

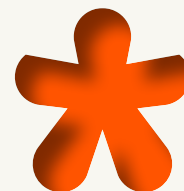
Gingerbread*

Our impact in 2022/23





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Welcome from CEO

Life for the UK's 1.8 million single parents in 2022 has never been harder.¹

Even before the pandemic, life was extremely tough for these families. They were by far the poorest amongst all households, no matter how you measure poverty.² The pandemic pushed them further into financial hardship and the current cost of living crisis is making things even worse.

Gingerbread has been on the frontline supporting single parents and fighting for their rights for over 100 years. But there is still so much more we need to do. Every day we hear from single parents who are struggling to feed their families, pay their bills and find flexible work to support themselves and their children.

Our ambition is to be the first port of call for all single parents, to help them support their families and themselves. We aim to provide a range of services – whether alone or in partnership – across the two areas where single parents tell us they need it the most – their finances, and their mental health and wellbeing.

Our work has a huge immediate impact. But we are determined to break the cycle of disadvantage which causes so many single parents to struggle.

That's why in 2022 we launched a **new strategy**, with a renewed focus on our support and campaigning work to address the causes of the issues single parents are facing today. But we recognise that we can't do this immediately: this is a long-term vision.

That's why the first year of our strategy has involved making shifts in the way we work as well as investing in infrastructure and change processes.

We've laid the foundations for success over the next decade while continuing to provide support for those single parents who most need it through our advice services.

But there's still so much more we need to do to realise our vision of living in a world where all single parents and their children don't just survive, but thrive.

We look forward to working with you to achieve this.

Victoria Benson

Gingerbread CEO





Ema's Story*

Ema has run our north London support group for single parent families ever since her son Haze was 3 months old. Haze is now 8, and Ema has been connecting and supporting single parents throughout that time. She's heard first-hand about the challenges they face, signposted to local sources of help and built a sense of solidarity through meetups. She even organises a Christmas party – arranging donations from local firms so that the children in her group, "All have a gift, even if their parent is struggling."

But Ema is finding it difficult to manage the cost of living crisis for herself and Haze. During Covid, she delivered food bank parcels to local families. But as prices rose, her part-time work changed and her childcare increased, she found herself as a foodbank user and desperate to find warm, free places where she and Haze can spend time. Anything, so that they don't have to turn their heating on.

She told us:

"Having volunteered for food banks during Covid and then finding myself using one made me very conscious of our financial vulnerability. Since the summer I have been paying as much as possible towards paying for our heating in the winter. Haze and I can go to our local library after school and to museums and galleries at the weekends. Anything we can do to minimise the time we spend at home.

By running the north London Gingerbread group, I get to hear first-hand about the things that are worrying single parents in my community. It is, increasingly, money. The difficulties in being able to pay for the basics and things like a school uniform.

Most of the people in my group did not choose to be a single parent. They are going through the brutal experience of their relationship breaking up while unexpectedly finding themselves bringing up their children on their own. To do that while the costs of all the essentials of life are spiralling out of control is terrifying.

Some of our members are facing impossible situations. One single mum lost her house recently and had to be rehoused with her children. Haze has asked me if that might happen to us.

When you are solely responsible for bringing up your child then all the financial and emotional impacts of raising your family are yours. I would be lost without the solidarity of my Gingerbread group."

"I would be lost without the solidarity of my Gingerbread group"





Vikas' Story *

"Lots of relationships broke down in Covid. Sadly, mine was one of them. Now I am a single dad to my daughter Kiara most of the time. We are close. I've always been a very hands-on dad from when she was first born.

But financially, it is really difficult. When my relationship broke up, I felt it was important that Kiara could stay in her family home. There had already been so much upset and instability. It meant buying my wife out of her share of our flat.

I asked my parents who live in India for help. They dug deep and, between us, we just managed it. I'm so grateful. They have been amazing but I can't ask them again for money. I've worked hard all my adult life. Now, all that feels at risk. Everything keeps going up – food, heating, childcare. I understand why After School Club has had to put the fees up but, without paying for childcare, I can't work. I have had to take out a bank loan to pay our bills.

I don't want Kiara to worry. Her life has already been turned upside down. I'm keeping her away from the news to try and protect her. And I certainly don't tell her that I'm so stressed about paying our bills and keeping the family flat. None of this is her fault.

