

**Gingerbread**  
Single parents, equal families



# Getting together

The impact of local Gingerbread groups on single parent families in England and Wales

A social impact report by Gingerbread  
August 2013

In partnership with **nef consulting**, the social enterprise of **nef** (the new economics foundation)



**“The group is providing me with a lot of support and some good friends and it really helps me on those ‘off days’ when things never go right to have additional support from like-minded families. I think I would be lost without the group now and look forward to every meeting we have.”**



# Introduction

**I am delighted to introduce the first in a series of Gingerbread reports to demonstrate the difference we make in the lives of single parent families across England and Wales. This report focuses on the impact and value of peer support delivered through local Gingerbread groups.**

The first Gingerbread group was set up in 1970 by a single mother, recently separated from her husband, living in London with her two sons. Feeling isolated, she sought to connect with other single parents. Over 40 years later, demand for localised peer support remains strong. For the first time, this report allows us to begin to demonstrate the measurable impact Gingerbread groups have on the lives of single parents who, in many cases, rely on them for support, friendship and a sense of belonging.

## **What it means to be a single parent**

There are 2 million single parents in the UK today bringing up 3 million children. Raising children on your own can be an immensely rewarding experience. It can also be uniquely challenging. At Gingerbread, we know that for many single parents, the realisation that they are now “on their own” can mean unexpected and often disorienting changes to life as they – and their children – know it.

Practical challenges – such as balancing work commitments with childcare, navigating complex welfare and child maintenance systems, agreeing contact arrangements with the child’s other parent – combine with the emotional challenges that come with raising children alone, such as feelings of isolation and loneliness. Emotional challenges can be particularly acute when the family is dealing with recent separation, bereavement or domestic violence.

It is the common experience of both the rewards and the challenges – the highs and the lows of life as a single parent family – that cause many to seek out opportunities to connect with others in a similar situation; for friendship, for support, for solidarity and celebration.

**“I cannot express how reassuring it is to meet up with people who are or have been, going through the same things as me, to share experiences, problems, solutions; good times and bad times.”**

## **Measuring impact**

In 2010, Gingerbread joined forces with **nef consulting** to develop the charity’s ‘theory of change’. This enabled us to identify what changes happen in the lives of single parents. We then developed an outcomes framework to measure these changes and assess how much is due to Gingerbread’s work, and a Social Return on Investment (SROI) model that would enable us to put a monetary value on this work.



Throughout this process single parents have been at the heart of our approach, sharing with us directly their opinions on the difference Gingerbread makes to them. Our initial focus was on three of our main services: expert advice provided by the helpline, our Marks & Start employability and work experience programme and local Gingerbread groups.

## **The difference we make**

**Our findings reveal that being part of a local Gingerbread group has a measurable impact on single parents – improving their confidence in their abilities, boosting their self-esteem, enabling them to access advice and information, and reducing their reliance on state services like the NHS.**

The findings of this research confirm what single parents have been telling us for over 40 years – that Gingerbread groups can be, in the words of one group member, “life changing”.

- **54 per cent of single parents felt less socially isolated due to joining a Gingerbread group**
- **35 per cent of single parents felt improved self-esteem.**

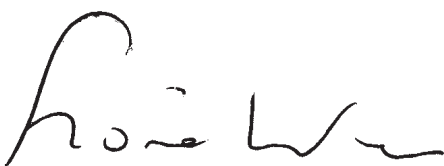
Our findings also provide a compelling case for funding of peer support services as a means of improving wellbeing, particularly for socially isolated groups such as single parent families, and as a worthwhile investment for the state.

## **What the future holds**

With 65 per cent of single parents wanting to join a local Gingerbread group but unable to do so because no group exists in their area, we are committed to finding and funding ways that will help meet this demand. Our commitment is reinforced by the findings in this report.

Developing, testing and refining our own framework for measuring impact has been invaluable to us as an organisation. But it has also been a complex undertaking, particularly for an organisation of our size and with limited resources. We recognise that impact measurement is an emerging field and that this, our first attempt at measuring impact, will benefit from further refining over time. Indeed, a key motivation for publishing our approach and findings is to share with other organisations undertaking a similar exercise so that we might collaborate to identify common approaches.

I hope that this report is both thought provoking and inspiring. I look forward to sharing findings from forthcoming reports into other Gingerbread service areas as we continue our work to embed impact assessment into our working culture.



**Fiona Weir,  
Chief Executive, Gingerbread**

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# **1. Gingerbread's work**

# Gingerbread is the national charity working with single parent families.

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Gingerbread is the national charity working with single parent families. We were formed from the merger in 2007 of the National Council for One Parent Families, founded in 1918<sup>1</sup>, and Gingerbread, a grassroots support network founded in 1970. Our vision is of a society in which single parent families are valued and where they – and their children – are treated equally and fairly.

Each year, Gingerbread's website, services and campaigns reach in excess of 300,000 single parent families in England and Wales. We provide single parents with expert advice, and practical and emotional support to manage the demands of bringing up their families on their own. Our services include:

- Online advice and information available 24 hours a day and an expert helpline for single parents with complex advice needs
- Training for single parents looking to develop skills, build confidence and enter the workplace
- Peer support services through a growing community of Gingerbread members, local Gingerbread groups and supportive online forums.

We also boast a strong campaigning track record, working with national opinion formers and decision makers to influence changes that will improve the lives of single parents and their children.

## 1.1 What is life like for single parents?

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There are 2 million single parents in the UK raising 3 million children. Now that one in four households with dependent children are headed by a single parent, it is no longer unusual to be part of a single parent family. Despite this, single parents and their children continue to experience stigma, and are disproportionately at risk of experiencing poverty and disadvantage.

Some of the challenges that single parent families face are practical. Single parents are twice as likely as couple families to be raising their children in poverty. A lack of flexible and well-paid jobs that will work around their families' needs, and a limited availability of expert advice and information to help them navigate a complex and evolving welfare system, are just two of the contributing factors to disproportionately high levels of financial disadvantage.

Emotional challenges, such as feeling isolated and supporting their children to come to terms with family separation or bereavement, can also affect single parents' well-being and quality of life. This is often compounded by the stigma and stereotyping still all too commonly experienced by single parent families, for example being labelled as 'scroungers', when most single parents are in work<sup>2</sup> or trying hard to get a job in a difficult labour market.

Single parents tell us regularly that realising that they are not alone, and that others are going through the same kinds of situations as them, makes a difference. Gingerbread groups, which provide opportunities for single parent families to access and give peer support, play a vital part in this.

<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1918 as the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child

<sup>2</sup> 59.2 per cent of single parents are in work according to Working and Workless Households, 2012, ONS Statistical Bulletin

# 1.2 Local Gingerbread groups: 40 years of support

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In 1970, Tessa Fothergill separated from her husband and came to London with her two sons. She felt isolated and actively sought out other single parents with the aim of building a network that would connect single parents. From her efforts, the charity whose name we carry today was founded, and local Gingerbread groups began to spring up across the country.

