LONE PARENT ADVANCEMENT - A REPORT OF LOCAL ACTION RESEARCH:

Are We Nearly There Yet? – Managing Children and Work

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1.00 Commissioners of the Report

The report was commissioned by the Learning Skills Council (LSC) funded Greater Merseyside Advancement Network Prototype (GMANP), led by Voluntary Learning Organisation Learning Association with accountable body – Blackburn House Group. The GMANP is one of 10 LSC funded prototypes, working as forerunners for the Adult Advancement and Careers service which comes into being in 2010/11. All 10 prototypes are capacity-building existing local networks of support organisation and are piloting innovative methods of improving inter-referral practice between a diverse range of partner agencies. Appendix I of this report outlines the detailed aims, objectives and outputs and Appendix II the methods used.

2.00 Welfare Reform Act 2009

The Welfare Reform Act, that became law on 12 November 2009, contains reforms to the welfare and benefit system to improve support and incentives for people to move from benefits into work.

The Act:

- reforms the benefits system by abolishing Income Support and moving all claimants on to either Jobseeker’s Allowance if they are well or Employment and Support Allowance if they are sick
- aligns the contribution conditions between Employment and Support Allowance and Jobseeker’s Allowance
- introduces a regime of benefit sanctions for non-attendance at Jobcentres
- requires job search by partners of benefit claimants
- abolishes Adult Dependency Increases in Carer’s Allowance and Maternity Allowance
- introduces work-focused interviews for over-60s
• requires work-related activity in return for receipt of Employment and Support Allowance

• introduces a requirement for births to be registered jointly by both parents

• provides additional powers for the enforcement of child maintenance arrears.

http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/

Accessed 14.3.2010

From October 2010 all lone parents with children aged seven years or older must make themselves available for work and will receive Job Seekers Allowance until they are employed
3.00 Background to the Research Study

3.01 The research project followed an earlier review of relevant research and literature, also commissioned by GMANP relating to the employment of lone parents in complex affluent societies, (Petrie, Campbell, 2009). This review highlighted a number of themes emerging from research concerned with ‘welfare to work’ policies for lone parents, most of whom are women in all countries surveyed. These themes were:

- The negative impact of key transitions (such as changes in income or social status, childcare arrangements, workplaces practices etc.).
- The necessity of appropriate, available, accessible, affordable childcare of a quality acceptable to parents and their children.
- Barriers caused by the lack of formal qualifications and non-cognitive education (social and emotional) of lone parents.
- The poor physical and mental health of lone parents and their children.
- A lack of flexibility in the workplace and the disadvantages faced by lone parents in relation to promotion and income enhancement.

3.02 Following this review it was decided to undertake a modest action research project using a peer interviewing approach to uncover more detail about the views and experiences of lone mothers in one locality in Merseyside. The research team, S. Ahmed, C. Graham and B. Lance Jones are all lone parents and using a snowball sampling approach and a flexible interview guide undertook a total of 20 interviews. L. Reith, experienced in social enterprise organizations undertook a small survey of local employers to establish their policies and practices in relation to lone parents and employment. Appendix I of this report outlines details of the peer research project and Appendix II the questionnaire used for the employers survey. S. Petrie acted as consultant during this project and compiled this report from the data collected and analysed by the team.

All quotes in this report are taken from the interviews with lone parents.
4.00 Executive Summary

- **Welfare Reform Act 2009:** This Act became law on the 12 November 2009 and, among other requirements, contains a number of changes to the welfare and benefit system that affect lone parents and their children. These include the abolition of Income Support and moving all claimants onto Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) if they are well or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) if they are sick. All lone parents whose youngest child is aged seven years or older will have to claim JSA and be actively seeking work from October 2010. Although there are no proposals at present to require parents of younger children to seek work the legislation is in place to extend this requirement. There is now a regime of benefit sanctions for non-attendance at Jobcentres.

- **The Research Project:** Building on an earlier review of ‘welfare-to-work’ studies and statistics as to the profile of lone parents in Merseyside (Petrie, Campbell, 2009) a modest action research study was undertaken. A participatory methodology was adopted using peer researchers. The aim of the study was to identify subjectively the learning, employment and advancement needs and experiences of lone parents living in one area of Merseyside. A small survey was also undertaken with local employers to establish their policies and practices in relation to lone parents.

- **Findings from lone parents:** 20 in-depth interviews were undertaken and the following themes emerged as important:
  - Childcare
  - Information and advice about employment and benefits
  - Career development – barriers and pathways
  - Training and education – accessibility and suitability
  - Flexibility and inflexibility in the workplace
  - Financial pressures – earning capacity especially at times of transition in and out of the labour market and associated with housing costs
Findings from Employers Survey: Without qualifications or experience it is unlikely lone parents will be able to secure employment at higher than basic grade. Familiarity with and access to the internet is of crucial important as larger employers now use this medium as their primary means of advertising vacancies and processing applications. Some employers are not able to offer any flexibility in hours or holidays to accommodate lone parents. For those who do arrangements are usually made on a case by case basis.

Implications: Findings from this study reflect national and international research on the impact of welfare to work policies on lone parents, most of whom are women, and their children (see Petrie, Campbell, 2009). Childcare problems, combined with inflexible working hours or study programmes, low wages, lack of progression and income delays adversely affect the health and well-being of lone parents and their children.

Recommendations:

- From lone parents: Proposals were made regarding financial assistance for pre-employment and in-service training and education supported by child care, more consistent income payment regimes and cheaper childcare. A less punitive attitude towards lone parents in policies and practices was also felt to be necessary.

- From the researchers: Proposals were made regarding childcare quality, availability, choice and cost; reducing income gaps at times of employment transition; improving advice and guidance, training and education and initiating more family-friendly policies in the workplace.
5.00 Findings from Lone Parents

Following analysis of all the interviews the following themes emerged as important to all lone parents:

- Childcare – accessibility, affordability, availability, suitability
- Information and advice about employment and benefits
- Career development – barriers and pathways
- Education and training – accessibility and suitability
- Flexibility and inflexibility in the workplace
- Financial pressures – earning capacity especially at times of transition in and out of the labour market and associated with housing costs

At the core of all interviews the well-being and happiness of both child and mother were paramount in the decision making process. Whilst the lone parents were keen to better their education, financial situation and home life, they also commented on the importance of striking a balance and being there emotionally for their children when young, especially when fathers played a more distant role in the family unit:

“I know half a dozen women at the minute who put the children in the breakfast club at 8 o’clock and that’s right through until 6, and they are only 4 or 5 … I think to leave the children at that age, for ten hours a day, is wrong. I don’t think he’d want to go more than two days per week...he loves just coming home - he still has a little blanket you know. I think that sometimes children of 4 and 5 want their Mum to pick them up from school...so it’s like emotional poverty as well as financial, but the government don’t talk about poverty in terms of emotion” (C4).

“Children, just looking after your children that all I want to do. I don’t want to work. I’m a mother and a parent as-well, so I have to do what I have to do and take my kids to school so that they can have an education. Everything stops there because your child comes first” (B3).
“Are you assessing the needs of the child in all this – it seems to have been forgotten along the way, being at home with a child is so discredited, the whole system conspires against single parents” (A6).

“You are jumping from one job to another trying to better yourself...but also your family is falling apart as well...because your kids are shoved into all these care places...while you’re trying to get yourself...you know...working. It’s my child, I had this child not to be brought up and palmed off on everyone else minding it...I look at kids today and feel so sorry for them and think no wonder the kids are smashing up the city, are causing all these things because where’s the parents?...they are out at work, they’re coming in, they’re shattered...they don’t want to sit down and start playing with the kids and say how was school today, they’re exhausted” (C2).