Being able to meet other children living in single parent families through Gingerbread has helped her and it has been a lifeline for me. I don't know any other single dads at work or among my friends. I felt completely isolated and alone when my relationship first broke down.

But being connected to other single parents who know what it is like to feel like this and calling on Gingerbread's expert advice has got me through.

**"Calling on
Gingerbread's expert
advice has got me
through"**



Hayley's Story *

My single parent journey began when Buzz was about 3 months old. I'd realised I was in an abusive relationship, and without my partner knowing, I contacted a domestic abuse helpline and moved back in with my dad.

It was a challenging time – thank goodness my dad was there. It felt like every week I had the police round, and in between times I had to care for Buzz. I took out a non-molestation order which then got changed to a restraining order, but it was breached so many times. Lockdown in some ways gave us some breathing space, but it also gave him more temptation because he knew exactly where I was.

Dealing with the police and family courts is really challenging. People just see a small section of your picture, not the whole story. And you have to explain your case to one person, then the next. But we went through the family courts, and then eventually he started seeing Buzz at a contact centre. We've increased that gradually – now Buzz spends every other Friday with his dad, he picks him up from nursery and has him overnight. It's working ok at the moment – but sometimes, you just have to accept that you're never going to be able to co-parent properly with this person the way you'd like to.

"Gingerbread helped me to feel that I wasn't on my own"

I tried to go back to work last year. It was lovely to get back to work but quite nerve wracking too, I felt like I'd been out of it for so long. Unfortunately, it was a real struggle with childcare arrangements with his father. And if he let me down, I had to let work down. I realised that the only person I could rely on was myself.

I realised I had to put work on hold, and just accept that this is where I'm at now. It won't be forever. I'm looking forward to getting back to work when Buzz starts school. I've worked in schools or in care work my whole life, but having Buzz has made me love being around children – their fun and innocence. So I've applied for a job at his nursery.

It's really hard being on Universal Credit. I've worked my whole life, I never wanted to be on benefits.

But when you come out of a relationship, you're stuck. I had no idea about the benefits system. Jacqueline (my friend) told me about Gingerbread, and I looked on the website. I didn't phone the advice line – it was hard to reach out after having been through domestic abuse. So it helped that I could find all the information on the website. And after a while I started talking to a couple of other single parents on the chat forum, and when I felt comfortable I was able to share my experiences too.

It took about two years on the council waiting list, but now Buzz and I are in our own two-bedroom flat. We love doing everything together, we're always cycling together. I bought him a seat for the front of my bike when he was a baby, and as soon as he could hold his head up, he's cycled everywhere with me.

Looking back at photos from a few years ago, I can see how miserable and depressed I was. Back then, I couldn't see it, I just kept trudging on thinking when is it going to get better? But now I feel like I'm coming out the other side.



Our impact

11,564

single parents
directly supported
across our services



Improving the financial situation of single parents

Advice and information



- * **5,889** calls and **1,185** webchats answered
- * **£151,763.10³** – the amount of unclaimed benefits we identified for callers (average of £370 per month per single parent we supported)
- * **99%** satisfaction rate with our advice services⁴

Policy and campaigning



- * **3** reports published outlining key issues faced by single parents and the solutions needed to address them
- * **5** written consultations and enquiries to contribute research and evidence regarding single parents' experiences
- * **3** select committee enquiries where we provided oral evidence: on Universal Credit and Childcare Costs, on Children in Poverty and the CMS and on Support for Childcare and the Early Years



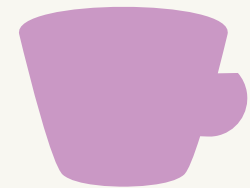
Improving mental health & wellbeing for single parents

Gingerbread community



- * **60** local groups running this year
- * **3,200+** local group members⁶
- * **78%** of single parents have more opportunities to connect with other single parents⁷
- * **1,163** online group members
- * **1,500** posts made on the forum this year
- * **78%** of single parents have received helpful support and guidance from other single parents⁸

Wellbeing Programme



- * **121 single parents took part in at least one of our 17** wellbeing programmes
- * **81%** of single parents learnt new tools and strategies to manage their wellbeing
- * **81%** feel more confident to look after their wellbeing and are better equipped to manage their feelings⁵