Four decades later, local groups continue to play an important role in the lives of single parent families across England and Wales. At the time of writing, there are local Gingerbread groups in every region of England and Wales, making up a total of 68 local Gingerbread groups with, altogether, over 1,000 members.

Groups meet regularly and typically welcome children to their meetings and outings. Many groups meet in venues such as children's centres, mainly for "tea and chat". Some of the more established groups organise an extensive range of activities for group members including outings, picnics, holidays and family trips as well as parties for the children and nights outs for the parents.

**Single parents tell us regularly that realising that they are not alone and that others are going through the same kinds of situations as them makes a difference.**

Gingerbread licenses individual group coordinators to run one of two local group models. At the time of writing, 83 per cent of all local Gingerbread groups were friendship groups set up and led by a single parent group coordinator licensed to use the Gingerbread name, and 17 per cent were associate groups with a constitution and a formal structure which grants a license to three officers (Chair, Treasurer and Secretary). Single parents who set up or join a local Gingerbread group are also Gingerbread members. At the time of writing, there were over 44,000 single parent members of Gingerbread across England and Wales.

Demand for groups outstrips capacity. In 2011, 65 per cent of single parent respondents to a Gingerbread membership survey said they wanted to be part of a local Gingerbread group but didn't have one in their area. More single parents will need to be willing to take on group coordinator roles if we are to meet demand for local Gingerbread groups and a key challenge for Gingerbread will be to support more parents to take on this role.

Gingerbread also runs online forums which are growing in popularity since their 2010 launch. These offer single parents without access to a local Gingerbread group an opportunity to connect with others in a similar situation, and in some cases, in the same geographic location. For the purposes of this report however we have assessed the impact of **local groups only**.





**Tessa Fothergill, founder of the first Gingerbread group, with her sons**

# 1.3 How does peer support promote well-being and create change?

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Peer support is about mutual support between people who are or have been in the same situation as each other. Its impact is well-documented, often in relation to mental health, as it helps people through different psychological processes<sup>3</sup>:

- **Social support:** having positive interactions with people with whom there is mutual trust and concern. These positive relationships can offer emotional support (helping with self-esteem, reassurance), practical support (where to access services), and information support (providing advice and guidance)
- **Experiential knowledge:** having access to specialised information and the perspectives that only those who have lived through a particular experience can provide. This knowledge tends to be pragmatic and, when shared, can contribute to solving problems and improving overall quality of life<sup>4</sup>
- **Social learning:** learning behaviour to enhance one's well-being through observing others, such as coping skills. Behaviour is more likely to be adopted if modelled by peers rather than non-peers; learning from peers who have successfully adopted skills strengthens the belief in one's ability to also do so
- **Social comparison:** the comfort people have interacting with others who share common characteristics, in order to establish a sense of normality. By interacting with others who are perceived to be doing well, peers are given a sense of optimism and something to strive toward<sup>5</sup>.

Gingerbread groups bring single parents together and give them the opportunity to support each other. The processes above correlate with the situations and experiences of single parents as the findings in this report show later.

<sup>3</sup> Salzer, Mark (2002). "Consumer-delivered services as a best practice in mental health care and the development of practice guidelines". *Psychiatric rehabilitation skills* 6: 355–382

<sup>4</sup> Shubert, M., & Borkman, T. (1994). "Identifying the experiential knowledge developed within a self-help group." In T. Powell (Ed.) *Understanding the self-help organization*. Thousand Oaks: Sage

<sup>5</sup> Festinger, L. (1954). "A theory of social comparison processes." *Human Relations*, 7, 117–140

# **2. ■ Understanding Gingerbread's impact**

Changes in human behaviour, attitudes and feelings are hard to define, monitor and quantify. Despite progress in some areas, measuring social impact in its broadest sense – including personal well-being and social capital (the value of our social networks) – is still an emerging field.

Nevertheless, Gingerbread is committed to capturing and understanding the difference we make. We have limited resources and need to make clear decisions on how best to invest our time, money and effort to support single parents in the most effective way. To achieve this we need to build systematic feedback channels for single parents and other service users, to inform our efforts and continuously improve our services. Moreover external stakeholders increasingly expect charities to be able to demonstrate the impact and value of their services.

Of the number of approaches to capture impact, Gingerbread has decided to invest in Social Return on Investment (SROI), an approach that has been increasingly adopted since the publication of a guide by the Cabinet Office in 2009<sup>6</sup>. SROI is comprehensive because it allows the capture of both economic and the harder-to-measure social impact, across multiple stakeholders.

By placing stakeholders – in this case, single parents – at the heart of the approach, SROI does not pre-determine the difference Gingerbread makes in the lives of those affected, it asks them directly. This approach allows us to measure what really matters to single parents, to systematically inform our decision-making.

Gingerbread worked closely with **nef consulting** to develop the methodology for applying the SROI approach. The impact framework we developed captures:

- The **changes** that happen in the lives of the single parents with whom Gingerbread works, as communicated by single parents themselves – our **outcomes**
- The **added value** that Gingerbread creates through its work with single parents, as defined by changes that are a direct consequence of Gingerbread's services – our **impact**
- The **social** and **economic value** created through our work for single parents and other stakeholders, as understood by placing monetary values on our impact and comparing this with the investment – our **value** and **value for money**.

These three elements provide us with a range of information with which to understand impact – from the changes we make, to the value this adds to the lives of single parent families, to the value for money this creates for single parents and in savings to the state.