“Some people might want their job to be a full time mother [but] if you want to have kids this is the way it’s going to be... no thought of what is best for you and your child ... your right is being taken away from you to be a mum” (A2).

“This piece of legislation, not much thought has gone into it I can imagine...we should start to utilize lone parents...lone parents are getting penalized at the moment for being lone parents...male or female...it’s really becoming common practice to look at the most vulnerable people in society and blame them...it’s lone parents that are bringing up the next generation...who knows what’s going to happen to the next generation, you’re placing them in childcare and they don’t want to go, or making women or lone parents work in jobs they don’t want to...how is that going to effect the generation and the next generation after that?” (C7).

“My own children [two young children] are a priority therefore at the moment I don’t want to work” (B4).
“I’m not unemployed I’ve got a full time job I’m a mother; regardless of what job I’ve got I’m always gonna come home to a full time job. The Government would have to take a running jump because children come first. This generation that we are raising is our future generation that will be running the country. Who is to blame when kids become unruly due to kids being forced into childcare?” (A3).

“It’s a personal choice for me, I want to bring my own children up, I want to be there when they come home from school and give them their tea and listen about their day at school, I don’t want them to bottle it all up for 6 o clock and then give them their tea and they’re tired. When your child starts secondary school you’re going into the dark nights aren’t you, you’ve got September, October, November, December, January…it’s pitch black…they’ve gone to a new school, probably sometimes with friends they don’t know…you’ve got your child dealing with that...and then they’ve got to come home to the house on their own...for me that is just not an option...I’m going to be there” (C3).

“It’s actually…I feel...destroys the family unit...in terms of structure of what we are trying to create as parents. I’m frightened of it...not just myself but of for other people too...if you have to go to work ultimately the child suffers. I feel that the needs of the child and what’s going on in the home is not taken into consideration. The quality time I spend with [daughter] has changed” (C1).

As will be seen below these considerations are embedded in all the other issues that concerned lone parents whether in employment; seeking employment or contemplating the new legislative requirements that will affect them in the future as their children grow older or if they become unemployed.

5.01 Childcare
Relying on family members for some lone parents was the only way they were able to find the childcare they needed:

“If I didn’t have the support of my mum there is no way I could do it” (A5).
“I wouldn’t have childcare, I haven’t got any parents and they do play a big part” (C4).

“An awful lot at my school the grandparents help out ... I’ve got a Mum but she’s too old, she can’t pick them up so I’m stuck really” (C5).

Advisers sometimes assumed that family members would help out:

“That’s when the Jobcentre said to me ‘why doesn’t your mum mind them?’ I said excuse me I haven’t got a mum, you know what I mean? We haven’t all got a family to say here’s my kids!” (C2).

Some felt that they couldn’t or shouldn’t have to rely on friends and family:

“The government should not expect lone parents to use family as childcare, I don’t want to take advantage of my family to look after my child” (A1).

“Not everyone can ring up a grandparent or ring up a friend you know” (B5).

“Not sure about childcare during the summer holidays as one child is in school and one in nursery. My family cannot help me out as two children would be too much to cope with” (A4).

“Its relying on other mums, it’s OK if you are doing somebody a favour, ‘can you pick them up I’m stuck somewhere’, but doing it regularly – we all help each other out when we’re stuck but ... people have got their own lives” (C3).

“I cannot ask my friend to pick up my child on a day to day basis – it’s a total insult on out friend ship” (A6).
“To get in at 9 I would have to leave at a quarter to 8 ... I’d have to leave them next door, next door would have to put them on the bus. I’m not happy with it ... I don’t like the idea of having to put them next door, they are nice enough but they are elderly people anyway, then making sure they are on the bus at 8 .. hmmm ... I’m not too keen” (C5).

For others their child did not like the the out-of-home care that was available placing extra pressure on everyone:

“I hated taking her to after school club on a Thursday...she hated going...it was too late, it was a long day...I was tired...I wanted to be able to pick her up at the normal time and do the teatime/bedtime routine” (C1).

“My child is quite shy and would not thrive in a place like that and wouldn’t cope in a place like that. It would be my worst nightmare having to put her in unsuitable childcare. If unsuitable childcare was the last resort I would give up my job to look after my child” (A3).

“They don’t want to go to after school club ... they said ‘who’d pick us up?’” (C3).

“After school club and stuff like that. The kids didn’t want to go to that. They were unhappy, which made me unhappy and I wasn’t happy going to work, because they were unhappy” (B7).

“The childcare is a huge issue for my child, he does not like breakfast club but in order to make it two days a week to work then we compromise and he’ll go” (C7).

“They do breakfast club as well but the kids don’t want to go...I thought I can’t force them in if they don’t want to go” (C2).

Childcare that met the needs of both the child and the parent was highly valued, although rare amongst the lone parents interviewed in this study:
“He goes to two full days childcare which he does enjoy immensely...it’s a different childcare provider, it’s a friend of mine that runs childcare full time...I was extremely happy because I have known them...I only put him in there because I know the person” (C7).

“What helped me to get into the job was the fact that the childcare provider was quite flexible in having to wait for Tax Credits claims to come through and stuff, because up to that point I couldn't afford to pay. I was coming from benefits and having to wait maybe four weeks for my wages and stuff. I was in no position to fund that myself for the first month or two” (B2).

Few, however, were able to find childcare that was available when working in the evening or weekends or who would accept older children:

“A lot of hairdressers want you to work Saturdays and I’m stuck there as well ‘cos I can’t work Saturdays” (C2).

“If they are teenagers how they are going to go home and let themselves in because after-school clubs don’t cater for the age of 11 and upwards” (B4).

“There’s no after school care for 12 years plus...so what’s your 12 year old supposed to do...roam the streets? Or have hundreds of kids back at your house ‘cos nobody else is there...round where I live you’ve got all kinds of people knocking on your doors, doing surveys...I don’t want them opening the door to strangers” (C3).

“Generally childminders only pick up children under eight years old” (A6).

“I am not leaving my child alone, going home alone. If I left the children home alone until I get in at 6 or 7 I could get done by social services. They don’t do after school clubs in secondary” (C6).

“Teenagers are not mature enough to be left ‘home alone’” (B5).
“I’m going to have to get a child minder for the youngest, but for my eldest there’s no child care, nowhere for her to go” (C5).

Unexpected school closures were another problem:

“That’s another problem for parents as well...what do they do in that week? [recent snowy weather] They couldn’t get to work a lot of them and they couldn’t get to school, does that mean, do you lose a week’s pay if you are a cleaner or a dinner lady” (C4).

“All these teacher training days, they’re off here, they’re off there … you know you’ve got to get the kids into these places and you’ve got to pay for that help” (C2).

Even when childcare was available it was very costly:

“Its £9.50 a session [after school club] ... £9.50 till 6.00 ... childminders are about £35 per day ... private but I think you can still get working tax credits, it’s a balancing act isn’t it?” (C4).

“The price of after school club is another issue...I went to the Head Mistress here and asked about it and said you need to lower your prices for breakfast club because I can’t afford that, she went, it’s because we get private people in to do the breakfasts, we’ve got to pay them ... places for nursery were 20 odd pounds a day... I rang round the whole of X looking for a full time nursery, all I found was Y, that does three full time days where you don’t have to pay...I rang round everywhere, I worked my backside off trying to get into work....I rang round all the nurseries...no one would take him full time, free” (C2).