Our vision for change



Our vision

A world where all single parents and their children thrive



The changes we want to see

Improved financial position for single parents

- * Money & debt
- * Welfare rights
- * Work
- * Childcare

Improved wellbeing for single parents

- * Relationships & separation
- * Parenting
- * Isolation & loneliness
- * Mental health & wellbeing
- * Discrimination



What we'll do:

Frontline services: Support for today

we provide direct and emotional support and campaign for access to money, debt and welfare rights, affordable and accessible family law, and mental health and wellbeing support

Campaigning: Change for tomorrow

we change the system by challenging discrimination and negative attitudes towards single parents

Our 2022-23 priorities

1

Provide advice, information, and support on welfare rights, the cost of living crisis, money and family law for single parents



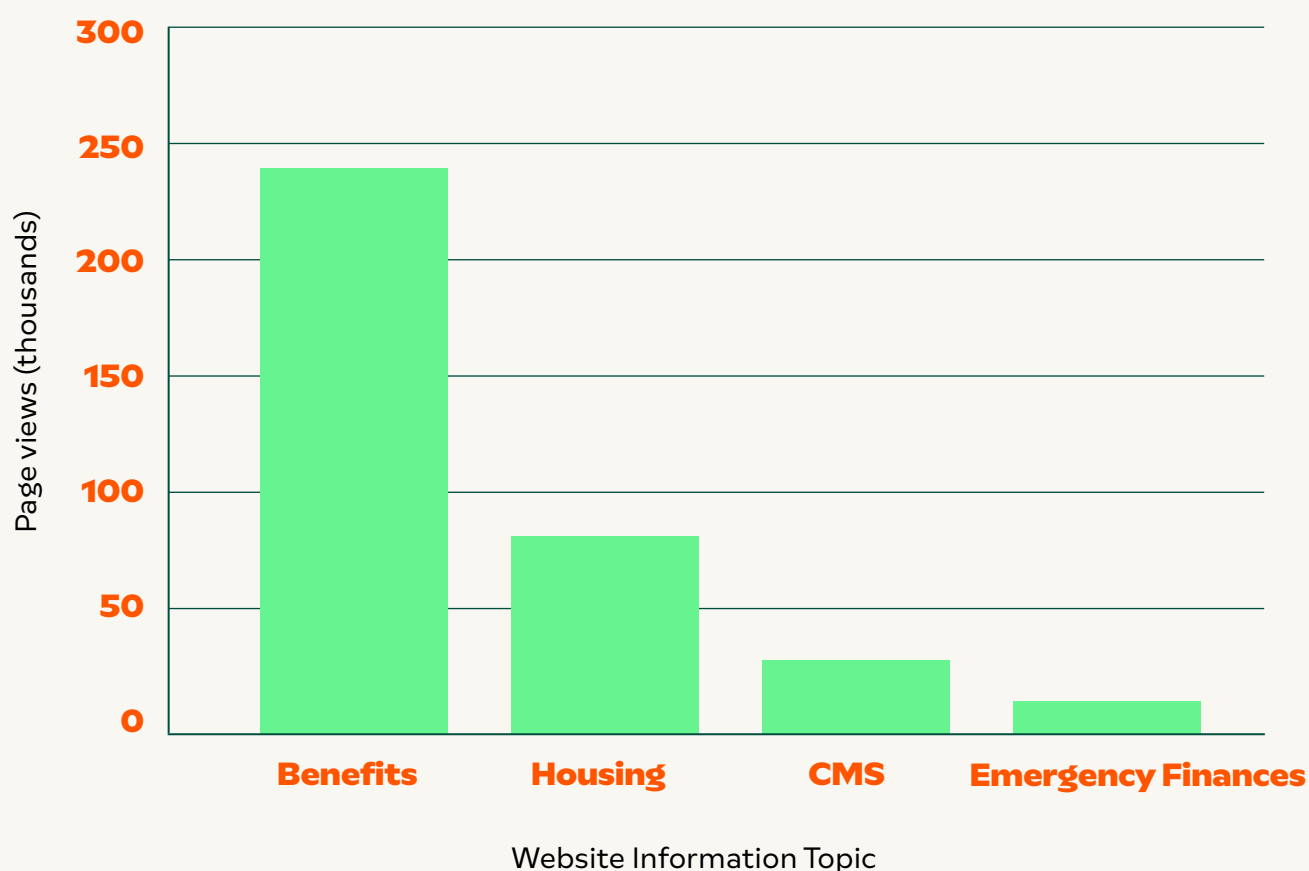
Our information webpages

Our website helps single parents to find relevant information and make confident choices about their family's future. With over 2 million page views this year, the Gingerbread website is often the first port of call for single parents who need support.