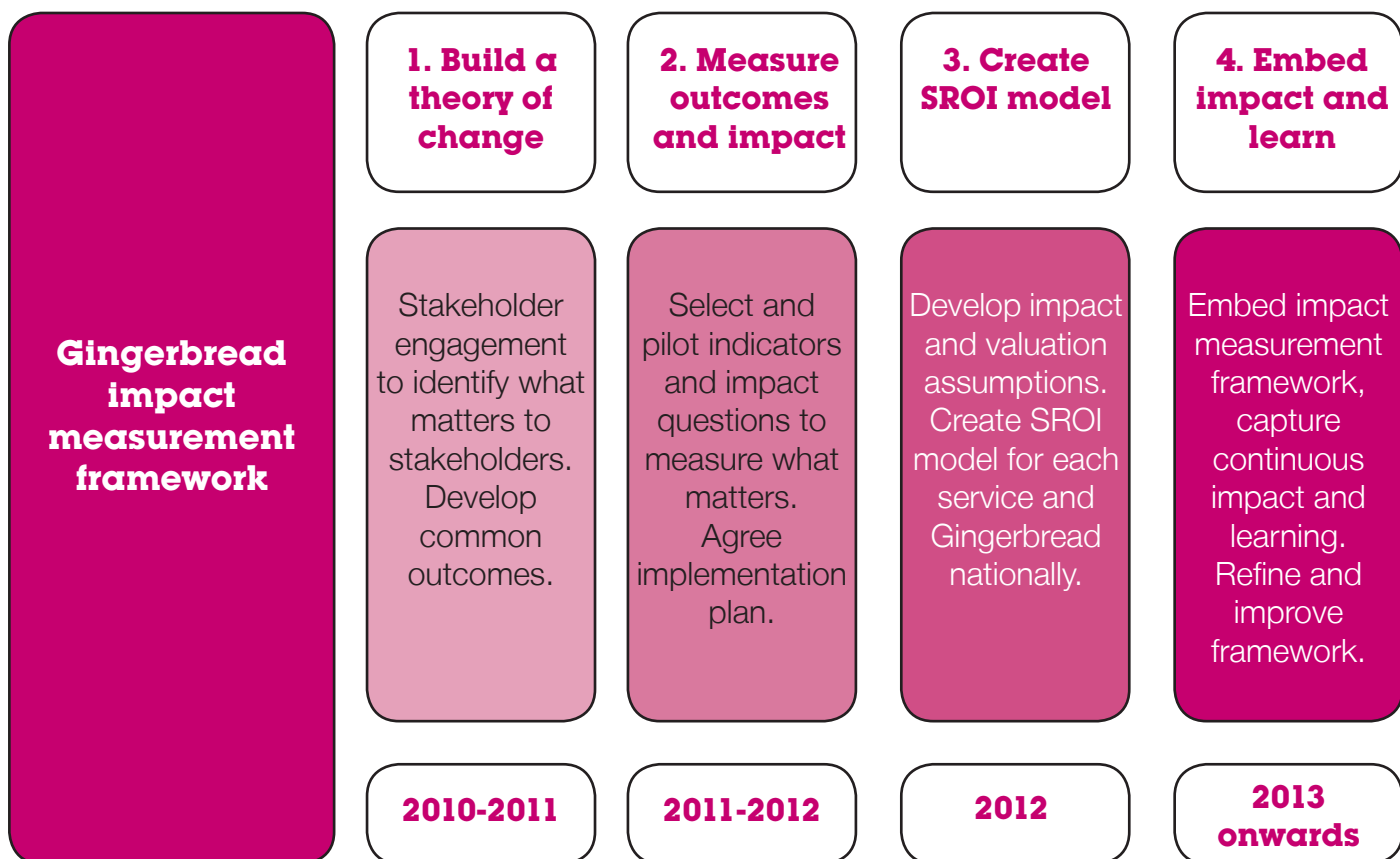
## 2.1 Our impact measurement framework

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Gingerbread's journey towards measuring impact started in 2010 and involved significant engagement with single parents and commitment from our staff. The first phase of measuring outcome and impact has focused on three of our core services: our helpline, our training programmes and our groups.

<sup>6</sup> A Guide to Social Return on Investment (2009) London: Cabinet Office Media

**Figure 1: Developing Gingerbread's impact measurement framework**



## 2.2 Our stakeholders – who is affected by our work?

We identified two stakeholder groups who are most affected by our work<sup>7</sup>:

1. **Single parents** with whom we engage directly
2. **The state**, an umbrella term used to describe public services that may experience outcomes as a consequence of our work, such as the National Health Service (NHS), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

Gingerbread's work potentially affects other groups, such as other public service bodies, local authorities, and the families and children of single parents. As a result, the impact and value reported here may be conservative estimates. The potential wider impact of Gingerbread's work may be explored as we develop our services and update our impact framework.

<sup>7</sup> We applied the SROI concept of 'materiality': A stakeholder is only included in the SROI framework if it is considered that the change they will experience is significant and relevant to the decisions made about a service.



## 2.3 Our outcomes – how are stakeholders affected?

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To measure impact, we need to define what actually changes for single parents and the state through being a group member. To do this, we asked single parents about the difference our services made to them. Through a series of surveys and focus groups, we built up a picture (or ‘theory of change’) of how Gingerbread makes a difference to single parents – what changes for them, and why. We were able to identify a number of common outcomes from Gingerbread groups, outlined below.

### Outcomes for single parents

The six common outcomes identified for single parents, and how they relate to being part of a Gingerbread group, are a:

- **Change in social isolation/ feeling part of a community:** Groups provide single parents with a strong sense of belonging amongst trusted friends
- **Change in self-esteem (self-perception and ability to progress):** Groups improve the self-esteem (feeling good about oneself) and sense of competence (feeling accomplishment from what you do) of single parents, which in turn help them to feel optimistic about the future
- **Change in resilience (ability to cope with challenging situations):** Helping group members to think differently, offering alternative solutions to problems
- **Change in access to information, knowledge and skills:** New tools gained from other single parents through sharing experiences and learning
- **Change in feeling represented at political and societal levels:** Strongly expressed by group members as a sense of belonging, meaning and purpose
- **Change in financial situation:** Group members learning about access to benefits and employment opportunities from speaking to other single parents.

### Outcomes for the state

Outcomes for the state are usually financial, such as savings to the public purse. Through stakeholder engagement and reviews with Gingerbread staff, the likely indirect outcomes for the state of single parents working with Gingerbread are a:

- **Change in single parents’ employment status,** measured by the change in benefits paid by DWP and tax revenue for HMRC
- **Change in single parents’ use of mental health services,** measured by the savings in treating mental health issues for the NHS.

## 2.4 Our impact – what difference does Gingerbread make?

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Impact is a term we use to describe how much of the measured change is a direct consequence of local Gingerbread groups. Understanding impact in this way means that we do not include changes in the outcomes above for which we cannot ‘claim credit’ when measuring impact and estimating the value of Gingerbread groups.

Measuring only what happens due to Gingerbread is difficult. We largely rely on a combination of the best available research evidence and professional judgement to estimate how much change we can attribute to Gingerbread groups. Appendix II provides further details on the adjustments made to ensure we only include change which Gingerbread groups bring about. This approach is in line with current practice in the emerging field of SROI, and judgements were made in close consultation with nef consulting.

**“Me and my children felt welcome and it helps us to realise that we are not the only ones going through the feeling of loneliness and confusion. We felt part of a family, where everybody respects you and your family without any judgement. We felt safe and secure.”**



# **3** ■ **The impact of Gingerbread groups**

Our SROI analysis found that Gingerbread groups make a measurable difference to members. We identified positive impact across all of common outcomes for single parents as a result of joining a Gingerbread group, particularly in terms of decreasing social isolation and strengthening political and social representation.

