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On the Engender, Scotland's feminist policy podcast.

[00:00:29.810] - Alys Mumford
Hello and welcome to On the Engender, Scotland's feminist policy podcast. I'm Alys Mumford, and I'm here, as always, with my co-host, Amanda Stanley. Hi, Amanda.

[00:00:37.730] - Amanda Stanley
Hello.

[00:00:38.980] - Alys Mumford
We also have Eilidh Dickson, Engender's Policy and Parliamentary Manager. Hi, Eilidh.

[00:00:42.860] - Eilidh Dickson
Hello.

[00:00:43.870] - Alys Mumford
And we're super excited today to be joined by two people from One Parent Families Scotland. We have Marie Spalding Family Support Worker.

[00:00:51.350] - Marie Spalding
Hiya

[00:00:51.350] - Alys Mumford
And Caitlin Logan, who's the Content and Communications officer. Hi Caitlin.

[00:00:54.320] - Caitlin Logan
Hey.

[00:00:56.660] - Alys Mumford
So, before we get into the meat of the episode, as always, we like to share something positive at the start of the podcast. Eilidh, why don't you kick us off with something? Something good.

[00:01:08.810] - Eilidh Dickson
OK, so my good thing is actually a shout out to my friend Rory because we went to his house for dinner on Saturday night, which is the first time I've actually been in someone's house for what? It's honestly about 15 months at this point. And colleagues at Engender will know that I am a big fan of the actor Stanley Tucci, and Rory marvellously recreated the meal from the film Big Night [Laughter], which Amanda might know, but the crescendo of that meal, is what's called a Timpano. I've never had one before, it was pasta, in a pie.

[00:01:41.290] - Alys Mumford
Wow. Wait, is that not macaroni pie? How have you not had that before?

[00:01:44.630] - Eilidh Dickson
No, it was like Ragu, and there was endive, and there was artichokes and oh, it was wonderful [Laughter]. But I don't really know if the good thing is the film Big Night, the Timpano, or going round for dinner. All three [Laughter].

[00:01:59.210] - Alys Mumford
Fantastic. Well, I'm glad you said that Eilidh, because the reason I very selflessly let you go first is because I thought your good thing might be the same as my good thing, but it's not. So my good thing, if people missed it last week, is the best day of the political year, which is the official portraits on the ScotGov Flickr account. Where they take photos of Ministers and Cabinet Secretaries looking

happy and looking sad, so that they could pick the appropriate ones for any news releases they're putting out. And it's just a wonderful thing to behold. So we'll pop a link to that in the show notes. But Philip Sim from the BBC always does a good thread of highlighting his favourites from that. So, always enjoy that day [Laughter].

[00:02:47.510] - Alys Mumford

Marie, welcome to the podcast. Can you give us something positive or good?

[00:02:52.640] - Marie Spalding

Yes, I had, well managed to have, well, I'm in Glasgow, so we're still in Level Three, so we still have more restrictions, can't go to people's homes yet, but obviously the weather, I think the weather has been lovely everywhere. But yesterday, we had a beautiful day, it was the bank holiday and I managed to catch up with some friends in a beer garden, and I've not seen those friends for I think probably similar, about a year, probably. So, it was just a really lovely day. It was nice to do something that felt normal.

[00:03:21.920] - Alys Mumford

Yeah amazing, living the dream

[00:03:24.170] - Marie Spalding

Yeah it was lovely.

[00:03:25.040] - Alys Mumford

And Caitlin, how about you?

[00:03:26.870] - Caitlin Logan

Well, my good thing would be that I have recently found out that I have bought a flat [Sounds of congratulations]. When I say - it makes it sounds a bit weird that I found out - so I did know [Laughter]. But I mean, I was kind of waiting for ages to find out if things like went through. So it's actually gone through, which is exciting. And so I've kind of been like staying with family, which in some ways has been good, and bad, through the whole, like, pandemic. But so it's going to be like a big change to actually have all that space to myself. And that's going to be nice.

[00:04:07.520] - Alys Mumford

Oh, amazing. My partner went away for the last couple of weeks to see his parents, who he's not seen since 2019, and of course I missed him. But I must admit, having the place to myself was quite nice. Amanda, close off with your your positive thing?

[00:04:28.250] - Amanda Stanley

Yeah. Well I was thinking about this now, how Caitlin just said that she found out that she had bought a house, and it just made me think imagine if it was like a scratch card or something [Laughter]. And then I remembered I won five pounds on a scratch card last week. So I've started this Friday tradition of buying myself a one pound scratch card. And so far I've won six pounds in total, which is not that good a return. But -

[00:04:51.440] - Alys Mumford

You can't have that as your good thing - you had winning a pound on it as your good thing a whole ago!