“I only get childcare for out of school time because um the childcare system on working tax credits does not recognize anything under £10, so because my childcare in the morning um is the only time I use the childcare system, um, it’s less than £10 per week and I don’t qualify for that...I’d only qualify for two full days...so the breakfast bit doesn’t count so I’m really out of pocket” (C7).
Quality and safety of provision was a major concern for all the parents interviewed:

“If I have to be in work till 3/4/5 o’clock in the evening then I would want to know he was safe. I think there is a lot of shoddy childcare out there – it’s very hit and miss” (A6).

“Get rid of church halls, they are dark, children want vibrancy, colours, well trained individuals in them...most of them look about 18/19 so are probably on the lowest wage anyway. Let’s have some provision for the children, not crumbling buildings! I don’t want them just left in a room. It’s got to be quality care that they are getting, not shoddy, third rate. You wanna put them somewhere where they can be watched or supervised, not just give them £5 or whatever and a packed lunch” (C4).

“I know you have all this safety stuff and whatever and they do that check up but you never know...look at that woman at that nursery [referring to recent abuse case in Devon] sometimes like...you know your kids right, they are young, if someone says don’t say nothing...you might hide that for years.........it’s a chance you have to take” (C2).

“If your child doesn’t want to go to Art class...I wouldn’t know where they were...it’s just too young...you don’t know who they are going to meet on the way home” (C3).

“There’s no guarantee that government childcare will bring up our children in a safe and secure environment. Internet abuse, abuse in nurseries ... if that is not enough to scare single parents to stay at home I don’t know what is” (A3).

“He does go to other childcare activities and he has faced racism as well whilst he’s been there and bullying so it’s difficult...something might start off and then within a few days it goes downhill...it has to be good quality childcare. It doesn’t really matter what Ofsted says as long as they have that seal of approval, once you’ve got that stamp you could have one hundred incidents you’ll still get your Ofsted stamp...it’s because I know the person that it works for me” (C7).
5.02 Information and Advice

Lone parents recounted many instances where agencies had given advice that was unhelpful, erroneous or even withheld:

“The Jobcentre sent me for jobs I wasn’t qualified to do. It knocked my confidence. As long as they filled their caseload I was sent for unsuitable jobs. Just go here. We’ll give you the bus fare, just turn up and make a show of yourself really. They should spend time with you and find out what your jobs needs are” (A2).

“But they are basically telling me what I should be doing rather than me looking for the types of work that I want, but they are pushing me to take anything. Having a Lone Parent Adviser at the Jobcentre, that’s it basically. I don’t like how they run things at the Jobcentre. I think if I had a better one to one with a Lone Parent Adviser they could understand my needs” (B7).

“I haven’t got anything positive from my own experience to say about Lone Parent Advisers at all. I think they just like to tick the boxes, they don’t do anything practical ... I’ve only been out of work for about three to four months. I’ve got a solid history in housing and I’d like to try and find a housing job, because you guys are telling me to find a job why was I pointed to go to [retail chemist] for an interview. It was not what I wanted to do” (B2).

“When I went to the Jobcentre and put in for being like a hairdresser she didn’t tell me how much the kit was or nothing...I then applied to the college for hairdressing and they send you a thing back saying right...you’ve got a place...I had to go for an interview with the head of it and she wrote a letter back saying you’ve got the place and this is how much it cost...where am I going to get the money from?[additional £400 for hairdressers kit]” (C2).
“I’ve heard of grown women older than me sent on ridiculous courses for basic Maths and English, what use are they when you can already do basics? ...Why don’t they do something positive, something we need?” (A3).

“The Lone Parent Advisers, because my qualifications and what have you, they weren’t really any help...we didn’t even get to the stage where, um, they were looking to find jobs for me...I went and I found the job I’ve got now myself” (C6).

“When I spoke to the Lone Parent Adviser it was very much focused on answering questions and at that point, I think because my youngest was at a certain age nothing more really needed to be done. The last time I went and I mentioned this course again it was the case of ticking boxes, writing down what I was doing, but there wasn't any extra or she didn't give me any extra advice” (B6).

“I wasn’t trained in the kitchen’ [applying for job as kitchen assistant in the school]...she wouldn’t put me forward for it...she left me feeling really cheesed off” (C3).

“Jobcentre Plus was helpful until I wanted to change the job I had. They couldn’t help me as I was already employed and they don’t offer advice to the employed. They help you get a basic job but you cannot improve on that with their help” (A3).

“I did go back to the Jobcentre, when I was working to try and get a better job and to get some skills. I went to Jet and Jetplus and to be honest with you, when you are working you want to upgrade your job or you want to get more skills. It’s actually very hard when you’re working. They do help you little bit with C.V., but they don’t really want to know, unless you’re unemployed, even though I was in a quite low-paid job. When I hadn’t been working I tried to get back into work they've actually tried to really help me, but when I was working and I tried they didn't want to know” (B4).

“I have a Personal adviser but the Jobcentre say they don’t know how to help me. I’ve never seen a job on their work-based system that I’m suitable for” (A6).
“When I’ve got a degree they [Jobcentre] won’t be able to help me” (C1).

Transport and hidden costs of job-seeking caused problems:

“You need a car on some job adverts...counts me out [there are] bus fares to libraries, added expenses to check email. I don’t have a printer...computer is old...no access to internet, no landline...everything costs, my mobile is 35p per minute. I asked a friend to print five CV’s... I can’t ask her all the time. [The] financial issues with distance away from home for job are not considered. I have no money...had to scrape together to buy shoes...clothes to do voluntary work...can only get travel expenses from [voluntary]employer” (C6).

“Finance, for us to have a car and stuff. You know what I mean to go to places and find out, because it's not all right at my door and if I didn't have the internet do you know what I mean and ways to contact people that would be a hindrance” (B2).

“The majority of time it's having the extra cash [for] getting on a bus and the time to go and speak to people” (B6).

“Without a car I would not be able to work. If I didn’t drive there was no way I could do it” (A5).

“I had to be in work for 9 o'clock and my son had to be in school by five to nine and so it doesn’t take five minutes to get to work and I had to travel on bus” (B3).

When advice, childcare, employment and government enhanced income came together effectively then the lives of lone parents and their children were improved:

VIGNETTE

“I found out about a training course through a friend who told me about TNG via the Jobcentre. I gained a NVQ level 2 in business and administration. I had a positive
experience with the NVQ in the work place and was offered a job. The Jobcentre did a
benefit calculation to inform me how much I would be entitled to if I was working 16hrs
per week. I got help with a clothing grant and receive a bonus to stay in work for the first
year. I get an NHS exemption as I am on permanent medication and it would cost a lot if I
had to pay for it. When doing a benefits check I had to make sure that I would get the
prescriptions free as it would cost me too much. My employer has good policies and
supports me as I have the children. I want to go full time in the when children are older
and hope to train up within the work place as my employer will provide me with free
training. I loved going back to work, meeting other people in the same position and I’ve
got good people skills since working as I was just around children all day. We’ve had our
first family holiday now I’m working, I can treat my children. I’ve got a new lease of life. I
want the kids to look up to me and I want them to go to work full time. I would get
support from the Adviser from the Jobcentre if I had problems with work. I was quite shy
before I started work but my family noticed a change in my personality since I’ve started
working. The help that I got was good from the Jobcentre/TNG. I could never have done
voluntary work in the past due to not having child care. I wish I could have known about
that course – I done nothing for 5 years. You need to work for a company that has child
friendly policies – all employers should have them” (A4).