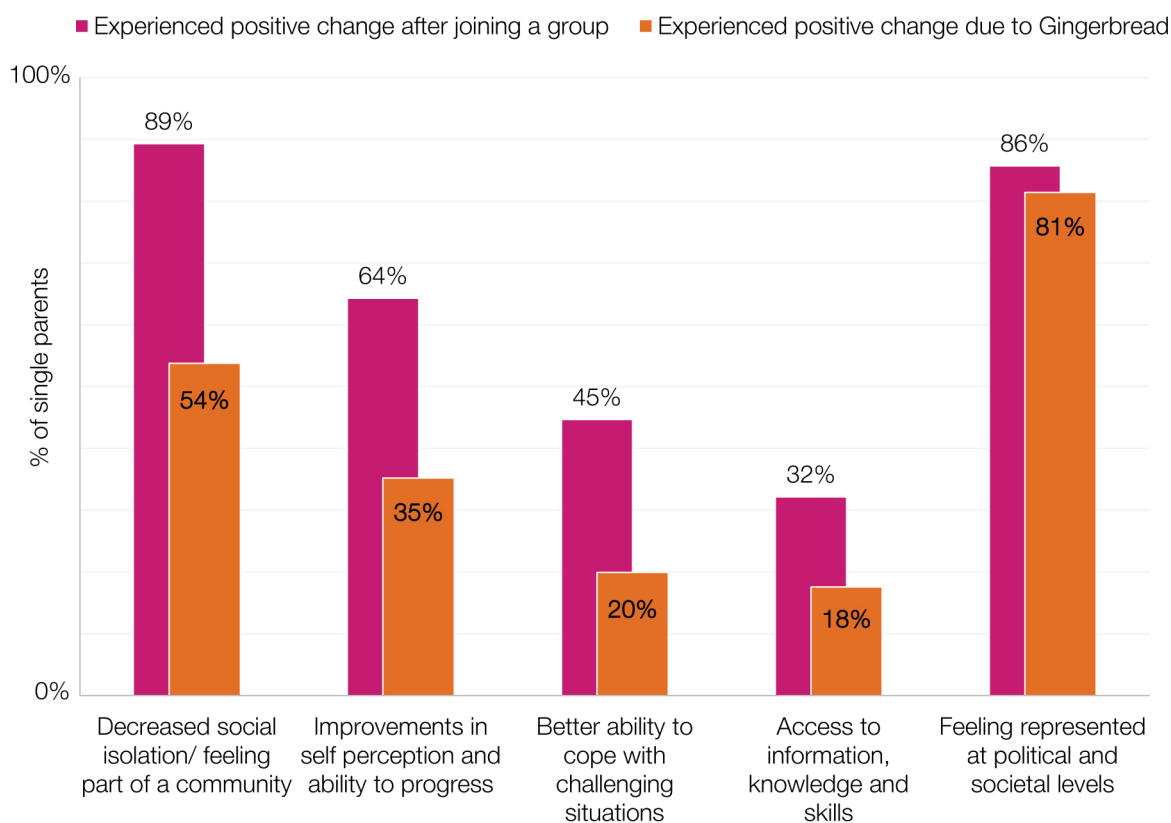
## 3.1 Impact on single parents

Data was collected from a sample of 56 Gingerbread group members between May and July 2012 against the six key outcomes that single parents experience as a result of Gingerbread's services (see section 2.3).<sup>8</sup>

Figure 2 shows the proportion of single parents who experienced positive changes in their lives as a direct consequence of being in a Gingerbread group – our positive impact (see Appendix II for the factors taken into account to calculate how much of positive change can be attributed to Gingerbread).

Some results matched our expectations: 54 per cent of single parents felt less socially isolated due to joining a Gingerbread group, reflecting what many single parents tell us about their motivation for joining a group. Groups also led to notable positive impact on other aspects of emotional well-being: 35 per cent of single parents felt improved self-esteem and 20 per cent felt greater resilience as a result of joining a group.

**Figure 2: Proportion of single parents who experienced positive impact from Gingerbread groups**



<sup>8</sup> Statistical testing showed that this sample was sufficient to show significant changes in outcomes; more detail on the adequacy of this sample size is presented in Appendix I.

The practical impact of groups was not as marked: 18 per cent of single parents had better access to information, knowledge and skills due to joining a group. And while a few gave examples of the beneficial impact of group networks in helping them to progress at work, very few single parents reported experiencing (or expecting to experience) a change in their finances as a result of joining a Gingerbread group. As these small numbers may make impact and social value figures unreliable, the outcome is excluded from the results presented here.

Interestingly, the majority of local group members appear to feel politically and socially represented by Gingerbread nationally (81 per cent of single parent group members feel represented by Gingerbread). Due to methodology issues, this figure should be treated with caution when reporting the impact of groups specifically.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, this presents an unexpected finding, worth further exploration in our next phase of impact measurement for Gingerbread groups.

### **By how much did single parents change?**

Another way to look at impact is to look at the extent to which single parents changed – on average, did Gingerbread groups make a big difference, or a small difference? This average impact is indicated by how much single parents change on our outcome indicator scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is the most negative outcome level (eg the least resilient) and 5 is the most positive (eg the most resilient). On this measure, the maximum a single parent could change is from 1 to 5, ie four ‘steps’ on the scale.

On average, single parents felt substantially less socially isolated as a result of joining a Gingerbread group – the equivalent of one full step on the 1 to 5 outcome scale.<sup>10</sup> Given the difficulties in achieving tangible outcomes in similar areas of well-being, this is a significant result. Other outcomes of self-esteem, resilience, and access to knowledge showed smaller but nonetheless discernible levels of change, equivalent to around half a step on the 1 to 5 outcome scale.<sup>11</sup>

## **3.2 Impact on the state**

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There is no ‘size of change’ for state outcomes in the same way that impact is reported for single parent outcomes (ie no percentage change in use of mental health services). Instead, we report on the estimated proportion of single parents experiencing positive changes attributable to Gingerbread (see Appendix II for factors taken into account):

- **Employment status:** 5 per cent of single parents were employed for more hours than when they joined their group, as a result of the Gingerbread group
- **Use of mental health services:** Less than one per cent of single parents reduced their use of mental health services from when they joined their group, as a result of the Gingerbread group.

**“[If I hadn’t joined the group] I’d probably have gone back to the Doctor for anti-depressants again.”**

**“I was totally isolate [sic] in a new area with no friends or family. Gingerbread became my ‘family’. I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown and the support held me together.”**

<sup>9</sup> The outcome indicator does not ask whether single parents feel represented as a result of being a group member (see Appendix I), therefore the positive impact measured may not be as a direct consequence of groups specifically.

<sup>10</sup> This average includes all single parents, ie not just those who recorded a positive change on outcomes.

<sup>11</sup> The outcome indicator on political and social representation did not measure change in the same way as other indicator (see footnote 12), and therefore does not capture how much single parents changed.



## 3.3 Impact on the children of single parents

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While we did not set out to measure the impact of joining a Gingerbread group on the children of single parents, we asked single parents for feedback on how they thought their children were affected by Gingerbread groups.