[00:04:55.130] - Amanda Stanley

Yeah, and I've won five pounds now!

[00:04:58.920] - Alys Mumford

Yeah okay, fair! [Laughter]

[00:04:59.570] - Amanda Stanley

No, what I was going to say is we haven't actually recorded since the Kenmure Street, the

demonstrators gathering in Kenmure Street, in Pollokshields the other week. So I thought it would be good to round it off by highlighting that, because, yeah, I'm a Glasgow Southsider also. And it was just a really beautiful display of solidarity, of the neighbours coming together.

[00:05:20.960] - Alys Mumford

Honestly, one of the best things in the last five years, easily! It really lifted everyone's spirits, I think, seeing that.

[00:05:28.750] - Amanda Stanley

Yes, so, I just want to highlight that because, we hadn't had a chance to, and yeah, obviously the hostile immigration policy and dawn raids that have been ongoing. Yeah, just a really, really nice thing like you said, to actually see something positive come out of something so hostile, with the community coming together. So, yeah, I was like, good things happen?!

[00:05:52.240] - Alys Mumford

And you won five pounds!

[00:05:52.930] - Amanda Stanley

And then I won five pounds on a scratch card. Yes, I did. Anyway yeah, that was mine.

[00:06:00.820] - Alys Mumford

Amazing. Thank you.

[00:06:03.310] - Amanda Stanley

So, today On The Engender, we're revisiting a theme that we've spoken about a lot, Social Security. So Eilidh just to ease us into this topic, I'm going to come to you first, can you remind us why Social Security is of interest to feminists?

[00:06:19.330] - Eilidh Dickson

Well, the very short answer is that it's because women are twice as likely to depend on Social Security for part, or for all of their income, as men are. But that's because of much wider, or that's because of wider gendered phenomena across the rest of society as well, like the gender pay gap, impact of occupational segregation, and the undervaluation of sectors where women's work has been traditionally dominant, as well as the impact of men's violence against women. Women are also a small majority of disabled people, and tend to live longer than men do. And they also provide, as we've spoken about on the podcast before, the majority of care and child care, and are more likely to - women who do provide care are more likely to live in poverty than men who provide care. Because of the way that the provision of care impacts the earnings from paid work. And all of this obviously means that disabled women, BME women, and refugee women, lone parents, unpaid carers, and other further marginalised groups of women are even more affected when changes to the Social Security system are mooted. Over the past decade, of course, we have seen a lot of really significant changes to Social Security and welfare, or welfare as it's called commonly in the UK. Firstly, the impact of a decade of austerity even prior to the pandemic, which saw benefits frozen between 2016 and 2020, and the introduction of the benefit cap for household income. Women are vastly overrepresented, particularly lone parents, amongst those who've been impacted by the benefit cap. And all of the cuts to Social Security also coincided with cuts to public services that women are more likely to rely on. So that outgoings were much more likely or were very likely to increase as well. And secondly, there was a trend towards familiarisation or household level entitlements that we can further the link between individual circumstances and the value of Social Security payment, and also encourage economic dependence between couples who reside together in a household. And I suppose, thirdly, you could also consider the impact of the ongoing process of devolution of Social Security to Scotland and the creation of the Social Security Scotland Agency, where there is a statutory requirement actually to use Social Security to advance equality. So, I guess all of this just to say, like many, many, many other things, have been heightened and made more visible by the pandemic where we've seen just how badly the Social Security safety net was operating. And in comparison to how quickly the UK government acted to try to secure jobs with the introduction of things like furlough and business support, the changes it made to Social Security were very, very minimal. There was a temporary uplift

introduced for Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit, which was worth 20 pounds a week. And despite campaigns to keep that, that's still not being made permanent. And also there was a very short term pause on sanctioning. We've seen, so far, a huge increase of households that are relying on, or are accessing Universal Credit. So there were 5 million households on Universal Credit in February, 2021, which is up from 2.6 million in March 2020. And obviously that is before furlough comes to an end at some point, which we don't know when and how the economy will look when furlough is removed. So I think that there is this looming sense of uncertainty about what women might be exposed to within the Social Security system, and whether that will increase or decrease.

[00:09:45.850] - Alys Mumford

Mm hmm, for sure. Thank you. A comprehensive rundown of why indeed feminists should care about Social Security. And one of the groups you mentioned there, are lone parents or one parent families, and Marie and Caitlin you're here from One Parent Families Scotland. For our listeners who don't necessarily know what your organisation is, can you just let us know what you do?