“I've been thrown into this situation unexpectedly and have to learn a lot very quickly about my rights. I went straight to the website to find information and advice. I liked the helpful virtual assistant that asked questions to guide you further along. The website is clear, easy to navigate and comprehensive.”

Our most visited topics were on:

- ✱ Benefits – including a helpful benefits calculator, and specific pages dedicated to single parents who have a disability, or what happens when their child turns 16 or their working circumstances change
- ✱ Their housing options, for example if they need to apply for council housing or what help is available to manage their rent
- ✱ How the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) works, and steps they can follow to claim child maintenance through the CMS
- ✱ Financial help available in an emergency





Our telephone helpline and webchat

Our advice team delivers expert advice and information via our telephone and webchat service. This year, over 7,000 single parents received clear and accessible advice regarding a number of issues such as benefits, family law, child maintenance, employment, education and training, and childcare.

"

**To be honest,
Gingerbread were
more helpful than a
solicitor.**

**They helped me
understand.**

"

"

**Gave me so much help and
support and information. The
lady was really caring but also
knowledgeable and insightful.
Really switched on and picked up
on some stuff that I wasn't aware
of. She was amazing, absolutely
amazing. She made me feel there
was hope and that I would be able
to fight this. I can't believe the
difference that call made.**

"

2

Provide information, support and advice on improving the mental health and wellbeing for single parents

Single parenthood can be extremely tough when you are facing financial worries, parenting challenges and an ever-lasting cost-of-living crisis all by yourself. But we also know that it can feel less daunting and overwhelming when single parents can connect and build strong relationships with others in similar circumstances.

Gingerbread is there to support single parents through those challenges.



Local groups

Our 60 Gingerbread groups provide an essential support network for over 3,200 single parents, many of whom are experiencing increasing anxiety, particularly over their finances. The groups help single parents feel supported, understood and less alone. They offer a space for single mums and dads to feel connected, and they also help to improve wellbeing.

“ I've been in this group for 6 years and it's been a real lifeline for me and my daughter. The sense of community with similar families has helped both of us to feel part of a very special family. Made us feel less isolated, happy and proud of our family. ”

“ Being in close [proximity] to people who completely understand and relate to the backbreaking struggles one parent families face - knowing you are not alone when you're in the dark is a saviour. ”



Gingerbread Local groups



Online community

Our online community is a safe place for single parents to connect and give and receive support any time of the day or night.

They can ask for advice and support from fellow single parents – people who have gone through similar challenges and are proof that their situations can improve over time. As a result, they feel part of a single parent community, and they feel less overwhelmed and better able to cope with their situation.

"

**I feel less isolated
[because of the
online community].
I live in a rural place
and have no car but
I know I can join
[online] and have
some company.**

"



Wellbeing Programme

Our online Wellbeing Programme has been designed to give single parents vital tools and strategies to use in their daily life to improve wellbeing. The programme is delivered over two hours with a post-course online space for single parents to keep in touch with each other.

"

**It gave me the
opportunity to reflect
on my wellbeing and
pay attention to areas
of my life that I tend
to ignore. It brought
my well-being into my
consciousness.**

"



Next Steps

City Bridge Trust has provided funding to Gingerbread for three years to develop 'seamless referral' pathways as part of a project called 'Next Steps'. Single parents who contact Gingerbread will be offered relevant additional support from local organisations and agencies, beyond the remit of Gingerbread's advice service.

We have developed partnerships with key organisations located in London (specifically Camden and Islington) since 2021:

- ✱ Solace
- ✱ Recovery College
- ✱ Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus
- ✱ Little Village
- ✱ Scope
- ✱ Citizens Advice
- ✱ The Trussell Trust

Much of the work has focused on building relationships with prospective partners.