61 per cent of single parents believe that attending groups has made a positive difference to their children, particularly by helping children to:

- Make new friends, having fun and gaining confidence
- Realise that others are also part of single parent families and in the same situation
- Benefit from positive outcomes experienced by their parents through groups.

**“Friendly, supportive, wonderful group of people. My son has come on leaps and bounds with his confidence and social skills since attending the group.”**

**“They love meeting up with their Gingerbread friends and the meet-ups. They didn’t realise for quite a while (despite me telling them) that the group was for single parent families, and they have said that they like the fact that this is the case and they’re not the odd-ones-out in the park.”**



# The difference local Gingerbread groups have made for one family

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Tamsin lives in South West London with her children Amber, who is nine, and Oscar, who is seven. She is the group co-ordinator of the North Barnes Gingerbread group.

It was seven years ago that my then-husband left. I had a real need to speak to people in the same situation as me and to discuss how they had come to deal with all the issues surrounding being newly single with young children.

When, if and how often should the children see their father? How do I get divorced? Where can I get financial help from? How do I have a conversation with my husband without getting upset? How do I change my name? The questions were endless.

I looked at people in the street and thought, 'are they single like me?' As a parent on our own we don't have it tattooed across our faces. I assumed everyone else was a happy two-parent family.



**“I had a real need to speak to people in the same situation as me and to discuss how they had come to deal with being newly single with children.”**

In 2008, after completing a training course with Gingerbread, I helped set up the North Barnes Gingerbread Friendship group. I'd come to realise I wasn't on my own.

Today we organise teatime meet-ups, picnics, coffee mornings, family trips, as well as parties for the children and nights outs for the parents. Gingerbread is close by to offer support, with factsheets, the helpline and a great website.

The group is constantly evolving. People come and go, children grow up and parents start work. There are still many questions, only now they are different. How do I get a healthy work and family life balance? Can I afford childcare costs if I work? How, if and when do I consider a new relationship? Will child benefit changes affect me? What is universal credit? What is the new 'bedroom tax'?

My motivation for co-ordinating the group is to create a place for parents like myself, to give us the chance to get together and support each other. It is great to know that there are other people out there like me. The statistics say there are quite a few of us so someone parenting on their own doesn't have to feel alone. My children and I enjoy sharing our days out and have made some lifelong friends.

# **4. The value of Gingerbread groups**



SROI enables impact to be represented in monetary values, which can provide additional depth in understanding impact, by:

- Comparing “apples with apples” by placing different outcomes into a common currency
- Providing a voice articulating the importance (and relative importance) of different outcomes, from those experiencing the change
- Allowing all outcomes to be compared with the service investment, providing an assessment of value for money.

## 4.1 Calculating value

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Calculating the value of Gingerbread groups involves finding financial proxies for social outcomes, and applying these to the average level of impact experienced by single parents. Chapter 2 illustrates how much positive change single parents felt on the different outcomes; the valuation process is based on average change, and therefore takes into account both negative and positive impact<sup>12</sup>:

$$\text{Social value} = \text{Average change} \times \text{Financial proxy (£)}$$

The longevity of impact is taken into account when calculating value. For Gingerbread groups, we have assumed that impact will last up to one year from the point of engagement for most outcomes (two years for social isolation), and that the outcomes experienced will change over that time (see Appendix II).

We scale up the sample-based calculation to the 1,003 Gingerbread group members in 2012, to estimate the annual value of Gingerbread groups. Statistical testing provides us with the confidence that this scaling process is robust (see Appendix I).

### **Caveats to valuation**

Financial proxies are taken from the best available academic research, and adjusted where appropriate to reflect the outcomes and population in question.

For this report, we make conservative judgements to ensure that we do not over-claim; when we cite overall SROI values, we do so with strong caveats. SROI is often expressed as a ‘ratio’ of investment to impact value, which gives a false impression of accuracy. Instead, the result of SROI analysis is likely to fall within a range, given the uncertainty of some judgements used.

Our methodology is consistent with the Cabinet Office Guide to SROI (2009), and used by other charities seeking to value their impact. The figures generated are therefore as robust as comparable social impact measurement in the sector. Nonetheless, we hope we can strengthen these proxies in future through working with other charities to develop common sector standards.

<sup>12</sup> The only exception to this calculation is the political representation outcome. This outcome was dealt with differently from others, which means we cannot measure the amount that single parents changed on this indicator. The rationale for this approach is explained in our methodology guide, which is available on request. With hindsight, we are not sure whether this method results in over-estimated impact attributed to Gingerbread groups on this outcome. To avoid over-claiming impact, we use the median ‘average size of change’ figure for other outcomes of Gingerbread groups for this report, and we are confident this results in a conservative estimate of value for this outcome.

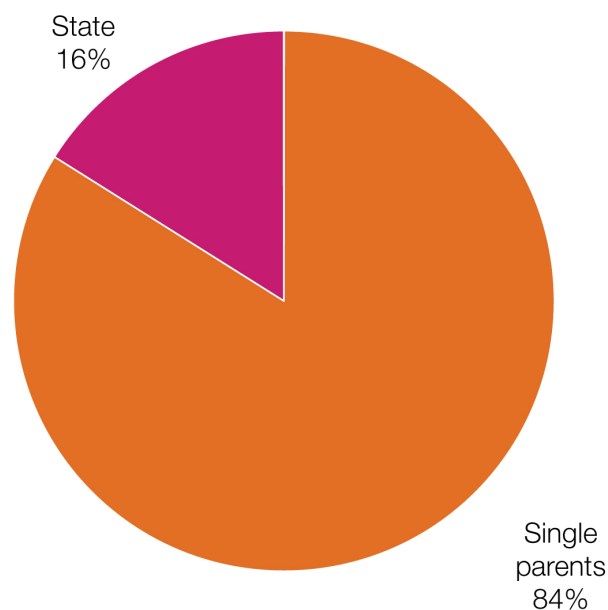
## 4.2 Value of Gingerbread groups

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In 2012, we found that Gingerbread groups directly generated over £900,000 worth of social value. This was worth:

- £774,157 to single parents in the value of personal and social outcomes, or £772 per single parent group member annually
- £148,207 to the state in the value of savings in benefit and health service spending, and tax revenue.

**Figure 3: Proportion of value created for stakeholder groups**



## 4.3 'Value for money' of Gingerbread groups

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We explore the value for money of Gingerbread groups by comparing the estimated value generated by groups annually against the annual costs of the services.

In 2012, the total cost of groups was £89,000, equivalent to a spend of £88 per year per single parent participating in a group, or £1.70 per week per group member.