[00:10:08.080] - Caitlin Logan

So, One Parent Families Scotland provides advice and practical support, to single parents through five local services around Scotland, and a national helpline. As well as campaigning with parents to make their voices heard, to change the systems and policies and attitudes to disadvantaged single parent families. And, I mean, the reason why One Parent Families Scotland exists is because single parents and their children still face stigma and inequalities in society, which lead to them being significantly more likely to be living in poverty, than other families and more likely to be in debt and with less savings, as well as facing greater isolation and poor mental health and well-being. So, yeah, there are a lot of inequalities that are faced by single parents, the vast majority of whom are women, it's around over 90 percent are women. That's kind of, that sort of the overview. But I think I guess Marie can, in terms of like, Marie works in the Glasgow service, maybe she can add something about that?

[00:11:10.780] - Marie Spalding

So, in the Glasgow office, we have lots of different projects within that office. We have unemployability programme, welfare rights and money advice. And the project that I work on, the best beginning's programme, is we've been quite lucky with this programme, because we have three years funding through the Charles Gordon Foundation. The Young Parents Programme is for young parents, 25 and under, who have a child of under three. It's basically an early intervention family support type programme, with a focus on mental health and wellbeing and really sort of increasing parent's capacity to give the children the best start in life. And for many young parents - within the Social Security system, there's two different things for young parents, because some young parents, the first experience of any benefit will be straight onto Universal Credit. And for some other young parents, they'll have a period of time on Income Support before they move on to Universal Credit. So there's quite a difference there. And whether a young parent would know that there's a penalty attached to the benefits they receive or not.

[00:12:20.500] - Alys Mumford

So you mentioned there the penalty, can you can you say exactly what that is?

[00:12:26.770] - Marie Spalding

Well, I might let Caitlin speak to the penalty, because -

[00:12:29.920] - Alys Mumford

Absolutely.

[00:12:30.840] - Mairi Spalding

Yeah, uh-huh.

[00:12:32.540] - Caitlin Logan

So, I mean, what we're kind of referring to, is the Young Parent Penalty, is the fact that while in general people under 25 are entitled to a lower allowance of benefits than people over 25. Before Universal Credit was introduced, there was an exemption for single parents, in recognition of the cost of caring

for a child alone. But under Universal Credit, that exemption was removed. Which means that young parents that are moving on to Universal Credit from the old system are up to 20 percent worse off per month. And this is something which, given that single parents and young parents are particularly high risk groups for living in poverty, meaning that their children are a particularly high risk of living in poverty. So cutting the financial support available to young single parents, is you know, that's totally unjustified by the evidence, and really a risk for pushing young families who are already struggling further into poverty. So that is essentially why we have launched a campaign to try to ask the UK Government to reinstate that exemption, which did use to be in place.

[00:13:51.340] - Alys Mumford

And Caitlin, sorry just to jump in, you said there, and I would agree that it's sort of unjustifiable. But what is the justification that the Government gives for doing this? Why do they think 25 is somehow a magic age?

[00:14:02.240] - Caitlin Logan

Well, I think that firstly, I mean, in terms of why they actually kind of removed that exemption, the only explanation that I've seen of it was that it was administratively simpler to, you know, to not treat a single parents as a different groups and other under 25s. But I think that in general, I mean, there seems to be a kind of assumption that if somebody is under 25, that they have financial support from their parents. We know based on - there has actually been studies into this. There was a study through the Social Security Advisory Committee, which showed that most young parents live independently from their parents and have the same household costs as older parents. So, again, there's not really evidence that that is the case. And I mean, obviously, we know in general that under 25 have a lower, they get lower minimum wage.

[00:15:06.510] - Alys Mumford

Yeah.

[00:15:06.950] - Caitlin Logan

So I think that's partly justification, so that if well, if someone would have less money in a job, then they should equally get less benefits.

[00:15:15.620] - Eilidh Dickson

I think that Caitlin's summary is really accurate. And I think it speaks to a wider truth about Universal Credit is the fact that it's underpinned by this sense of familialisation or household level of entitlements that weakens, or further weakens the link, between individual circumstances and the level of a Social Security payment. And also encourages economic dependence between a couple who reside in one household. An it's very traditional, very hetero-normative, very gendered. Where women are able to provide care and they have a partner who is able to go out to work, typically a male partner who's able to go out and do paid work. And the whole design of Universal Credit is really infused with that notion of what a typical family unit is and what a typical family unit needs in order to live securely.

[00:16:07.790] - Amanda Stanley

And on that Eilidh, the campaign has obviously had tons of support from many organisations signing up to the campaign calls, including Engender. How does this fit with Engender' work, do you want to expand a wee bit more on that?

