

Position of Employability Priority Groups in Edinburgh –

Lone Parents

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(this research project was compiled by Robbie Pye an intern with Capital City Partnership during 2010; if you require more information on this work or the work of the Job Strategy Team, please contact Capital City Partnership on 0131 270 6030)



## Lone Parents

### Definition

Defined as - a mother or father living without a spouse (and not cohabiting) with his or her never-married dependent child or children aged either under 16 or from 16 to 19 and undertaking full time education.

### Outline

Finding employment can be very difficult for lone parents. Time has to be balanced between caring for their child and working, and those with younger children may choose to look after their child full time. The times that lone parents can work may also be restricted due to school hours and childcare arrangements. This leads to a higher proportion of lone parents taking up part time work than the general population.

Over the past several years changes have been made to the benefits system for lone parents. The number of lone parents able to claim income support has been gradually reduced as eligibility based on the age of their child has been tightened. In November 2008 parents were excluded from income support when their child turned 12, in October 2009 this was lowered to 10, and in October 2010 this will be further lowered to 7. This has resulted in many lone parents moving onto JSA.

### Scope

The 2001 census found that there were **11,134** households in Edinburgh headed by a lone parent in that year, made up of 10,204 female and 930 male. This was roughly 2.4% of the population of Edinburgh, which is below the Scottish average of 5% of the population being lone parents (Scottish Household Survey, 2009). The current population of Edinburgh is estimated to be approximately 486,369, an increase of 8.4% on the 2001 census. From this very rough estimation, the current number of lone parents sits at **12,069** households.

### Employment

The national employment rate of lone parents in 2008 was 56% for women and 64% for men, meaning that in Edinburgh about 4,867 lone mothers and 363 lone fathers are not in employment. However, it is recognised that many lone parents choose to look after their children rather than work, so these figures can be misleading. The 2008 unemployment rate is 11% for lone mothers and 16% for lone fathers. So out of those lone parents currently not in work, **1,217** lone mothers and **161** lone fathers are actively seeking employment.

However, unemployment rates are higher for younger lone parents: 31% of lone mothers aged 16-24 were unemployed, and 34% of lone fathers aged 25-34 were unemployed (16-24 lone father figures were unavailable). Lone mothers with children under 5 had the lowest employment rate, at just 35% (Office for National Statistics, 2009). However, as these figures are for 2008, the actual number of lone parents seeking work is likely to be higher.

For types of employment, the 2001 census showed similar employment levels for full time and part time work, at 25.9% and 24.3%.

### **Benefits**

The most recent figure from the DWP shows **4,260** lone parents claiming benefits in Edinburgh. However, this figure excludes some lone parents as it lists only those who cite lone parent as their primary reason for claiming benefits. For example, where a lone parent is also disabled, they may be listed under the disability group instead. Furthermore, as stated above, more lone parents are being moved onto JSA. As the DWP figure previously stated only lists claimants whose primary reason for claiming benefits is being a lone parent, those on JSA are not included.

### **Overlaps**

Lack of information available concerning overlaps.

- In 2007, **1,209** lone parents presented themselves as homeless
- 1,569 (13%) come from a black or minority ethnic background
- 3,259 (27%) have a long standing health problem or disability (City of Edinburgh Council, 2008; One Parent Families Scotland, 2009; Department of Work and Pensions, 2010)

### **Barriers to Employment**

- Affordable and available childcare. Statistics show only 28% of lone parents use formal childcare.
- Debt management
- Benefits systems: including knowledge of assistance available and waiting times for payments
- Reluctance to work too many hours whilst raising a child
- Employer's attitudes towards lone parents working fewer hours (Gillespie, Mulvey and Scott, 2005)

## **Services**

**\*Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce** – Gateway to Work – This two week course is available for long term unemployed who are eligible for New Deal. It provides courses on employability skills, confidence building, CV and application form writing, interview skills and provides work placements and access to employment.

**EUS Community Learning Centre** – Surestart – Runs courses aimed at adults who missed out on education and want to increase their parenting skills. The courses cover child care and work skills, and some are SQA certified.

**One Parent Families** – Its hotline provides free advice and publications on issues to do with lone parent families – for example benefits, childcare and legal and employment rights.

**Working for Families** – Provides a one to one advisor to help disadvantaged parents into employment. It covers employment advice, help with the transition to work and guidance with childcare and available funds.

**Marks and Starts Lone Parents Return to Work Programme** – Provides training and a work placement in conjunction with Marks and Spencer for lone parents.

## **Research Issues**

- Lack of available up to date information on lone parents in Edinburgh
- Lack of information regarding overlaps with other groups