefits or because of issues with the sample chosen. Linking to benefit records, and an additional step of grossing up benefit totals to match administrative totals, should address this issue.

However, administrative linking or earnings records could push things to the other way. The IFS reported last week that they believe that DWP's survey is underreporting earnings (11). If this is true, and administrative linkage picks up more earnings, this is likely to increase the relative poverty statistic because higher income households are more likely to have more of their income from earnings. Significant changes in how poverty is measured are on the horizon in the coming years. For those focused on child welfare, the key concern remains whether poverty is rising or falling.

These refinements will enhance our ability to assess the impact of social security policies on poverty rates—a positive step forward. However, shifts in measurement methods could lead to substantial changes in the reported number of children in poverty, creating potential confusion and a dilemma for the Scottish Government. If child poverty rates fall purely due to a methodological update, can the Scottish Government claim that it has made progress in reducing child poverty? Most would disagree, but with elections approaching, it might be difficult to resist.

Conclusion

The latest data on child poverty in Scotland presents a mixed picture. While overall child poverty rates are declining, Scotland has missed its interim targets, and progress remains uneven across different groups and regions. The Scottish Child Payment has likely played a significant role in reducing poverty, yet it is not sufficient in isolation to eradicate poverty in Scotland.

Upcoming methodological improvements and the integration of administrative data into poverty statistics could lead to shifts in reported figures, making it crucial to differentiate between real progress and statistical adjustments. It is also important that Scottish data is part of these improvement efforts.

Looking ahead, further action from the Scottish Government in the form of policy measures, particularly in relation to social security, will be needed to reach the 2030/31 child poverty targets. SHERU will continue to analyse emerging data and provide insights to support evidence-based policymaking as well as taking forward work at local and community level to ensure we can understand more about the impact of decisions taken and the lived experience of those that are at the highest risk of poverty.

SCOTLAND DEMANDS BETTER

THE MARCH FOR A BETTER SCOTLAND BEYOND THE INJUSTICE OF POVERTY

EDINBURGH - 25 OCT 2025

povertyalliance.org/SDB

the POVERTY ALLIANCE

WORKING TOGETHER TO COMBAT POVERTY

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