[00:16:20.240] - Eilidh Dickson

Well, yes. I mean, I mentioned or I've spoken previously about the disproportionate impact that the design of Social Security has on women, and even more so on women who are further marginalised. And as we've mentioned, that statistic over the podcast that 9 in 10 single parent families are headed by women, and they have been shown to be some of the most effective groups because of cuts to the Social Security system. So, for example, single mothers make up about 75 to 85 percent of households affected by the benefit cap. So this campaign, and The Young Parent Penalty more generally is really important in preventing, or trying to prevent, further poverty and marginalisation of groups that rely on Social Security for some of their income. And I think that's really important to

consider right now, because we know that young women are especially likely to work in sectors that have been impacted by the pandemic, such as hospitality and retail. And so the kind of work that they were doing, which was already typically quite precarious or part-time, or not as flexible as needed, in order to balance child care is even more precarious, or the sectors that they're working in are facing real difficulty. And accessing things like child care has been really difficult over the course of the pandemic, so right now there's this kind of sense of a lot of different problems coming together and creating a real crisis point for this particular group of young women, with young women who are single parents. We also need to look at Universal Credit more broadly and Social Security even more broadly about - and look at things like the impact of aspects like the family cap or two child limit, which restricts Social Security to just two children in a household, and the rape cause, which demands that women disclose a trauma at a time and a circumstance, and to a person not of their choosing, simply in order to minimise poverty for herself and for her children. And of course, I mentioned previously the impact of the single household payment, which denies women access to independent income and entrenches really outdated gender roles within families. And we know that that actually can prevent women from leaving an abusive partner, not only because they cannot independently access funds to leave, but then they're subject to a five week wait for their first payment of Universal Credit once they have actually left. So there's lots of things that are kind of making it difficult for single parents of all ages within the Social Security system at the moment. And I think if we can kind of focus some of the campaign work around this one thing, that's a really good thing. But we can't ignore that it's systemic, and part of the whole design of the of the payment.

[00:18:53.510] - Marie Spalding

The thing about Universal Credit, certainly for young parents, as I said for young parents who for the first time, the first experience of any benefit is Universal Credit. Having to wait those five weeks, and take an advance payment means that the very first step into independent life begin with debt.

[00:19:11.060] - Eilidh Dickson

Yeah.

[00:19:11.900] - Marie Spalding

You know, that debt that comes off over the following, so not only are they -

[00:19:15.140] - Eilidh Dickson

And reduces their income over time as well.

[00:19:17.510] - Marie Spalding

Yes, so they're not only disadvantaged by the penalty, they're then disadvantaged again by starting off in debt.

[00:19:27.200] - Alys Mumford

That's a really good point. And one thing I wanted to come back to that was - you mentioned briefly is this idea of stigma, and Eilidh you talk there about, you know, Universal Credit being a confluence of lots of terrible things. And I think it's really interesting looking at this idea of when we're looking at young parents. We're looking at sort of multiple stigmas combined. So society is still very stigmatising people on Social Security in first place, of one parent families and particularly single mothers, of young people in general, and particularly young parents. So is that something you find throughout your work with young parents?

[00:20:04.940] - Marie Spalding

We know that there's a lot of stigma around being a young parent, fallen pregnant at an early age. And it's certainly how that sort of perinatal mental health period as well for young parents. They often will conceal their pregnancy. It's very, very rare that pregnancy in a young person is seen as a celebration. And that impacts as well on how a young person, a young parent, sees themselves, how they see their pregnancy, and then and it can have a real impact on their attachment with their child as well.

[00:20:39.500] - Caitlin Logan

Yeah, I mean, I think that that's just - like I think when we're thinking about it in terms of like, this

campaign that it's important to sort of see it in that wider context, the policies, I think like this, that they can be justified. You can see how that it's justified if you come from a perspective of thinking that, you know, almost like you don't want to give support to people to be in a circumstance that you would want to discourage in a way. So, if say you know, if you're coming from mindset that you should discourage people from being a young parent, then like that can be a reason to actually give less support to people that are a young parent. But then it's actually completely the wrong way around because if you look at young parents, like you said, can be more likely to experience poor mental health and more likely to live in poverty and, you know, other issues that you can experience. But it's I think that the thing is that we want to do is try and change the conversation about that and to understand that it's actually policies and inequalities in society that result and those poorer experiences. And it's not the fact of being a young parent, in and of itself. So clearly, we should be trying to change the structures in society so that someone that does become a parent at a younger age is not disadvantaged.

[00:22:20.660] - Alys Mumford

Yeah, absolutely. I think, yeah, you've got it totally right there, that it's coming at the problem from completely the wrong end, and yeah, absolutely. So, Caitlin, you've been doing loads of work on this particular campaign to end the Young Parent Penalty. What's been happening so far? How's it been going?