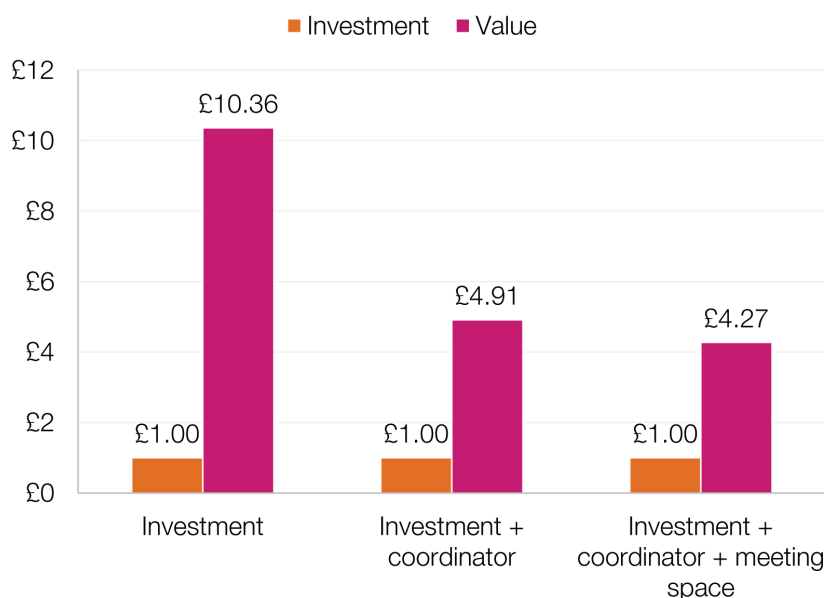
Groups also require other resources, provided without financial costs. Creating, growing and sustaining peer support groups for single parents is highly dependent on the commitment and drive of volunteer group coordinators, as well as the activities undertaken by the national organisation. Groups also use venues free of charge for meetings. We estimate the worth of these resources in 2012 as follows:

- Group coordinators: Nearly £99,000<sup>13</sup>
- Meeting venues: Over £28,300.<sup>14</sup>

Including the value of these ‘in kind’ resources results in alternative service costs to consider of nearly £190,000 (including group coordinator time), and over £215,000 (including both coordinator and meeting space costs).

The ratio of investment to value is illustrated in Figure 4 below, and suggests that even with taking the highest estimate of service costs, over £4 of social value is generated for each £1 spent.

**Figure 4: Value for money – social value relative to investment**



Of course, this value for money estimate depends not just on the investment figure used, but also on the calculated impact. Initial analysis suggests that the effect of varying the adjustments made when calculating impact is limited, but we intend to do more work to assess how sensitive the value for money estimate is to different estimates of impact (see Appendix II).

**In 2012, a cash investment of £1 created over £10 in social value for single parents and the state. Around £8.70 of this is social value to single parents. If also including the non-cash investment needed to run groups (group co-ordinator time and meeting venues), £1 investment created over £4 in social value for single parents and the state.**

**Our SROI calculation therefore indicates that Gingerbread groups provide measurable positive impact and social value for key stakeholder groups.**

<sup>13</sup> We assume group coordinators volunteer an average of four hours per week (52 weeks per year), and a median hourly salary of £8.04 (Office for National Statistics, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings revised results, Table 1.5a, 2011; part-time female worker rate is used, to be representative of the majority of single parents). Costs are scaled up for 59 groups in operation in 2012.

<sup>14</sup> We assume groups meet for two hourly meetings per month on average, and venues would normally charge £20 per hour. Costs are scaled up for 59 groups in operation in 2012.

# 5. Summary of learning

Perhaps the most useful feature of this work has been the development of effective tools with which to engage single parents in evidencing the impact that local Gingerbread groups make in their lives. Through these tools, we have found that Gingerbread groups make a measurable difference in a range of ways.

As anticipated, groups are particularly effective in reducing social isolation and fostering a sense of community. Groups also have some impact on single parents' personal well-being in terms of resilience and self-esteem, as well as practical access to information and advice. This is consistent with literature evidence of how peer support creates a difference in the lives of single parents.

Some findings came as more of a surprise. We had not, for example, expected the extent to which single parents involved in their local groups would report feeling better represented at political and societal levels. And the anecdotal feedback that groups are having a number of positive impacts on the children in single parent families was highly encouraging and an area we hope to investigate further in future.

Change in single parents' financial situation was unclear. Only a few single parents report some change in their financial situation before and after Gingerbread's intervention, and it would appear that the role of groups in this area is limited.

We welcome results demonstrating the impact on the state – including the finding that 5 per cent of single parents have transitioned into work or increased their working hours as a result of joining a Gingerbread group. This is consistent with anecdotal evidence suggesting that groups indirectly provide a means to make progress in their working lives, by developing new skills and knowledge and boosting single parents' confidence as a group member or coordinator. The results for the impact on the NHS are less than we would expect from anecdotal experience, which may be partly a result of the conservative approach taken to construct the indicator measuring use of NHS mental health services.

Overall this analysis suggests that investment in Gingerbread's peer support groups leads to significant and measureable improvements in single parents' wellbeing, and that these outcomes have value for the state.

By definition, the main investment in peer support is the time single parents commit as volunteers to coordinating and supporting the group. Gingerbread provides important support, but overall the service is cost-effective and these findings make the case for funders and policy makers to pay much greater attention to the value of peer support as a means of improving wellbeing, particularly for socially isolated groups, in the community and as a worthwhile investment for the state.

Given demand for Gingerbread groups hugely outstrips the availability of a local Gingerbread group, finding and funding effective ways of supporting start up and sustaining groups will be an important challenge in the coming years. Over the next few years we hope to introduce a range of support mechanisms for group coordinators from buddying opportunities between new and established group coordinators to tailored training. Continued investment in the membership and groups function and in the single parents who run groups will be required if we are not only to maintain, but to grow the network of local Gingerbread groups across England and Wales to meet high levels of demand.

# Appendix I: Data collection

While developing our ‘theory of change’ and common outcomes was an inherently qualitative exercise, data collection on impact is a quantitative activity aimed at evidencing the extent to which change has taken place for single parents, involving:

- Developing indicators
- Planning data collection implementation
- Surveying a sample of single parents
- Analysing for statistical significance of changes
- Accounting for impact considerations to understand impact.

## Developing indicators

Indicators are ways of knowing that change has occurred or whether an outcome has happened. The indicators selected to evidence change were developed between Gingerbread and **nef consulting**, and piloted before being finalised.

Drawing from existing surveys, such as the European Social Survey (ESS)<sup>15</sup> and National Accounts of Well-being<sup>16</sup>, an initial draft of indicators was developed and cognitively tested with a sample of ten single parents via telephone. They were asked to comment where an indicator was unclear, where the wording could be improved and where they felt the indicator did or did not accurately reflect the outcome. The indicators were refined following feedback from single parents; the table below summarises the indicators used.

