



Parenting across Scotland

Briefing paper Parenting with adults



January 2025



Introducing this briefing



Parenting across Scotland is the national membership organisation working for a Scotland where all parents and carers are valued and supported to give children the best start in life. Parenting across Scotland members support the diverse needs of families, including one parent families, families with very young children and those affected by the impact of disability, poverty, or imprisonment.

On 26th September 2024 Parenting across Scotland convened a special roundtable discussion, inviting parents and carers, members and other relevant stakeholders to explore the topic of parenting with adult children (those aged over 18 years). The conversation was instigated by PAS members, who felt it was an important, yet under-explored issue. The organisations that took part in the roundtable are listed in the **Appendix**.

This briefing provides an overview of the current evidence and policy landscape relating to parenting adults, findings from this roundtable discussion and key recommendations for how the needs of this parent group could be better met at policy and practice levels. The briefing and its recommendations are supported by the following organisations: Aberlour, Carers Trust Scotland, Contact, The Donaldson Trust, Families Outside, The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, One Parent Families Scotland, Scottish Autism and Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs.

PAS extends our grateful thanks to the organisations, parents and carers who took part in the roundtable discussion and shared their experiences.



What we know about parenting with adults

Census data on household composition tells us a little about the numbers of adults living with their parents.¹ In 2022 there were 253,800 households in Scotland containing one family with only non-dependent children. This is an increase of 9,400 or 3.8% since 2011.² There will be a variety of reasons why adults live with their parents including a range of practical and financial reasons, as well as more significant support related causes.

Some evidence about the needs and experiences parents of adults can be found in Carers Scotland's State of Caring Survey.³ There is also a wealth of qualitative evidence available in the form of case studies from organisations such as Carers Trust⁴ Families Outside⁵ and Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs.⁶

Evidence from these sources highlights that, while many adults do not need significant ongoing support from their parents, some require support throughout their adult lives. For others, new issues may emerge in adulthood that means in depth parenting support is required for a limited period of time. Situations where parenting support may be particularly important include:

- When an adult child has or develops a significant health condition or disability
- At times of personal bereavement or loss
- Employment, financial or housing difficulties
- Poor mental health, stress or addictions
- Becoming a parent or carer
- Being a victim of crime or abuse
- Being within the criminal justice system.

Providing support to their children with issues such as these can have a huge impact on parents and carers. Adults do not need to be living with their parents for this impact to be profound.

The parents and carers who took part in the PAS roundtable talked about how they and their families sometimes felt lonely, isolated, overwhelmed and stigmatised. Providing support to their adult children had impacted all parts of their life, including work, relationships, finances and mental health. They also described how their relationships with friends had changed over the years as their children's lives had become increasingly different from that of their peers.

While this evidence is powerful, we do not have an accurate picture of the number of parents in Scotland who are affected in this way. At the time of writing, PAS could find no specific research published in Scotland on the topic of parenting with adults. This needs to be addressed in order that the needs of this specific group can be better understood and supported.

¹ **Non-dependent children living with their parent(s) who are aged 19 or over, or aged 16 to 18 and not in full-time education**

² **National Records of Scotland (2024) Scotland's Census 2022 – Demography and migration. DOI**

³ **Carers Scotland (2024) The State of Caring Survey. DOI**

⁴ **Nicki's story – Carers Trust**

⁵ **The Powerful Story of a Friend of Families Outside**

⁶ **'So much has went on that it's hard to remember dates and years.' – Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs**

Recommendation 1



Parenting adults brings its own unique challenges and considerations. Research should be commissioned that identifies the number of parents providing significant support for their adult children in Scotland, the issues they experience and their support needs.

Scottish policy

The needs of parents of adults are included in a range of different Scottish policies and strategies.

National Parenting Strategy (2012)

Scotland's National Parenting Strategy defines parenting as 'anyone who is involved in raising children of any age'. It does include a focus on parenting teenagers and a recognition that more help was needed for parents with older children. However, the strategy predominantly focuses on parenting children aged under 18 years.

National Carers Strategy (2022), Carers Charter (2018) and Carers (Scotland) Act 2016

The National Carers Strategy recognises that some parents will have a caring role for their children beyond that which is typical for parents. It acknowledges that not all parents in this category will view themselves as carers; 'For example, parents of disabled children will see themselves as parents first and foremost, not necessarily as carers. Once identified, many will rightly call themselves parent-carers.' It emphasises the need to encourage more people to self-identify as unpaid carers in order for them to receive the support to which they are entitled.

The Carers (Scotland) Act enhances the rights of carers and required the production of a Carers Charter to set out these rights. Adult carers, as defined within the charter, have a right to an adult carer support plan, which outlines the nature of the care provided, the impact this has and what support is available. The local authority is responsible for this plan.

Parenting or caring?

Given that parents of adults are currently more visible in the National Carers Strategy than the National Parenting Strategy, it is important to understand whether these parents see themselves as carers. The carers organisations present at our roundtable discussion felt that parent-carers of adults were under-represented in carers centres, meaning that not all individuals in this category would be accessing the support to which they were entitled.

We acknowledged that some parents would not consider themselves as carers. Others might be caring for their adult children and their own parents at the same time. We also discussed how caring for adults can be intense, even when not living in the same household. We agreed that measuring caring responsibilities in terms of hours spent does not reflect this intensity or the complexity of some individual circumstances.

Recommendation 2



Parenting adults needs its own emphasis within national policy, whether that is within the National Carers Strategy, National Parenting Strategy or both.