We have delivered awareness raising workshops to highlight the main issues faced by single parents. And we began to make and receive referrals and piloted a callback offer in partnership with Citizens Advice in Hounslow, as part of their Help Through Hardship programme. This is a critical step in our ability to start delivering direct support to single parents in the coming year.

3

Influence government, stakeholders and public opinion to change the financial and welfare systems for single parents

We are fighting to create a world where all single parents and their children thrive. We campaign against the inequalities and injustices that single parents face every day. And we challenge the stigma and negative perceptions around being a single parent.



Policy and campaign work

Over 2022/23, we focused our policy change efforts on four key areas:

- * Childcare
- * The child maintenance service (CMS)
- * Employment
- * Cost of living and benefits

Gingerbread regularly punches above its weight. We have an outstanding reputation in Westminster which we use, along with our expertise, to develop relationships with politicians and decision makers.

We met with MPs and Members of the House of Lords 59 times this year to raise awareness of the needs of single parents and to help secure key changes.

We also held 7 meetings with civil servants in key government departments, such as the Department of Work and Pensions and the Child maintenance Services, to raise these key issues.

We're regularly asked to provide evidence to select committees on issues affecting single parents and we are the secretariat of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on single parents.



Research and reports

This year we published 3 key reports outlining the issues faced by single parents and the solutions needed to address them.

The invisible family: the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on single parents living in London

This research tracked the impact of policy change and to gain a better understanding of how single parent experiences evolved throughout the pandemic. The report found that single parents collectively feel that they are an afterthought in policy making and government decisions. Or, as one of our interviewees succinctly put it, “we are the invisible family.”

You can [**read the full report and our recommendations here.**](#)

Single parent employment challenge - job loss and job seeking after the pandemic

This project explored single parents’ experiences of the UK labour market as we emerged from pandemic restrictions from mid-2021.

We found that single parents want to work, but experience consistently higher unemployment rates than couple parents. They also want to work more hours than they currently do and are frequently having to put their career aspirations aside to take on roles that better fit with childcare options and school hours. This means many are on lower incomes than they would otherwise be.

While childcare costs are a key barrier for single parents in getting into work, single parents are being held back significantly by the shortfall of suitable flexible part-time roles.

You can [**read the full report and our recommendations here.**](#)

Debt is a ticking timebomb for single parent families

To mark Single Parents’ Day we released a new report and data which showed that:

- ✱ **76%** of single parent families are in debt, with half of those reporting debts of over £2,000
- ✱ **86%** of single parents are worried about their ability to pay for household essentials, with 20% already relying on credit to cover these costs
- ✱ **32%** of single parents have seen their debt increase over the past year and almost half of those have seen their debt rocket by over £1,000
- ✱ The rise in the costs of heating, electricity, and essentials is the number one reason for increased debt

You can [**read the full report and our recommendations here.**](#)

4

Building a movement by increasing reach and engagement

By 2030, we want to build a single parents' movement that has over 1 million people supporting Gingerbread in some way. We also want every single parent in England and Wales to know that Gingerbread is there to help them.

To realise this ambitious vision, we need to increase the reach of and engagement with the charity.

1.2 million

People saw our social media posts – we look forward to mobilising them to take action and support our community.

702,815

People visited our website to access support, information and guidance. We expect this figure to increase as we work to make our website more accessible and expand our range of digital advice products.





Our priority groups

At Gingerbread, we provide free information and advice to all single parents from all backgrounds, whatever challenges they may be facing. Our strategy research showed that although many single parents struggle in some way, there are particular groups of single parents who are more likely to experience higher levels of need, including:

- ✱ Women with low income
- ✱ Families with a disability
- ✱ Black, Asian and single parents from other ethnic groups⁹
- ✱ Younger parents
- ✱ Single parents in the North East and South West

Going forward we will prioritise working with single parents from these groups to ensure our services and policy work reflect those that are likely to face increased needs, making their situation particularly difficult.

To achieve this, we want to:

- ✱ raise awareness of Gingerbread and the community of single parent families with key audiences
- ✱ change negative perceptions of single parents in society
- ✱ increase engagement with Gingerbread by growing our database, increasing income and increasing the number of single parents we can support

The foundations of building a movement have been laid this year, with Gingerbread investing significantly in developing a new brand and website.

The new brand provides Gingerbread with the tools we need to fight for change. It will position Gingerbread as the only charity that is providing expert care and support while also fighting for a world where single parents and their children thrive.