Stakeholder	Outcomes	Outcome indicator	Asked for two ratings ('Before' and 'Now')
Single parents	Decreased social isolation/ being part of a community	“I have people with whom I feel able to discuss the issues I face as a single parent”	Yes
		“As a single parent I know where to go for practical help if I need it”	Yes
	Being represented at political and societal levels	“I feel that Gingerbread does a good job of representing single parents like me”	No
	Changes in self-perception and ability to progress	“In general I feel positive about myself”	Yes
“On the whole I feel optimistic about what I can achieve”		Yes	
Changes in ability to cope with challenging situations	“I feel able to deal with important problems that come up in my life”	Yes	

<sup>15</sup> For questions see [http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=61&Itemid=580](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=61&Itemid=580)

<sup>16</sup> Abdallah et al (2009) National Accounts of Well-being: bringing real wealth onto the balance sheet London: **nef**

Stakeholder	Outcomes	Outcome indicator	Asked for two ratings ('Before' and 'Now')
Single parents	Access to information, knowledge and skills	<p>“Have you gained any new knowledge or skills since you joined the Group, for example, some money-saving ideas, employment opportunities or new parenting skills? “</p> <p>“If yes, what knowledge or skill has been most valuable? Please write in the space below.”</p> <p>“Consider what you have written in the space above. To what extent would you agree that you had good knowledge or skills in this area before joining the group”</p>	Yes
	Improved financial situation	<p>“Has your financial situation changed since you joined the group, or do you expect it to soon?”</p> <p>“If yes, how much has your financial situation changed/will change by, per week? If you do not expect a change in regular income or outgoings, but expect a single one-off increase/decrease, please specify the amount”</p>	No
State	Value to state of change in single parent's employment status	What was your employment status before you joined a local Gingerbread group?	Yes
	Decrease in use of State services for mental health issues	<p>Individuals assumed to be depressed if they rated “disagree” or “somewhat disagree” to the following indicators:</p> <p>“I have people with whom I feel able to discuss the issues I face as a single parent.”</p> <p>“As a single parent I know where to go for practical help if I need it”</p> <p>“In general I feel positive about myself”</p> <p>“On the whole I feel optimistic about what I can achieve”</p> <p>“I feel able to deal with important problems that come up in my life”</p>	Yes



## Data collection components for Gingerbread groups

<b>Measurement design</b>	Retrospective	<p>Single parents are asked how they felt when they first engaged with groups and how they feel post-engagement, at the same time.</p> <p>Retrospective measurement was selected because groups are self-regulating, which means that Gingerbread does not necessarily know when people start attending. This lack of insight makes using a pre-/post-service measure a challenge to implement, as it would be hard to guarantee measuring with the same single parent twice.</p>
<b>Collection method</b>	Online survey	Online surveys are deemed the most resource efficient and effective, avoiding confidentiality issues if surveys are completed during group sessions, and having to collect personal details of group members for postal surveys.
<b>Time period</b>	2012	Online surveys were completed by single parents at groups between May and July 2012.
<b>Sampling method</b>	Convenience sampling	<p>Convenience sampling means that individuals were sampled when the opportunity was available.</p> <p>Although less robust than random sampling, convenience sampling is still widely used in academic and evaluative research, and can be considered an acceptable compromise when weighing the need for the strength of a closely representative sample against difficulties and costs associated with random sampling designs. The selected approach is low-cost and can be replicated each year.</p> <p>For groups, members self-define as single parents. Both friendship and associate groups were sampled as we feel there was no reason to restrict the sample in this manner.</p>
<b>Sample size</b>	56	We aimed for a sample of 60. Following the positive outcome of statistical tests (see below), this sample would be scaled up to an observed average of 17 single parents per 60 groups in operation in 2012. This is an estimated total population of 1,003 single parents who attend groups in any one year.
<b>Total population</b>	1,003	

## Testing the reliability and validity of results

**Sample size:** It is difficult to pre-judge the sample size required to draw robust conclusions on impact. Instead, we used 'post-hoc power analysis' – statistical tests performed after data collection to judge whether the sample size was sufficient to represent a larger population. Results showed that the sample size of 56 for Gingerbread groups impact measurement is large enough to reach the appropriate power ( $>0.99$ ) and therefore give us confidence that we have spoken to enough people and can extrapolate our findings to the total population of single parents who attend groups.<sup>17</sup>

**Statistical significance:** Most indicators showed large amounts of change. Results from the analysis on each indicator, bar one, demonstrated that the measured change was also statistically significant. The indicator and outcome that did not lend itself to statistical testing was the improved financial situation of single parents. This indicator was unsuitable for analysis due to a lack of relevant data points (ie the number of single parents experiencing a change in financial situation). This meant an average amount of change, particularly narrowed down to change due to Gingerbread (impact), would be an unreliable figure. Consequently, impact and value are not reported on this outcome in this report.

<sup>17</sup> The analysis looked at the sample size, and the mean difference and standard deviation between 'prior' and 'now' scores. This was performed on the indicator with the lowest t-value, ie the indicator that had the lowest measure of statistical significance. Scores greater than 0.8 were deemed powerful enough to suggest that a significant difference had been identified and that the sample represented a larger population. Groups results: using the input parameters one-tailed hypothesis; effect size of 0.753 (determined by mean difference and standard deviation); alpha value of 0.05 and sample size of 56, the achieved power was  $>0.99$ .

# Appendix II: Adjusting impact and value calculations

We make a number of adjustments to the change recorded in the survey data in order to ensure our impact measurement only includes change that can be attributed to Gingerbread, and that does not prevent other single parents from achieving the same outcomes.

We estimate how much of the change recorded should be deducted for each of the five adjustments below, for each of the eight outcomes for single parents and the state. The table below provides some indication of the adjustments made in the final column. The range of deductions for the drop-off period is difficult to summarise, as the deductions vary every six months across the benefit period.

The exact adjustments are in our methodology guide, which is available on request.

Adjustment	Method of assessment	Affected calculation	Range in the deduction from calculated impact/value
<b>Attribution:</b> how much credit can Gingerbread take for the change that has happened?	Standardised approach, asking single parents directly to give their judgement through the impact surveys.	Impact/value	0 – 50%
<b>Deadweight:</b> what would have happened anyway, in the absence of Gingerbread's service?	Combination of primary and secondary research, and professional judgement	Impact/value	5 – 20%
<b>Displacement:</b> to what extent are we preventing other people from experiencing change by moving a change from one place to another?		Impact/value	0 – 5%
<b>Benefit period:</b> over how long are the changes likely to last?		Value	One – two years
<b>Drop off:</b> to what extent are changes sustained over the benefit period? How does the amount of credit we can take for them change over time?		Value	Six-monthly changes in value

## Effects of varying adjustments

We have done a basic analysis of how sensitive these ratios are to the assumptions made when calculating the value for money of Gingerbread groups (see section 4.3).

In the table below, we focus on deadweight (what would have happened anyway). The upper estimate uses the impact value when deadweight is halved (ie generating higher impact – more change is attributed to Gingerbread), and the lower estimate uses the impact value when deadweight is doubled. This suggests that the value for money is not significantly affected by the deadweight adjustment, which provides confidence in the assumption made when calculating impact, value, and value for money.