There were other positive experiences:

“The Lone Parent Adviser did actually contact me through my home address and did invite
me to a lone parent one day activity, I thought that was really, really useful…I went along, it
was to a children’s um, I think it was Jungleworld in the city centre where the children had a
free go at all the activities...the children were bought lunch and all you basically had to do
was sign up with the Jobcentre Plus...it was a really good thing, quite a lot of lone parents
went along. They told me of the benefits I would get if I was going to work 16 hours or
more...they did a benefit calculation which I found very useful to have” (C7).

Although sometimes the systems did not work effectively:
“[Re training grants from JET, Jobcentre] It was terrible trying to get the money off them, they left me right up to the very last day and I had to go down to the thing and give them the cheque the very day ... to go and pay for it, had to run down to pay it ... it was very stressful trying to get it” (C2).

“About three years ago I went to the Social and I done like a test to see what level I was going to go and they didn’t even get into contact with me to see what level I was. They didn’t - I lost all my confidence” (B3).

“Because I’m not computer literate, I don’t know how to turn the computer at all. That stops me because a lot of the jobs I get from the Jobcentre apply through email, well I don’t know how to do use a computer, so that stops me ...The whole computer I just don’t know how to switch one on or anything. I’m not going to lie I went to Jet and the woman said to me do you want to go on a computer course and I was so scared I said ‘Yes’, but I didn’t go I was too scared. Learning computers; that would help me a lot” (B7).

It was argued by some that better advice should be accessible especially for lone parents currently in employment or education or wanting to undertake full time education. To be confronted by these new requirements without warning was felt to be unjust:

“I wasn’t aware of the legislation at all and was pretty shocked when I was told. I think it’s disgraceful. The people that have put legislation in place should try to live as a single parent and see the difficulties they face. The Jobcentre, TV, newspapers, employers, should inform people of this type of legislation” (A5).

“If I came out of work now I am mortified that I would have to go on Job Seekers Allowance and go to the Jobcentre to sign on”(C7).

“The government should let people know what the options are out there. People don’t just want to sit around and do nothing. There should be more ads / information to let people know that there is support out there for people on their own with kids” (A4).
“Certain changes to do with income support turning in to Job Seeker’s Allowance when the child reaches 7 ... I’d have to look into how that would affect me being in education, whether or not I still be expected to look for work, whilst being in education as well” (B5).

“To me it's a worry, because with me thinking about going to university this September my son actually turns 10 in June, so am wondering on whether I would be able to continue with the course on my benefits or whether they are actually force me to re-enter the job market” (B6).

5.03 Career Development
Those lone parents with older children that had been out of the labour market for a number of years and described a lack of confidence sometimes connected with age:

“You know if you have no confidence in yourself you think ‘oh my god I can’t even work in [supermarket] ... I’m 45 you know, I'm not getting any younger. If I don’t start doing something soon I’m going to be basically unemployable, because who’s going to employ a 50-year-old?” (C2).

“I’m at the age 47, that holds you back as well ... my problem is lack of confidence” (C4).

“I think that they have to understand that a lot of parents are not confident after they have been at home for so long with their children and that we need better support. They expect us to just take any old job. A lot of us don’t have the skills” (B7).

“I’ve been out of it for like whatever twelve, no ten years, I’m not very confident going back into it” (C5).

“I’ve worked in offices, shops, I ran my own business with my husband...I am not stupid...it’s just basically getting my confidence back to get out into the world...everything has changed” (C3).
“Not everyone has the confidence to go to work. It will be hard for me to go back to work being out for a year. I would need to meet people and build confidence” (A2).

If they had no qualifications and were only able to obtain a job at minimum it was difficult to progress.

“It was slave labour. There was nowhere for me to go in it. Do I really want to do this job, this type of job? They only needed 11-1 over dinner time. I ended up in debt. I left in the end because it didn’t pay” (C1).

“Lone parents get the worst jobs. There’s no progression and it’s a competitive market” (A3).

“Most of us single parents are willing to work, I’m willing to work if it means I can pick my children up and also you need to be able to cover you rent...the wage basically needs to cover the rent...not minimum wage...you bring your children up and being offered the wage of an 18 year old!” (C3).

“The only way I would start work again and make it worth me going out and leaving my kids to have a job above the minimum wage at least” (B5).

Some felt racism was a factor in employer’s selection procedures:

“Look at all the shops ... I don’t really see in Next or Adams or anywhere really, even in Woolly’s whatever you never looked it’s mostly white people. Even Perfume shops if you look in Perfume shops and you look in Shoe Shops. I never see hardly no Black people or Chinese people or whatever to get a job. They have their own businesses. Me and her went for an interview in X for a shoe shop. I had more qualifications than her. I had a CV proving that I’ve done retail, proving that I had done Business in school, proving everything. She had no qualifications. I bought my certificates everything what I proved and because I was a different nationality she chose the white girl” (B1).
Some feared being forced into unsuitable employment:

“I don’t want to be forced into any job not suitable for my qualifications. The Government should not be forcing people into unsuitable jobs” (A1).

“I am being offered jobs by Jobcentre that are unsuitable [that] I do not want to do” (C6).

“Single parents should not have to take a menial job. There are not many opportunities for single parents” (A2).

“I have an in work calculation thing, if I was working I think I set it a 20 hours a week and I would be £20 a week better off and I just thought it is equivalent to £1 an hour. It’s not something, I mean the reason I’m doing this is that so I can get a better job that pays the bills and am better off, so if it is between sticking with this for a more few years and getting there or going to work in a shop for minimum wage, I’d rather stick with this”.

The main factor for lone parents was employment that fitted in with school hours and terms and this inevitably restricted the types of employment available:

“I need to find a job that fits in with my child and school hours. In this type of economic climate who is going to employ single parents? These people need a continuous workforce to come out of recession ... you can’t even get voluntary work” (A3).

“We want to work! Make life easier for us! I know they’ve got all this ‘well we’ll pay so much for the nursery’ and whatever but we’re always coming up against brick walls...like prices of after school clubs...like I wanna work but I want it to fit in with the school hours, thinking that the only thing I can do is dinner lady work or something to do with school because when the school is off then I’m off...there’s just too many holidays” (C2).
“I can understand the government wanting to get us out to work...for us as well in terms of self esteem...but I am sorry...you are made to feel crap if you can’t come in for overtime. If you want promotion, screw the kids...its wrong” (C6).

Lack of and the cost of childcare and transport and life transitions were also factors hampering career development:

“’Cos I’ve got to go for you know shop work, it’s basic, you know £5 or whatever it is, ’cos I can’t get out to do the better jobs at the minute travel wise. I am able to do higher ones but, you know, I just can’t get there. I don’t know if it’s worth me getting a job that low or waiting a couple of years and getting one, a good job...if it turns out I’m on basic money, maybe I’m only going to be better off by £10 per week, is it worth all the hassle of schools and stuff?” (C5).

“Internal jobs come up but I cannot take them due to child care. I would have to travel, move out of the city to take up promotion. Could not do it as would have to move children out of school – as a mum I just couldn’t do that. Work based training I miss out on as it usually overnight and based in London. I would not get help with child care from employer to go on an overnight training course The amount of money you would get if you were to get promotion doesn’t cover the amount you would have to spend on an extra days’ childcare and then you do not see your kid. I am saving up with credit union to try and get deposit for a home” (A5).