[00:22:38.540] - Caitlin Logan

Well, yeah, it has been well so far. We kind of originally, like 50 organisations signed up supporting the campaign that we've got, on the campaign page on our website, you can kind of see the information about that. That includes organisations all around the UK, that's women's organisations, children, families, organisations, disabled people's organisations. And we have, and we've also been now sort of working in the background to get support on this from MPs, which has now got support from a lot of cross-party MPs and so there is some work that is going to be coming out about that, to try and push the Government more on this issue. And yeah, it has got quite a lot of support from UK wide organisations, which is good. Obviously, we're Scottish organisation and have kind of started this year. But it's very much an issue that affects young parents across the UK. So hopefully, well we'll just sort of be seeing how things progress in the next weeks and months, with trying to raise more awareness about this. Because I think that this, obviously you've talked about some of the other issues with Universal Credit, but some of those are a bit more well known, whereas this particular issue hasn't been as widely publicised. So it would be good to see a lot more attention given to this. And I mean, I think that partly, you know, looking at the statistics across the UK, based on figures from like just a few years ago, there is about 175,000 young single parents and the UK, and it's just about 17,000 in Scotland, which in across the UK and the countries, it's about a third of all young parents are single parents. But this is as quite a small population group. So in a way, it's kind of, that could be part of the reason why, in a way, it's not as something that people are as aware of, but then, equally, we find that the experiences of young parents in general are often not given the attention that they should be. And so we're kind of hoping by raising this issue that it can start some of those conversations in general about the experiences of young parents and make people more aware of the kind of inequalities that are faced.

[00:25:18.000] - Alys Mumford

Yeah, absolutely. I think, you know, you're saying that people don't know about it is absolutely true. I mean, I think people will be really, really shocked, you know, hopefully to hear about it, because it is a completely topsy-turvy that people who need more support are getting less support. And obviously, we're looking at this from women's equality point of view. But obviously all of this has a huge impact on the well-being of the children involved. A reduction in income is, yeah, has so many knock-on effects. So, and you just you mentioned there, that this is obviously a UK wide issue, and you're targeting the UK government. And Eilidh previously mentioned the sort of devolution of Social Security and how some bits have been devolved to Holyrood and some bits remain with Westminster. This bits obviously focused on Westminster. Is there anything we can be doing in Scotland?

[00:26:02.820] - Caitlin Logan

Yeah, I mean, I think there are a few things in terms of like specifically the Social Security aspect. I

mean, IPPR Scotland recommended in a report earlier this year that the Scottish Government consult on introducing a lone parent premium to the Scottish child payment. And we think that kind of measures like that or a premium targeted at young parents specifically, could help to mitigate some of the inequality that's faced by those that are the worst affected by some of the issues with the UK Social Security system. And so that's kind of one aspect of it. And then just, you know, there are wider things that could be done to support young parents, even in education, for example, because we know that, while mothers have kind of like maternity rights in employment, the same sort of thing doesn't exist in education. So, I mean, that's something that I think, marie could talk about as well, that parents can kind of really lose out in terms of their education, if someone does become a parent at a young age.

[00:27:18.030] - Alys Mumford

Yeah, marie, if you want to come in there, that'd be great.

[00:27:20.520] - Marie Spalding

Yeah, I think for a lot of the young parents do have a sort of interruption in their education, quite often won't finish school, or will leave school with - I mean it's a generalisation obviously, not all young parents, but many young parents will leave school without qualifications or with quite low qualifications. Which then has an impact on the type of - because you were talking before on the type of work that lone parents tend to do because of childcare issues. But for young parents could be sort of lack of, little, or no qualifications, which means then going into employment that is usually lower paid, and of course going from a lower rate of Universal Credit, then into a lower paid job because of a lower minimum wage. These all have an impact on how - and we were talking before about how people don't know about this penalty, but young parents don't know about this penalty either, until they're in a position that they maybe have to change from Income Support to Universal Credit. They don't know about it. And young parents who have never been on Income Support don't know about it either. So there'll be some young parents who are in receipt of Universal Credit, with less money than another young parent, who's on Income Support and wondering why they're not budgeting, and why they're not managing their money the same as that other young parent is. How can they how can they manage to do that? So they're managing to save a wee bit, or just managing the money a bit better. But they don't know that they're living on a lower income. And it all has an impact, I think, on how young parents see themselves. That's sort of what we realised, sort of at the beginning of lockdown, was just how much young parents live on a day to day basis, and they're budgeting money, buying shopping. Of course, at the very beginning of Coronavirus, everything was gone from the shops, all that sort of cheap foods that young parents will live on, lone parents in general, but young parents would see it even more, sort of, you know, pasta, and all these sort of cheap foods that was all gone from the shops, and then not having that extra money for transport to go to other shops. And there's a real shame attached to that isn't there. There's a real shame attached to poverty in general. Poverty it's just exhausting. And for the young parents, they don't want to talk about it. Because they feel that they're not managing, and it's their own personal failing. And of course, we have groups for young parents and bring them together and we discuss this within groups. And then they see that it's not, it's not them. It's just that they actually don't have enough, and they don't have enough of an income to get from one week to the next, which means then there's no thoughts of the future, you know, thinking about how life might be like, because they're actually surviving on a day to day basis and focused on that, sadly.