We hope to do further analysis of other adjustments made as our impact work unfolds, to ensure we have confidence across the assumptions involved in our methodology.

**Figure 5: SROI ratios for groups 2012**

<b>Ratio options</b>	<b>Upper estimate</b>	<b>Core estimate</b>	<b>Lower estimate</b>
<b>Ratio 1:</b> financial investment by Gingerbread only	11.74	10.52	10.14
<b>Ratio 2:</b> financial investment by Gingerbread and coordinator time investment	5.57	4.99	4.81
<b>Ratio 3:</b> financial investment by Gingerbread, coordinator time and venue investment	4.48	4.34	4.18

# Appendix III: Demographic and attendance profile of the sample

Based on the impact measurement survey, the demographic profile of a single parent that attends groups is a female (93 per cent), aged 35-44 (59 per cent) and has one or two children (86 per cent). A small proportion of our sample is registered disabled (5 per cent) and has children with a disability (12 per cent).

This data suggests the sample is broadly comparable with the national population of single parents. Compared with national data, the sample is broadly representative on gender, over-representative of the Black and minority ethnic population of single parents, and under-representative of young single parents (aged under 25 years) and disabled single parents.<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 6: Demographic profile of the sample**

<b>Gender</b>	Female	93%
	Male	7%
<b>Age of single parents</b>	Under 25	0%
	25-34	23%
	35-44	59%
	45-54	16%
	55-64	2%
	65 and over	0%
<b>Ethnic background</b>	White/White British	85%
	Asian/Asian British	3%
	Black/Black British	8%
	Other	3%
<b>Disability</b>	Registered disabled	5%
	Children with a disability	12%

## Length of attendance

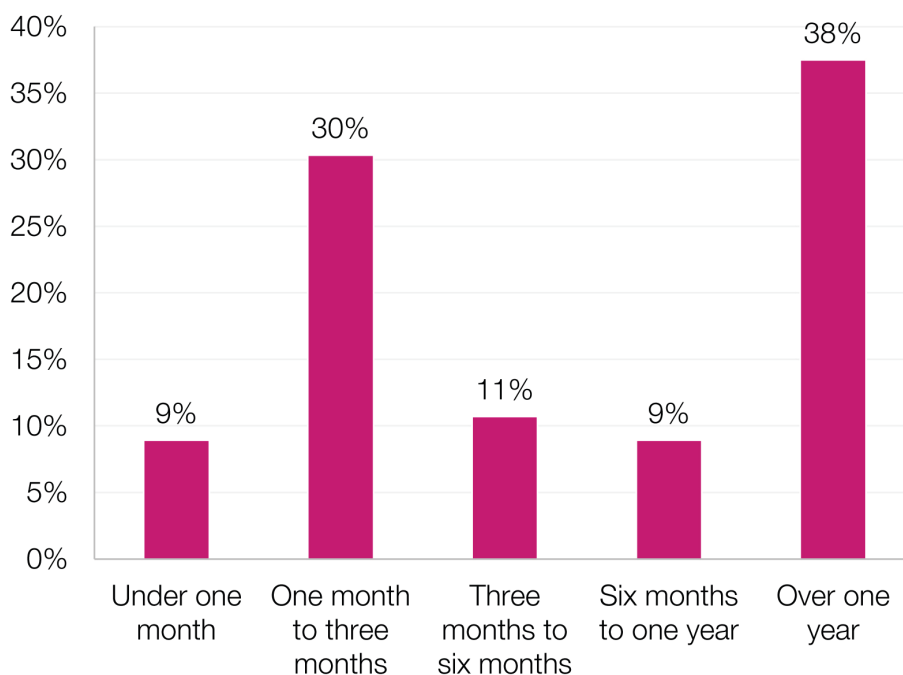
39 per cent of the single parents in the sample had been attending for three months or less, while 38 per cent had attended for over one year.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> National data is taken from ONS 2011 data (gender and age), Family And Children Survey 2008 (2010) (ethnic background), and DWP research (LPO disability in lone parent households (2011)).

<sup>19</sup>Frequencies add to 97% due to missing data entries

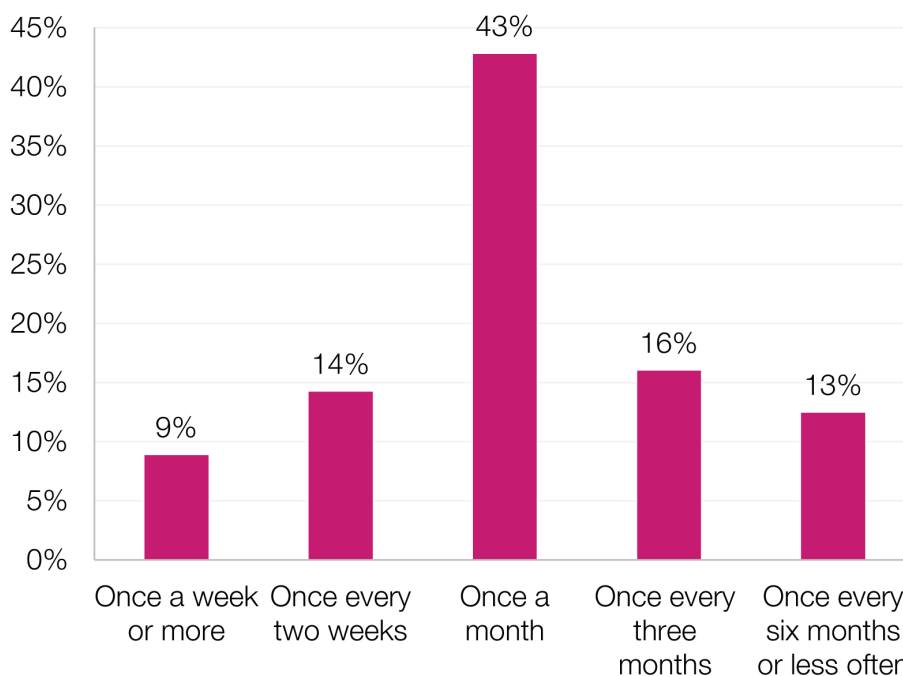


**Figure 7: Group members by length of attendance**



**Figure 8: Group members by frequency of attendance**

The majority of single parents attended groups or spent time with single parents met through groups at least once a month (66 per cent).<sup>20</sup>



This data is representative of wider statistics that we have on single parents who attend our groups. We currently use this data to understand the profile of group members and the outputs of the service, only. As we develop our impact measurement methodology, we may seek to understand correlations between data such as length and frequency of attendance, and achievement of outcomes.

<sup>20</sup> Frequencies add to 95% due to missing data entries.

**“I was totally isolated in a new area with no friends or family. Gingerbread became my ‘family’. I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown and the support held me together.”**



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# **Gingerbread**

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