“It would cost me £50 odd quid a day to put them in a nursery round the corner from where I was, that was by X Park for the two of them...I couldn’t afford that...what is the point of me going to work earning probably less than £50 a day and I’m paying it all for the nursery” (C2).

“I didn’t go for promotions before because I had two children to look after um, that did stop me going places, there were always opportunities there but childcare was a big issue that stopped me” (C7).
“Around the time that me and the kids’ dad broke up I demoted myself. I didn’t feel up to the responsibility of my job any more it was asking too much of me at that time” (B2).

5.04 Training and Education

Many lone parents valued training and education but found barriers existed through lack of funding and childcare and inflexibility in agencies and institutions:

“I had a lack of support when trying to study in the workplace. My employer would pay for my study but would not allow day release which meant I could not do the course to do further qualifications” (A1).

“I have no Education, I left school at 15, that’s why I want to go to College, so that I can have Education for myself and children and my future [I need] childcare for the kids, making sure they are in full-time education, so that I can have my education as well” (B3).

“Education is the key to all of this in terms of my personal development. I worked to do a post grad course but the Jobcentre cannot fund Higher Education” (A6).

“I can do a further one but I’d have to pay a lot of money for that...that’s where I’m stuck, need to be in work to get the money. X Road doesn’t do it, I think I would have to go outside [the city], I think it’s [nearby town]...I would have to pay a couple of hundred pounds for the next level. Its money and the fact it’s outside [the city], I need to be here for the children; the school run” (C3).

“It just enriches your life outside the four walls, you are doing it for yourself and your future as well, I think it’s a good thing to be doing a course all the time, if possible, I used to and I’d love to get back into that again. Even the GCSE’s, you have to pay, you know the registration. I have no internet at home” (C4).
“Every Monday I would borrow money to get to college...on a Monday there was literally nothing in my fridge to make packed lunches...I don’t get paid till Tuesday. I missed out on teaching certificate and honours part of degree due to finance (fees, travel, child care). Someone was taken off my course to work in the [supermarket] because they had to get a job” (C6).

There is apparently as little flexibility in educational institutions as there is in many workplaces:

“When I was at College they didn’t make any leeway for me because I had children that I might get in late. I still got in trouble for if I was late. They didn’t understand that I had kids to get into school” (B7).

“I would like to do nursing, but the hours in university are quite long and you have to do a lot of placements and the shifts are set shift 8-8 shifts” (B4).

“There is no flexibility. The university I was in it was geared more to ... young people with no commitments” (B2).

“I asked the teacher when you do the night school could I come in the day and do those hours and she said no” (C2).

**VIGNETTE**

“I had no confidence when around people when I was 19 years old and started a course but had to give it up. As I got older I gained more confidence and moved on. I got confidence to continue in further education. I left employment to go on income support and was able to study to get place in university. Working and then going to study was hard. And then going back to work part time was even harder. The modules that I am required to do are between 5 – 7pm. When I told them of childcare issues, I was told to choose another module. What I want to know is what support systems are in place for
mature students, what funding they provide, any connections with any aftercare for the children? There is no point in attending university if your child is unwell as you can’t think about anything other than your sick child. There should be more focus on parents at university as there are more people in university now. No networks are set up for support at university. Ensure that the lecturers are equipped to support lone parents. I do not know who my personal tutor is. I’m not sure what benefit to claim or how to claim it during the transition period from graduating to starting Masters (June-Sept 2010). It will feel humiliating to sign on having just finished a degree. The University sends an occasional letter re: financial support as a parent but no other information. Where do you find the 30% of the costs to make up the total cost of childcare? Other universities appear to have better understanding of lone parents and have support mechanisms in place. There have been many times when I felt I was abandoning my child due to pressure of work at the university. I nearly gave up and dropped out for a bit but told myself to continue. I dropped a dress size due to pressure of work at university and lack of childcare. I felt exhausted and was going to be sick as a result of trying to do catch up work at university” (A3).

For some it was worthwhile although for others this was tempered by ongoing stress:

“...I wanted to do the degree because I found a degree I wanted to do...I also wanted to spend more time with my child and I really found that very, very helpful in terms of how the University worked in terms of hours and classes and in terms of support, financial support I got the full everything I could get, childcare as well, the university has a small nursery...and during the summer holidays lone parents were getting priority to apply for the childcare, it really worked very well for myself, but I know people where it hasn’t worked well for. I went on that course, I did a degree and started to enjoy life as it should be” (C7).

“It was empowering...liberating to say don’t worry about it [finance] let’s just go and do this. It’s changed me...um...I’ve realised my potential and actually can sit down and write a decent essay, I can put my mind to working structurally and do well as well. Sometimes I feel that um yes it has given me some confidence but at other times I’m just too worn out” (C1).
5.05  Flexibility in the workplace

Flexibility in the workplace that is the ability to alter working times to fit school and childcare schedules, regular hospital appointments and children’s illnesses was critical to a lone parents’ ability to remain in the workforce:

“The current employer I’ve got now has helped me quite a lot, because they give me child-friendly hours ... they will give me like 9-3 if my children are sick they are quite understanding when it’s like Christmas or Easter. They give me time off because they know I am a lone-parent it’s quite hard for me to find people to and they know I need to be with my children really, because I am the main parent. I feel like they are really sensitive to my needs. They are supportive” (B4).

“My employer doesn’t pay well but they have good benefits. I had two lots of maternity leave in a short space of time with the same employer. I work flexi time – over 4 days but I’m not aware of family friendly policies” (A5).

“When I went back to work when my son was four ...they were quite flexible with the hours and things like that, so when I say flexible I was working full time as well, so I didn’t have to be in work till 10, so that gave me chance to get him to school and work, but then I was there till 10 to 6” (B5).

“I did it because it fitted around...it was a start to the structure I needed...it was £3.60 per hour...I became in debt because of that job...put me in a more difficult situation. I needed complete flexibility...ok...to be able to choose my own hours...to be um oh...to be able to drop my daughter off at school and pick her up from school...there needs to be acknowledgement... there are going to be times when having a child whatever...I need the understanding and non-judgmental attitudes [of employers] as well” (C1).

For many lone parents there was little flexibility in their workplace:
“I work in a small company with no family friendly policies. I would not get paid if had to take time off work due to childcare. It would be difficult if had to work 9-5 without childcare support. I had to ensure the school had before and after school care and I am worried about the lack of childcare when my child reaches 12. I would like more flexible working hours in employment and believe employers should be more accommodating to lone parents” (A1).

“From an employer I don't think I have had any help being a lone parent it was very much not an issue for them if you know what I mean, if I couldn’t work certain hours or do certain things. The fact I had children made no difference to them what so ever. I would lose hours rather than them try work around me being a lone parent” (B6).

“In particular my work is night time – it would be hard to leave my child [now on maternity leave]. I would like support from employer with child care as don’t want to leave” (A2).
“Childhood illnesses come about and things like that. To be honest with you in the end I had to leave that organisation because of embarrassment of just having to be off quite a lot. It just happened to be one of those years when the kids were sick a lot. So when you look into it properly you think even though the policies and stuff are there, they treat you as a special case” (B2).

“I’ve found that, even if you are working your basic 16 hours, you do four hours a day, that’s fine in school time, but what happens in the school holidays...I want to look after my own children...just because you’re on your own, your children shouldn’t have to be farmed out to different places” (C3).