[00:30:15.410] - Alys Mumford

Yeah. Thank you so much for sharing that. I think definitely the, you know, even with lockdown, saying well, make sure you've got two weeks worth of food in the house, in case you have to self-isolate. Yeah exactly.

[00:30:23.900] - Marie Spalding

Yeah. I know, I know. And you know we've had some great support from partners, partner agencies, and in delivering food to people and, you know, using food banks, and local pantries and things. But all of that is exhausting. It takes away from, you know, just being able to enjoy being a parent and enjoy the sort of process of your child growing up. That attachment that you should have, you know, that you should be able to focus on really, when your child is born, yeah.

[00:30:53.810] - Alys Mumford

Well, I mean, Eilidh said earlier that, you know, Universal Credit is built around this sort of hetero-normative nuclear family idea, but lockdown has seen that even people that are, you know, in that situation, it's been really, really tough. You know, dealing with kids and home schooling. And so, yeah, you add any additional stigma, and Universal Credit penalties for young parents, it's really shocking.

[00:31:16.160] - Marie Spalding

And young parents are much less likely to receive any financial support from the child's other parent. So yeah, and less likely to take up, to try and access those payments through any kind of formal services.

[00:31:32.030] - Alys Mumford

Mm hmm.

[00:31:32.810] - Amanda Stanley

So I want to kind of start wrapping us up, and bringing this to an end. And we've spoken about, you know, obviously Social Security and the partial devolution of it. And also I think especially now just talking about the impact during the pandemic. And I want to ask now, looking out from the pandemic, what the recovery would look like as well. And we've just obviously entered a new term in the Scottish Parliament, is there anything that our listeners should be looking out for in terms of Social Security policy over the next few years? If anyone wants to jump in with anything that they have there?

[00:32:08.360] - Eilidh Dickson

Well, I can start, so interestingly I think, the first thing to mention is that we didn't see a huge amount of Social Security focus in party manifestos ahead of the election. And we've also actually seen there is now a minister for Social Security, but that role is no longer in the cabinet and it is combined with local government. So I think there is a sense that Social Security is moving from a high policy development phase into one of implementation in Scotland. The kind of devolution process of moving the benefits that were being devolved from UK Parliament to Scottish Parliament, has taken, I think, longer than expected and has been delayed because of Covid. And I think there's a lot to monitor around that, and to make sure that is done in a way that is realising the commitment to equality and non-discrimination that the Scottish Government is required to meet. So I think we definitely are seeing a kind of new phase, but I think there's still a lot to do. We've talked about the things the Scottish Government can do in terms of adjusting things like the Scottish child payment. There's been an ongoing campaign to see the value of the Scottish child payment, which is not yet fully rolled out, but to see that doubled from 10 pounds a week, to 20 pounds a week. Aspects like additional premiums have been mooted by several organisations. So I think there's still policy stuff to be considered, but I think it will be about adjusting what's already there, rather than a huge amount of focus on what else the Scottish Government might want to do, certainly for the next couple of years. I think a big part of that is because of the necessary emphasis we're going to see on Covid recovery. And we had the Social Renewal Advisory Board publish a report just after Christmas, just before the election, which recommended things like the introduction of, or piloting of, minimum income guarantees. So there is going to be some development work and some big things that the Scottish Government will be exploring over the next few years that will be shaped by whatever happens with Covid and Covid recovery, and the wider economy over the next few years. What that will also be impacted necessarily by what the UK Government decides to do, thus far I think possibly surprisingly, the UK government's response to the kind of immediate economic crisis has not been more austerity. It has been to invest in things like furlough, which has done a huge amount of the heavy lifting in terms of kind of job security, I think it's really still too early to say whether, and for how long that will continue and what will replace it. I think Rishi Sunak has certainly made some noises about, well, 'things will have to be paid for in the long run', but what does that mean? I think still a lot to be determined.

[00:35:07.390] - Amanda Stanley

And Marie and Caitlin, once you've ended the Young Parent Penalty, what's next for One Parent Families Scotland?