The new website will provide a better user experience, allowing single parents to find the information they need, when they need it, more easily. We have rewritten the entire information section of the website to ensure that it is accurate, easy to understand and up-to-date.

Finances

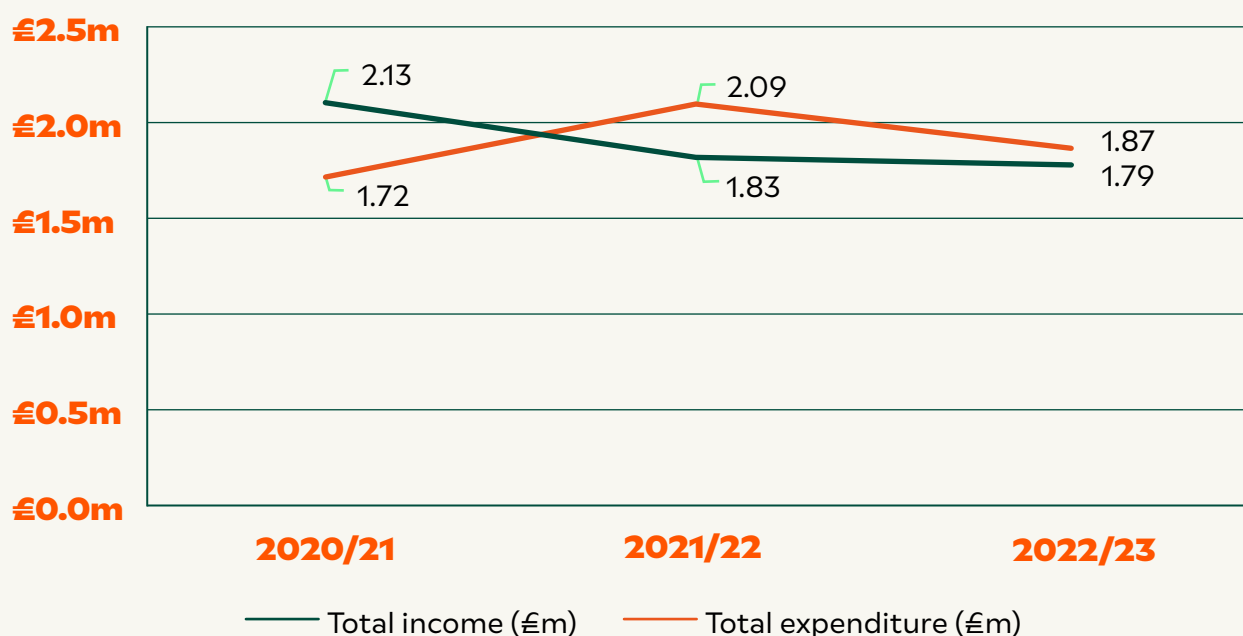
In 2022/2023 our income was £1.79m and our expenditure was £1.87m. We have a small fundraising team which we intend to expand in 2024/2025.

For every **£1 spent**
on fundraising,
we turn it into
almost £6



which pays for all we do to support single parents.

Income & Expenditure 20/21 - 22/23



Looking ahead to 2023-24

The first year of our strategy laid the foundations for success over the coming years, but there is still so much we need to do.

In 2023-24 we continue to have ambitious plans for improving the financial situation and mental health and wellbeing of single parents while continuing to ensure Gingerbread is a sustainable and effective organisation so we can fulfil our mission to fight for a world where every single parent and their children thrive.

Here's a summary of the work we'll be prioritising over the coming year.

Strategic objective #1 - To improve the financial situation of single parents.