“Sometimes I'll be late because I had to put my son in school first ... Sometimes I was late ... but then they did give me the sack, because I was late for work on numerous times” (B3).

“She has a few medical problems...I’ve got to organize, she’s in hospital about every two months or so...she has no thyroid gland so she needs an awful lot of check-ups and things as well...every month...blood tests...at least half a day every eight weeks” (C5).

“[My son has] got dyslexia in him and he behaves bad. They [his school] if he was acting up they would phone me up and say would you pick [X] up. Really I’m in a tough spot any ways, how I look at it” (B1).

5.06 Finance and Housing
Times of transition, from couple relationship to lone parenthood; in and out of the labour market or into education are particularly problematic. As noted above crucial advice and information was missing but more significantly the transition from one employment status to another often led to gaps in income because of delayed communication between agencies. Debts often affected housing:
“I find it difficult to find work and I’m financially struggling. I have not been able to pay my rent for 2 months” (A6).

“One department wasn’t speaking to the other...coming off income support [it had] happened before...there was a time when the rent wasn’t being paid. The housing benefit stopped um...before the income support stopping...the gap was about six weeks” (C1).

VIGNETTE

“As long as it doesn’t affect my rent, I think I could cope, I could manage. I was living with my partner at the time but [described domestic issues] that’s why I moved out of the house. Where I’m living now it’s a flat above a shop, it’s £125 per week to live there, now I do get help with that...now next year, next January they are putting it up to £135 per week, now, that’s just ridiculous...when I moved in it didn’t even have any curtain rails up, it hasn’t got a back door, it’s above a crummy shop...I’ve got to watch what sort of job I take because I don’t want to give most of that to a landlord. I’ve been to the housing, it’s the drawback, someone told me about fair rents. I’ve been to see a housing place, it’s not X Council, and I’m on their list, they said they could house me, it’s social housing, and they could re-house me to Y or Z in about September October. [Once] I get out of the house into social housing, it’s only £60 per week for a house...I’d be settled then and I could think more clearly” (C4).

In many instances the employment offered meant a reduction in income because of the loss of other benefits:

“Even when I went to the Jobcentre, she worked out my money and I said just work it out, if I am on say £150 per week, just work it out, taking away all my stuff ... she said you’re worse off by £5. I thought that’s disgusting, you’re stuck on a lot of avenues, you can never really get yourself up, like being comfortable. [After signing on] I thought I wasn’t going to get paid then but I thought if I get no money and we’re starving I’ll go to social services and say ‘right you’re gonna have to feed my kids” (C2).
“I did go back to work, when X was four. I went back to work and I ended up in more debt than I was before, because in terms of the benefit at the time we were meant to get a full week benefit run on for housing benefit and things like that and that didn't happen. There was a mix up with rent and various things like that, so I ended up worse off” (B5).

“They’ve done a calculation and they’ve worked out I’ll be something like, it worked out at £12 better off if I worked 16 hours or so per week...that’s basing it on a minimum wage. They should pay you a wage like they pay a family man, you are the sole carer and you are getting the minimum wage. I worry about the rent because my rent is expensive, and if I wasn’t earning enough to cover rent and council tax...how am I going to pay?” (C3).
6.00 Findings from Employers’ Survey

6.01 Background

Interviews were conducted with four employers from the public and private sector (for the interview schedule see Appendix I). Two employers were selected who employed staff during unsocial hours and these were in the Care and Retail Sectors. Of the remaining two employers one was a large private/public sector employer and the other a large private sector employer (retail).

6.01 Recruitment and Selection

During the last few years the internet has been used increasingly by employers as a recruitment tool. Consequently traditional methods such as placing vacancies in local newspapers; receiving unsolicited CVs or issuing application forms on request are no longer acceptable to some organisations. Whilst this can be simply a matter of convenience, for one employer it is a deliberate policy as they do not wish to attract candidates who attend Jobcentre’s, ‘they do not provide the calibre of employee we require (private sector, retail)’.

Some online procedures require applicants to undertake a test and their applications are considered only if they are successful. If applicants reach the interview stage selection is usually made on the basis of job and person specifications with little flexibility as to prior experience or qualifications. Sometimes the selection procedures are complex and involve further testing. Consequently the only jobs available for those who are unqualified and inexperienced are low skilled minimum waged jobs with little possibility of progression. One employer operates a recruitment scheme specifically aimed at lone parents (private sector, retail) and another offers pre-employment programmes for those with little or no work experience and claiming benefit (public sector, care). This involves work experience and gaining qualifications and may lead to employment if available. They also offer a volunteer scheme.
6.02 Flexibility in the workplace

Most employers did not specifically identify ‘lone parents’ within the workplace for fear of being discriminatory although one recognised all employees with ‘caring’ responsibilities which included sick and elderly adult family members. Most employers were not aware of the Welfare Reform Act 2009 or the implications this had for lone parents with children aged seven years or older. Some employment contracts were rigid in that the hours of employment were part of the job offer and couldn’t be changed. Other situations were more flexible albeit on a case by case basis and allowed for the rearrangement of hours to maintain income when children were sick. The most flexible arrangements involved flexitime and splitting annual leave to cover half term and so on although this had to be planned in advance. Some employers felt lone parents should not be treated differently as their policy was the ‘everyone is treated on an individual basis (private sector, retail). One employer is now ‘bench-marking’ family friendly policies to become more businesslike which involves extending opening hours until 7 p.m. in some situations (public/private, transport).

6.03 Career Progression

Once employed at a higher than basic grade there were a range of in-service opportunities designed to support career progression. Continuing Professional Development courses were common and this sometimes involved in-house competency-based tests leading to in-house NVQ-type qualifications. Some in-service courses were residential involving overnight stays away from home. The opportunity to acquire Maths and English external qualifications is also available from some employers and one offers a ‘buddy system’ for new entrants who only receive trainee wages until accreditation.

6.04 Implications for Lone Parents

It seems that lone parents, and any other type of Jobseeker, must have regular access to the internet. Even though internet facilities are available at UK Online centres, within community based facilities and at local libraries, these are not necessarily accessible to lone parents either geographically or free at the times they are without children. Few have
crèche or childcare facilities onsite and small, and even older children, are unlikely to allow their parent uninterrupted time for job searches. There is no guarantee that a vacancy with suitable or flexible hours will be available on their first visit, and may require regular if not daily visits to the various websites before they even find something for which they can apply. There is then the requirement to be IT literate and familiar with the internet. For individuals with little job experience or poor educational levels, this is now an extra barrier to employment for which the schooling of older adults did not prepare them. Due to the nature of recruitment methods it is important that lone parents have at least basic IT skills, and regular access to the internet. Although some recruitment procedures seemed to focus more on motivation and judgement than educational attainment many of these skills are also learned and are not inherent. A lack of confidence could undermine performance at interview and prove restrictive to those with limited experience of paid work outside the home.