[00:35:14.890] - Marie Spalding

I think ending the Young Parent Penalty will be fantastic in many ways, financially, but also in a way that the young parents view themselves, that they're not worth less than other people. But I think in general, there's still, I guess a lot has been done already around, you know, access to nursery places. Look at the 1140 hours now, which is great. They've got Scottish child payment, you know, there's a lot being done, but I think a lot of what we will still be working towards is reducing the stigma that is around for single parents, or for single parents and for young single parents. If we can do that, then I think young people will feel that they have more of a voice in things, that they'll be able to access antenatal care, mental health and wellbeing support, and opportunities for employment and child care in the future. Yeah, just to sort of to be able to reduce that. And we've involved many of the young parents, in the campaign, which has been great to be able to hear and share their stories. A lot of that is on our website, you can see some of the young parent's stories on the website. And just what a shock it has been for some of them, to move from Income Support on to Universal Credit. But, yeah, I think a lot of work just to continue to try and reduce the stigma around being a young parent, because although it's a very difficult job, there's much to celebrate as well. And we don't really get to the point that we can talk about things that are good to celebrate. You know, you do all the hard work yourself, but you also get all the good stuff for yourself. And it would be nice to get to the point that we feel that we can celebrate that with women.

[00:37:06.710] - Alys Mumford

Absolutely, that's something that would definitely be nice to revisit on the podcast as well. You know, the idea of stigma around young parents, and also around Social Security in general, I mean, it's a whole episode to talk about the, you know, the media representations of young parents and people in receipt of Social Security. So, yeah, lots, lots still to do. But yeah, let's hopefully we'll win the Young Parent Penalty campaign first, as well. Caitlin, is there anything you wanted to come in, on that?

[00:37:33.020] - Caitlin Logan

Well, yeah I think that I mean, Marie has really covered that point about, yes, seeing it as part of that bigger picture, the next thing is just in terms of actually breaking down the barriers in employment, because of just now obviously, we're speaking about Social Security. In an ideal scenario, you know, single parents wouldn't need to be so reliant on Social Security, but the reasons why that is the case, and why single parent families are more likely to live in poverty is because of the fact that they are more likely to be in lower paid or insecure work. And a lot of that is to do with exactly the kinds of things that you speak about in terms of, you know, gender equality issues and employment. But that it's about actually ensuring that employment is, that there's high quality, flexible opportunities that take into account child care responsibilities, and all of that, that can actually mean that single parents can progress in employment and are kind of stuck in a low paid job purely because of their childcare responsibilities.

[00:38:55.670] - Alys Mumford

As always, we're going to close off now with some recommendations, and it should go without saying that the main recommendation from this episode will be to head to opfs.org.uk and ask your MP to end the Young Parent Penalty. And there's lots of other resources on that site. You can find out more about the campaign, and how you can get involved, we'll link to that in the show notes. Caitlin, how else can people find out about the work of One Parent Families Scotland?

[00:39:20.390] - Caitlin Logan

You can find us on Twitter @OPFS and on Facebook it's, One Parent Families Scotland.

[00:39:32.960] - Alys Mumford

Perfect.

[00:39:33.680] - Caitlin Logan

And we're also on Instagram, that is also One Parent Families Scotland.

[00:39:42.230] - Alys Mumford

Perfect, we'll pop links in the show notes to them as well. Great, so to round us off, we'd like your recommendations. It can be something related to what we've talked to on the podcast or something completely unrelated. Who wants to go first?

[00:39:59.160] - Amanda Stanley
I don't mind going first.

[00:40:00.750] - Alys Mumford
Go for it Amanda.

[00:40:02.790] - Amanda Stanley
So well, there's two things. First of all, my recommendation - [Ugh!] - I know! But it's because my first recommendation is to go back and listen carefully for someone's cat was miaowing during the episode [Laughter]. And it was very adorable. And I really hope that it gets picked up.

[00:40:20.520] - Alys Mumford
It wasn't mine this time!

[00:40:21.860] - Eilidh Dickson
If it was mine, it was Ginsburg who is currently throwing a tantrum because the bed is not made exactly the way she likes it [Laughter]. And I wish I were joking, but she yeah, she cries if we haven't made the bed and laid out the blanket exactly where she wants to sit that day [Laughter]. So, sorry!

[00:40:39.240] - Amanda Stanley
It was so good, so good. Yeah, that was very enjoyable throughout the conversation. Just hearing a small tantrum going on, it was very funny.

[00:40:45.390] - Eilidh Dickson
Over bedding.

[00:40:47.430] - Amanda Stanley
Apart from that - over bedding, yeah! - apart from that, I've just started reading Leslie Kern's book, Feminist City [Sounds of agreement]. So I, went and treated myself during the Verso Books May sale, and that was one of the ones I picked up. So it's about, yeah, claiming space in a man-made world. And I've just started it, but yeah, I was lounging in the park over the weekend just enjoying getting angry at how cities are made for men.

[00:41:16.100] - Eilidh Dickson
I'm going to a conference next week, virtually, where I think Leslie Kern is speaking, but it's all about feminist cities. And I'm very, very excited about it.

[00:41:24.030] - Amanda Stanley
Very exciting. Yeah, so it takes an intersectional approach, also looking at how a new city could be built. And yeah, like how a city built for women would look, as opposed to built for men and the male experience. So yeah, it's very, very good read so far. I would recommend.