Support for parents of adults



Although I feel I do have the ability to “fight” for my child’s well-being and right to adequate risk assessment and support, timewise it is like having a second job, and I have carried significant levels of extra stress over many years”

Parent participant

Parenting across Scotland members and other third sector organisations provide invaluable support to parents of adults, including helplines, support groups, grants, benefits advice and 1:1 support.

The parents involved in the PAS roundtable had all received support from the third sector organisations and were very positive about this support, calling it ‘lifesaving’ in one case. These organisations were able to provide parents with a safe space and outlet to talk about their worries and concerns without feel judged or stigmatised.

Parents had by and large found their way to these organisations themselves via web searches or social media. However, they recognised that some parents might experience barriers to accessing support in this way.

Those taking part in the roundtable discussion felt that while the support they received was invaluable, not enough parenting support was available. Scottish Autism shared that in 2023, 25% of callers who were parents of autistic adults were calling for emotional support.



Things fall apart as soon as they turn 18”

Parent participant

Parents whose children had received support from child services described the challenges they experienced transitioning into adult services and the differences in what was on offer between child and adult services. There was agreement among parents that, while things might not have been perfect with child services, the quality and availability of adult services was worse. Insufficient budgets were thought to be at least partly to blame, but parents also felt that the adult system was overly complex and difficult to navigate.

Parents highlighted that while the needs of their child might not have changed on turning 18, their entitlements sometimes had, meaning things that were previously free now had a cost attached. Differences across the UK nations were also described.

Parents felt it was deeply unfair that the type of support provided to their children seemed to be determined by age and not need. This was not just about the level of support, but also how support was provided. Parents felt that children’s services were more person centred and holistic than adult services for example.



Services are a postcode lottery”

Parent participant

Parents and carers also highlighted some significant barriers that exist particularly when trying to get help. These include lack of specialist knowledge of particular conditions in social work, changes to financial entitlements when children become adults, having to speak to multiple professionals to get an answer to a question and the inflexibility of the system to changing circumstances.

The first encounter with services was crucial; one parent talked about feeling dismissed by the GP when she spoke to them about her child's drug habits because they weren't deemed serious enough. Given how significant a problem they later became, she felt strongly that there was a missed opportunity to intervene early and possibly prevent things from getting worse. The importance of feeling listened to and respected by professionals was a key priority for parents and carers

Recommendation 3



Parents of adults should be listened to and respected by professionals and should be supported to understand and access their rights and the rights of their adult child(ren).

Recommendation 4



There must be increased emphasis on early intervention. Parents of adults should not have to wait for a crisis situation before help is available.

Parents expressed lots of frustration with statutory services. They felt that access to services varied considerably across the country and there were huge gaps in provision which parents often had to fill themselves, through providing care at home for example. They also felt that communication between services wasn't sufficient so they often had to tell their story multiple times.

But the picture wasn't entirely negative. One parent talked about a positive experience that she had with a social worker who was willing to hunt out information and help her family find answers to their questions.

Recommendation 5



More support is required for adult children and parents. Access to holistic and person-centred services should be determined by need – not age or postcode.

Recommendation 6



Systems need to get better at talking to one another. Parents should not have to repeat the same story over and over again. A key worker should be identified for each family to navigate the system for and with parents. This would take a huge weight off their shoulders.

Summary of recommendations

Based on the findings of the roundtable discussion and other available evidence, the following recommendations are made:

1. Parenting adults brings its own unique challenges and considerations. Research should be commissioned that identifies the number of parents providing significant support for adult children in Scotland, the issues they experience and their support needs.
2. Parenting adults needs its own emphasis within national policy, whether that is within the National Carers Strategy, National Parenting Strategy or both.
3. Parents of adults should be listened to and respected by professionals and should be supported to understand and access their rights and the rights of their adult child(ren).
4. There must be increased emphasis on early intervention. Parents of adults should not have to wait for a crisis situation before help is available.
5. More support is required for adult children and parents. Access to holistic and person-centred services should be determined by need - not age or postcode.
6. Systems need to get better at talking to one another. Parents should not have to repeat the same story over and over again. A key worker should be identified for each family to navigate the system for and with parents. This would take a huge weight off their shoulders.



Next steps

Over the coming months PAS and its members and partners will be sharing this briefing with decision makers. We will also seek to gather further evidence about parenting adults to help support future changes and improvements to policy and practice.

To find out more please contact:

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About Parenting across Scotland

Parenting across Scotland is the national membership organisation working for a Scotland where all parents and carers are valued and supported to give children the best start in life. In order to achieve this vision we:

- Spend time listening to parents and carers and working with them, our members and other stakeholders to understand their priorities.
- Use the evidence we gather to influence legislation and national policy
- Provide access to practitioner resources on our website, share good practice through our newsletter and run themed webinars and events.
- Develop our own test of change projects, often in partnership with others, to gather our own evidence of what works for families.

You can find out more about our work by visiting parentingacrossscotland.org

To find out more about our work on parenting and adult children or to arrange a meeting to discuss the contents of this briefing and our recommendations please contact:

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Appendix: Organisations participating in Parenting and adult children roundtable discussion

- Aberlour
- The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland
- Carers Scotland
- Carers Trust Scotland
- Contact
- The Donaldson Trust
- Families Outside
- One Parent Families Scotland
- Parenting across Scotland
- Scottish Autism
- Scottish Families Affected By Alcohol and Drugs