Because of recruitment practices and the small number of entry roles, which in turn have very limited progression possibilities, most employment opportunities only seem accessible to lone parents who have previous and recent employment experience and possibly qualifications. Pre-employment training or work experience is also apparently positively regarded by employers. If the entry level role into the organisation is an unskilled one, then it is likely that there will be little opportunity for progression although if training is integral to the job role, then progression is more likely. Even if a lone parent is able to find a contract to suit them, their circumstances may not remain the same and few employers surveyed would be able to accommodate any change in needs. This is particularly important, however, for employees who are in transition from couple relationships to lone parenthood. There are some routes offered by employers, such as voluntary work, that may lead to employment within the organisation or if not may enhance employment opportunities elsewhere. Nevertheless voluntary activities still present lone parents with practical issues of childcare. For some employers financial inducements for several months to subsidise initial training, would make employing lone parents more commercially viable.
Although some employers satisfy themselves that their family friendly policies are sufficient to meet the needs of lone parents, it may be that potential talent is being missed or directed towards low-paid, unskilled work. With more support and flexibility in the workplace, many lone parents would prove to be long-term and valued employees benefitting in turn their families.
7.00 Summary

The findings from this study reflect national and international research on the impact of welfare to work policies on lone parents most of whom are women, and their children (see Petrie, Campbell, 2009). Lone parents want to work in order to better the material lives of their children but do not wish to do this at the expense of their children’s well-being. Lone parents entering the labour market face the following barriers which have led, in some instances, to them leaving employment:

Childcare

The lack of suitable childcare at the times and in the places needed is a major barrier to employment, employment sustainability and career development. Lone parents are not prepared to leave their children in provision they find unsuitable. Ofsted approval means very little to most parents and they rely on personal recommendation, their own judgement and their child’s views. The lack of choice for children is a particular issue especially for those older children expected to attend ‘after school’ clubs. Many children did not like these facilities and did not want to attend. For children over eight years old there was no other choice as most childminders would not accept them. For children over eleven years old some ‘after school’ clubs would not accept them either. Lone parents were unwilling to allow children below late teenage years to stay ‘home alone.’ They pointed out that this was the very age group that were identified as being vulnerable to criminal activity without adequate supervision. Furthermore they feared for the safety of their young teenagers left to their own devices for many hours. The cost of childcare was also burdensome. There were some parents who did not receive financial assistance because they fell outside regulations, were not fully aware of benefits or who were moving from one employment status to another leading to substantial delays in income. Many lone parents only managed with the support of family or ad-hoc arrangements with friends. Those without family assistance were disadvantaged.
Information and advice

Information and advice from all agencies was generally regarded as inadequate, insufficient, inappropriate or ill-informed. Many lone parents feared, or had experienced, pressure to take up jobs they felt were unsuitable. Some felt they were sent for unsuitable jobs simply to ensure quotas were filled. Those who had a particular career pathway in mind received little help. Lone parents returning to employment after a number of years working in the home referred to a lack of confidence and an awareness of being out-of-date especially in relation to computer technology. Many also identified this lack of skill as a barrier to applying for some jobs as many employers now use online recruitment procedures. When advice, childcare, employment and government enhanced income came together effectively then the benefits to the whole family were clear. Enhancements to income, however, are time limited and longer term financial benefits may reduce.

Career Development

Lone parents are ambitious and wish to progress in their chosen employment not only for financial reasons but as positive role models for their children. Childcare was again a major barrier. Part-time employment, the inability to do overtime or attend residential in-service training precluded promotion. Perhaps the greatest difficulty for those entering employment after working in the home for some years was that the only jobs they were offered were unskilled and minimum waged from which progression was not possible.

Education

The thirst for education at all levels was apparent. Sometimes the training or education offered was inappropriate because it was too basic or, on the other hand too demanding. Matching of need to educational opportunities was not apparent. Those lone parents who wanted to study full-time at undergraduate level experienced similar problems to lone parents in employment. These related to financial pressures, lack of suitable childcare and inflexibility in relation to working hours. Training opportunities and work-based qualifying courses were also often out of reach for financial or childcare reasons.
**Flexibility and Inflexibility in the workplace**

Even when lone parents were able to find suitable and affordable child care there were other responsibilities that affected their work schedules. Schools, for example, often had teacher training days or closures for other reasons such as bad weather. Children suffered short-term illnesses or required regular hospital appointment if they were living with an ongoing condition. Few employees were able to respond to their children’s need easily. Some employers allowed a measure of flexibility at the expense of income; in other situations lone parents felt exposed as a ‘special case’ and felt guilty for being given a privilege rather than accessing a right. In other situations there was no flexibility and the employees were sacked if they chose their child’s needs above their employment contract.

**Financial Pressures**

The loss of income caused by moving to minimum wage employment, incurring additional transport and childcare costs and losing other benefits such as Housing Benefit caused financial pressure. Commonly there was an income gap when lone parents moved into or out of employment as a result of the different payment regimes to which they were subject. These gaps and delays in income caused acute hardship and acted as a disincentive to lone parents taking up temporary or short-term employment.

**Implications**

The barriers that face lone parents are crucially centred around childcare that is rarely available for the times and ages required and is extremely costly – entering the workforce can mean a reduced income not only from loss of benefits but from increased childcare and travel costs. Childcare problems combined with inflexible working hours or study programmes, low wages, lack of progression and income delays affect the health of lone parents and their children:

“When, like, my son was three ... I had post-natal depression. I think it carried on. I didn't realise I had it I had quite bad depression. I got signed off work for six months, so that did stop me from working for a quite a while” (B4).
“I manage my depression, I do want to work...proving I am looking for work is exhausting, not being on the net. Kids sick... you’re sick...you’ve got to keep up with the work...no Dad at home...no aunties or cousins they could go to...literally I was on my own with the kids. [My son] has learning difficulties...I have to give him extra support at home...it’s a strain on all of us” (C6).

“[There are] obesity issues as children are being fed packed lunches and snacks during childcare and not at home having balanced meals with family. A child’s mental and physiological health are more important” (A3).

“It’s tiring...to the point of complete exhaustion at times...and tears...like I’ve had enough...you’ve got to keep yourself together whilst you’re doing that” (C1).
8.00 Recommendations

Recommendations from Lone Parents Interviewed

✓ Government financial support to organisations to train lone parents in the workplace
✓ Training courses whilst on maternity leave to prepare for re-entry into work with child care on-site
✓ Courses that are child friendly, especially courses with two days a week work training so you get a taste of that job and training as well
✓ Jobs with qualifying training
✓ Average school-term only wages over 12 months so lone parents don’t keep coming in and out of the benefits system creating gaps without income.
✓ After school clubs should be free or at least cheaper ... get the poor out of poverty
✓ Policies should stop:
  ❖ trying to fit single parents into the way it is – change it
  ❖ punishing people who are raising next generation
  ❖ the system focussing on blaming mothers

Recommendations from Researchers

✓ Childcare: Improve Quality, Availability, Choice, reduce Cost
✓ Benefits: Ensure lone parents are not subject to income gaps when moving from the benefit system into employment or from work to Job Seekers Allowance
✓ Family friendly policies: National, local and employer policies should be child friendly and parent friendly - flexible around lone parents’ needs BUT most importantly around children’s needs.
✓ Improve advice from all agencies and for lone parents not yet in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance: There is a lack of professional development & guidance and a lack of good advice.
✓ Training/ Education: Training and education courses should be flexible around school hours and holidays. Financial help should be available for lone parents undertaking postgraduate study; fulltime qualifying training programmes or qualifying training whilst in employments.
Appendix I - Methodology: Lone Parent Interviews

Peer Research Project

A participatory methodology was chosen for this local action research study. Participatory research is a philosophical standpoint rather than a separate methodology (Arnstein, 1969). It reflects the desire of researchers to be ‘interactive’ rather than ‘extractive’ thus giving more power to participants (Bennett, Roberts 2004). The Department of Health (DoH) defines research as ‘work designed to provide new knowledge, whose findings are potentially of value to all, that is, generalisable (cited in Kirby 2004:6).’ It has been argued that since participatory research generates local and specific knowledge the application of findings elsewhere may be limited however there is some evidence to suggest that involving adults in research about issues of which they have personal experience benefits the study as a whole as well as those involved. The intention underpinning this method is not to seek objectivity but to understand subjectively. Although no individual’s experiences are exactly the same as another person’s, common themes and perspectives generate a detailed understanding of shared social phenomena. Consequently knowledge gained from participatory research in specific locations is generalisable and findings can be extrapolated to other settings and communities (Bennett, Roberts, 2004; Henley 2005; Beresford and Hoban 2006).