[00:41:42.870] - Alys Mumford
Amazing. Caitlin, have you got a recommendation for us?

[00:41:47.760] - Caitlin Logan
Well a sort of recommendation, which is slightly ridiculous, but something that I've been really enjoying, well I've now watched all of it on Disney+ is Mighty Duck's Game Changers.

[00:42:03.150] - Multiple Voices
[Laughter] Wow!

[00:42:04.980] - Caitlin Logan

It's really good, it's like a series if you don't know, that's based on the original movies. And it does actually have an Emilio Estevez still in it, as Gordon Bombay. So, that's fun and other weird connection is that Lauren Graham is actually a single parent in it. So that's nice.

[00:42:27.630] - Alys Mumford
Nice, excellent link!

[00:42:29.450] - Caitlin Logan
Yes. Though she's not actually a young parent, although obviously before she did play someone that had been a young single parent, in Gilmore Girls. So I think she just likes to play single parents [Laughter].

[00:42:46.200] - Alys Mumford
Amazing. Excellent recommendation. That's the first Mighty Ducks recommendation we've had on the podcast so far. Marie, have you got a recommendation for us?

[00:42:56.400] - Marie Spalding
Well, funnily enough, I've also been reading some articles about how cities have been built for men. And it's never, never to this point occurred to me how I just thought I was short [Laughter], you know 5'2", and I just did - I have never considered the fact that, yes, cities were just built for much taller people who were men. Yeah. So that's been quite a revelation. My other recommendation for this week is I'm all fingers crossed that Glasgow moves out of Level Three, and down to Level Two this weekend, because I would love to have people back in my home again, and not just be me and my daughter, in the house all the time. That would be lovely.

[00:43:39.180] - Alys Mumford
I've got some East Coast fingers crossed for you!

[00:43:42.540] - Marie Spalding
I think we'll be fine.

[00:43:45.900] - Alys Mumford
I will go next, and seeing as other people have had two. Sneaky twos. I'm going to have sneaky two. My main recommendation is you all know I love the Great British Bake Off. It's not on at the minute, I'm having a bit of withdrawal. But luckily the great British Sewing Bee is here [Laughter] to keep me entertained. I did don't know whose sigh of disappointment that was [Laughter]. But it's brilliant! They make clothes, Joe Lycett is funny. There's fabric everywhere. It just just give in to it. I love it. And my sneaky second, which is on this podcast, I think the equivalent of saying you've never seen Star Wars, but I had never read Beloved by Toni Morrison, and I have now read it. And turns out it is actually pretty good. [Laughter]. So that's my recommendation if you haven't, or if you have, want to read it again. Read Beloved by Toni Morrison.

[00:44:43.830] - Marie Spalding
I have never seen Star Wars.

[00:44:45.840] - Alys Mumford
Oh! Well there we go. Also watch Star Wars! But, so you can critique it from a feminist perspective.

[00:44:55.380] - Eilidh Dickson
I've not gone.

[00:44:56.640] - Alys Mumford
Who's left? Eilidh! Yours is always the best.

[00:44:58.170] - Eilidh Dickson
Mine is always rubbish. So if I, well, obviously, I would recommend everyone watch the entire back catalogue of Stanley Tucci, but particularly the film Big Night. But, oh, this isn't really a

recommendation. It's more maybe of a humble brag. But I now feel like I can voice on the podcast that I have finally, after many years of trying, finished Couch to 5K. [Sounds of celebration]. So I've been running, and I cried yesterday, because I couldn't work out what day I could fit running into my schedule this week. Which, for those who knew me prior to Couch to 5K, it's quite, it's quite something. So my recommendation is the app, because I've only ever used the podcast, which you can download from NHS website, years ago. I downloaded the app, which means you can listen to a podcast while you were running and I think it's made all the difference. I am the latest person to that particular party [Laughter]. Yeah, really made a huge difference for my ability to actually make myself leave the house, if I can schedule in some podcast consuming time.

[00:46:03.510] - Alys Mumford

Nice work, I feel that we've given our listeners a good range of activities to engage in for the next week. Fantastic. That's us I think. Thank you so much to Marie and Caitlin, from One Parent Families Scotland, for joining us. And thanks as ever to Eilidh and Amanda, check out links to all of the all of the information we've shared in the show notes. And until next time, stay safe. On the Engender was hosted by Alys Mumford and produced by myself Amanda Stanley the music was written and performed by Bossy Love You can follow Engender on Twitter at EngenderScot.

[00:46:47.670] - Speaker 1

And to find out more about the work of the organisation, head to EngenderScot and be sure to click. Subscribe to this podcast so you never miss an episode.