✱ Digital advice products

Develop how we use multimedia (video, graphics, animation, audio) to share financial information and advice in new ways to support single parents and their families through the cost of living crisis

✱ Direct support programme

Pilot direct grant making for single parents delivered by Gingerbread and in association with grant making partners – as well as a programme of practical goods and services, to help make life easier for single parents

✱ Secure real change

Building on last year's work, secure real and impactful changes to the welfare and financial systems for single parents through parliamentary bills and policy changes

✱ Next Steps

Continue developing 'seamless referral' pathways with local organisations and agencies that can offer additional support to single parents

Strategic objective #2 - To improve the mental health & wellbeing of single parents

✱ Local group network

Working with businesses, universities and family hubs to establish new single parent groups in key areas of England and Wales

✱ Digital community

Consolidate and grow the digital community (forum and digital groups) and increase engagement and support offered through this channel

✱ Wellbeing workshops

Complete the pilot programme started in 2021-22, which was co-produced with single parents and tailored to their needs, and develop content for our online Wellbeing Hub



Strategic objective #3 - To ensure Gingerbread is a sustainable organisation that can deliver reach, impact and income to fulfil our mission to stand with and support single parents

- * Create a movement of single parents**
Develop a participation strategy that integrates the different ways people can involve themselves in Gingerbread's work to increase levels and duration of participation with Gingerbread
- * Storytelling**
Develop a proactive approach to storytelling, where Gingerbread's needs are identified as part of comms planning, a process for sourcing storytellers is created and effective stewardship process is in place
- * Salesforce**
Develop our Salesforce capabilities, prioritising fundraising data management



Thank you

- * Our 63 amazing volunteer single parent group leaders
- * Those who shared their stories with us to let other single parents know they are not alone
- * Those who shared their stories with MPs
- * Gingerbread donors and fundraisers
- * Special thanks to Helen Thorn for running the London Marathon in October 2022, raising over £10,000 for Gingerbread.

Our funders, including:

abrdn Financial Fairness Trust (formerly Standard Life Foundation)
City Bridge Foundation – London's biggest independent charity funder
Department for Education
The Dulverton Trust
Garfield Weston Foundation
His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)
John Armitage Charitable Trust
The Linbury Trust
Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales
The National Lottery Community Fund
Pears Foundation
The Prudence Trust
The Rayne Foundation
Smallwood Trust
Trust for London
The Volant Charitable Trust

Ways you can support Gingerbread

We're here every step of the way for single parents. To help us support more single parents you can:

Make a donation – give a one-off gift or set up a regular direct debit.

Join a challenge event – raise awareness and vital funds as part of #TeamGingerbread

" I have donated to Gingerbread and I wanted to send you a message to say thank you for all of the work that you do. It is great to know there are people working hard to help support single parent families. "

Richard, donor



What we do

We are Gingerbread.

We're fighting to create a society where all single parents and their children thrive.

We challenge



We challenge the systemic inequalities and injustices faced by single parents every day. And we challenge the stigma and negative perceptions around being a single parent.

We support



We provide expert advice and information to single parents so they have the tools they need to support their families themselves.

We connect



We provide a community where single parents can connect with one another, reducing the loneliness and isolation that many single parents feel. We also work in collaboration with similar organisations who share our values and our objectives.

We are brave



We want to change the world for single parents – to do this we need to be brave with our words and our actions.

We are ambitious



We're a small charity with big ambitions and we frequently punch above our weight.

We are trustworthy



We are experts in our field, we are well known, and we have a proven track record spanning over 100 years.

We are inclusive.



We are open, accessible and here to fight for all single parents and their families.

Endnotes

- 1 - page 3 ONS (2022), [Families and households](#)
- 2 - page 3 ONS (2022), [Income and wealth](#)
- 3 - page 7 Based on 410 benefits calculations completed for single parents between August 2022 and March 2023, excluding any lump sum payments identified.
- 4 - page 7 End-of-call survey, data collected over a one-year period (April 2022 to March 2023), 249 responses
- 5 - page 8 Wellbeing evaluation, 42 single parents completed our end of programme survey and 16 responded to our one-month follow-up survey
- 6 - page 8 Estimate based on monthly reporting from group coordinators
- 7 - page 8 Evaluation of local groups, May 2022, 105 responses
- 8 - page 8 Evaluation of the forum, November 2022, 23 responses
- 9 - page 20 Using broad ethnic categories such as Black, Asian, and Mixed allows us to draw comparison with national datasets like the Labour Force Survey. However we acknowledge the limitations of using these broad categories and recognise they are reductive and misrepresent the diversity of needs of specific groups and communities.

Gingerbread*

Find out more about us at

www.gingerbread.org.uk

@Gingerbread

@gingerbreadcharity



Gingerbread, the charity for single parent families, is registered in England and Wales as a company limited by guarantee, no. 402748, and a registered charity, no. 230750