Recruitment of researchers and interviewees

Information about the project and an invitation to lone parents to participate as researchers was disseminated through third sector and wider networks. Planning and preparation meetings were then held with three researchers interested and available to undertake this work. Snowball sampling was used to identify interviewees.

Profile of interviewees

A total of 20 interviews were carried out all with female lone parents. Ages ranged from 25 to 47. Those interviewed had between one and three dependent children in their care with the youngest child’s age ranging from a few months old to 10 years. Some lone parents
were employed, some were unemployed, one was on maternity leave and two were in full-time education. Interviewees live in five different wards in Liverpool.

**Blackburne House Group Ethnicity Self Identification Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>White British, Irish, Other, please specify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>White &amp; Black Caribbean, White &amp; Black African, White &amp; Asian, Other, please specify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or Black British</td>
<td>Black Caribbean, Black African, Other, please specify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British</td>
<td>Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Other, please specify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese or other ethnic group</td>
<td>Chinese, Other please specify</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lone parents identified themselves as White British, Maori, Black British, Arab, African European, White Asian, White and Black Caribbean, British White Indian and White Asian.
Interviews tools

Tape-recorders were provided and the interview tools below were developed with the researchers. It was agreed that the tools were simply aids and the intention of the researcher was to initiate and develop a guided conversation.

**Consent Form**

First of all I would like to thank you for agreeing to help us in this important research project.

You will be actively involved in collecting information to discover the needs of lone parents and your findings will then be included in a larger report which will include an examination of additional pieces of research, all relating to lone parents, as well as our findings from talking to employers about their experiences of employing and developing lone parents.

The information you give us will be treated as confidential, and we will *not* share your information or details with any other agency, for example Jobcentre Plus or your local authority (council).

Although we have asked you for your personal details, they will not be used in the research, and you will only be referred to by a reference number. Therefore you may speak freely without having anything you say associated with your name.

If you feel unhappy at any time, you are free to leave the project and take your details with you. You do not have to give a reason to leave the project.

Your discussion with me will be taped, so that I can concentrate on what you say, rather than having to make notes. You will be referred to by a reference number rather than by name to make sure that your conversation is kept confidential/anonymous.

*Do you have any questions?*

*Please read the consent form and we can both sign it.*
Schedule of Questions

ICE BREAKERS

How many children do you have? What are their ages?
At what age did you become a lone parent?
Are you working at the moment? What does your job involve?
Are you doing any learning at the moment? What are you studying? What is your highest qualification that you have gained?
Can you tell us a bit about your work/learning experience and history?

NOTES & QUOTES

NEW LEGISLATION

Are you aware of the changes that are happening to income support?
How, if at all, will the changes to income support affect you?

NOTES & QUOTES
## FINDING OUT ABOUT OPPORTUNITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT HAS HELPED YOU?</th>
<th>WHAT HAS STOPPED YOU?</th>
<th>WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where do you currently find out about work and learning opportunities? How helpful has this been?</td>
<td>What, if anything, stops you from finding out about opportunities? If you know where to go to find out about learning and work opportunities, but have never been, what are the reasons for this?</td>
<td>What support would be helpful in finding out about opportunities?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## NOTES & QUOTES


## GETTING A JOB / STARTING A COURSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT HAS HELPED YOU?</th>
<th>WHAT HAS STOPPED YOU?</th>
<th>WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has there been any government support, (e.g. working tax credits, lone parent advisors), that has helped you get a job or start a course?</td>
<td>Can you tell us about any circumstances that have stopped you from getting a job or starting a course?</td>
<td>What support would help you to get a job or start a course?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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### STAYING IN WORK OR TRAINING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT HAS HELPED YOU?</th>
<th>WHAT HAS STOPPED YOU?</th>
<th>WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can you tell us about a time when you have worked for an employer who has policies and procedures that have helped you as a lone parent? Or Can you tell us about a time when you have studied for course where there have been policies and procedures that have helped you as a lone parent?</td>
<td>Have you ever missed out on any work or learning opportunities? What were the reasons for this? Can you tell us of a time as a lone parent, you have felt unable to continue in employment or with a course?</td>
<td>What support would help you stay in work or learning?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT HAS HELPED YOU?</th>
<th>WHAT HAS STOPPED YOU?</th>
<th>WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How, if at all, has being in work or on a course affected your life?</td>
<td>Has there ever been a time when something has happened that has stopped you from going for a promotion or going on a higher level course?</td>
<td>If you had a hot line to the government what would you like to say to them about supporting lone parents?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How, if at all, has being in work or learning affected your confidence?</td>
<td></td>
<td>If you had the opportunity to speak to a group of employers what would you like to say to them about supporting lone parents?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What support do you need in order to progress in work or learning?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### NOTES & QUOTES

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### Data collection and analysis

Researchers, with consent, taped the interviews and made contemporaneous notes. Later they scanned the tapes and made further notes identifying emerging issues in each interview. Subsequently all the researchers came together with the consultant for a day and identified issues emerging across their own interviews and then across all interviews. Six themes were identified for further exploration in the data collected and draft reports written and shared with all involved until the final report was completed. Interviews are anonymised by letter (referring to the interviewer) and number (referring to the interviewee).
## Appendix II - Employer Semi-Structured Questionnaire

### Lone Parent Research – Employer Research Form

**CONFIDENTIAL**

The information contained within this form will be solely used for research into the needs of lone parents, conducted by VOLA and Liverpool University for the Greater Merseyside Adult Advancement Network prototype

### General Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Org Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Postcode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>Job Role</th>
<th>Tel</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Organisation Type

*Please tick as appropriate*

- [ ] Public
- [ ] Private
- [ ] Third Sector
- [ ] Other *(please specify)*
- [ ] Large
- [ ] Medium
- [ ] Small

### Employees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Employees in total org</th>
<th>No of Lone Parents employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Employees at this location</th>
<th>Family Friendly policies</th>
<th>Y / N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Flexible working arrangements

Ref No. (office use only)
### Recruitment
Where does the organisation advertise its vacancies?
- □ Jobcentre
- □ Internet
- □ Local Papers
- □ Other (please specify)

### Recruitment Procedures

### New Legislation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the organisation aware of the new legislation?</td>
<td>Y / N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any adjustments made by organisation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on business/ community?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Training
Access to training for lone parents (*some of whom may have initially poor skill levels*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial training</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPD Training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Employer experiences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Issues**

Relating to the employment of lone parents that perhaps need help from government
Appendix III: References

http://www.partnerships.org.uk/part/arn.htm
Accessed 29.7.06.


Petrie, S., Campbell, P., (2009), Lone Parent Advancement – A Greater Merseyside Profile: a contextual report supporting further, local action research, University of Liverpool: Liverpool.


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