



## Olivia

*Careful and pared back. Never without love.*

Section	Content
Home and family	Olivia lives with her mum in a small privately rented house in Brae. They have no car and her dad is in prison on the mainland at HMP Grampian, far beyond visiting reach.
What daily life feels like	Life is careful and pared back. The house is often cold, unheated and damp, but Olivia lights it up with fairy lights, drawings and beach walks to collect "magic" stones.
Pressures behind the scenes	After rent, just £112 a week remains for food, heating and basics - in a place where everything costs up to 30% more to have an acceptable standard of living than a UK urban area. Asking for help is difficult, and the stigma around having a loved one in prison adds extra strain.
What helps	Food bank support and help from her grandmother- including home-grown vegetables- provide a vital safety net. Access to the beach.
What this child shows us	Olivia shows the reality of deep poverty in an island context, where high costs, poor housing, distance and the far-reaching impact of the justice system combine- and where modest, steady support still matters greatly.





## George

*Doing everything right. Still not getting ahead.*

Section	Content
Home and family	George lives in Lerwick with his mum, dad and two older siblings in a private rented home, where bedrooms, beds and toys are all shared.
What daily life feels like	Outwardly the family looks organised and ordinary. Inside, food is stretched, snacks are quietly skipped, and some school "fun days" are avoided because the extras feel too expensive or too exposing.
Pressures behind the scenes	The family's income of around £15,182 a year is eroded by higher local costs. His dad must carefully limit his hours to avoid losing benefits the family cannot do without, while his mum lives with anxiety, depression and very low confidence.
What helps	The Scottish Child Payment (£28.20 a week) and the Shetland Winter Payment (around £300) make a genuine difference. Strong love, quiet sacrifice and food bank support keep the household going. Adult Learning is beginning to rebuild his mum's confidence and sense of possibility- though progress feels fragile, and the impact on benefits remains an uncertainty.
What this child shows us	George shows how poverty, mental health, benefit rules and the cost of living trap families who are doing everything right- creating stability on the surface, but no real security beneath it.





## Freya

*Settled on the surface. Stretched underneath.*

Section	Content
Home and family	Freya lives with her parents and younger sister in a remote, owned home, surrounded by open land, quiet roads and familiar neighbours.
What daily life feels like	Childhood feels mostly settled. She walks to school, knows everyone, and sometimes spends school holidays at her mum's café- drawing and chatting to tourists while her mum works.
Pressures behind the scenes	Two jobs, one car, no wraparound care and costly heating stretch the family thin. On top of no extra money or savings to make repairs to their deteriorating home. Their disposable income is around £22,204 a year, yet living in this part of Shetland can add up to 60% to costs compared with a UK urban area- leaving almost no room for the unexpected.
What helps	Owning their home offers some stability. Collecting driftwood, pallets and cutting peat helps reduce fuel bills. A friendly community, local school and hall events give the girls a sense of connection and belonging.
What this child shows us	Freya shows how rural distance, fuel costs, childcare gaps and poor housing condition can pull families close to the edge- even when they appear settled and are not in any obvious crisis.





## Harry

*Both working. Both trying. Still running to stand still.*

Section	Content
Home and family	Harry lives with his parents and three siblings in a mortgaged family home in a remote part of Shetland, with his granny close by.
What daily life feels like	His childhood feels mostly secure- school, meals and some activities are in place. But every club, trip or extra requires planning, fuel and energy, so opportunities are often rationed and shared between siblings.
Pressures behind the scenes	Both parents work full-time, together earning around £34,736 a year, yet after essentials their disposable income sits below the UK median. High food, fuel and transport costs- and the need for two cars- quietly erode any sense of comfort. They sit just beyond benefit thresholds, with no safety net for unplanned costs.
What helps	A mortgage secured when interest rates were lower, free school meals for children in P1–P5, and daily childcare from his granny all help keep everything ticking and both parents in work.
What this child shows us	Harry shows what "running to stand still" looks like: a hard-working family in a high-cost setting, just beyond benefit thresholds and heavily dependent on informal care to cope.





## Carrie

*Stable from the outside. A different story within.*

Section	Content
Home and family	Carrie is an only child living with her mum and dad in social housing in town, with a secure tenancy and lower rent than the private sector.
What daily life feels like	Her life looks calm and ordered. Bills are met, the weekly shop is manageable, she swims regularly and there is enough stability to plan an annual trip south to visit family.
Pressures behind the scenes	Her dad lives with trauma, alcohol dependency and historic debt built up to "keep up" and cope. When the debt came to light, it reshaped the family's choices and future plans. Managing repayments and worry falls heavily on her mum, who works hard to shield Carrie.
What helps	Social housing, a predictable lower rent and a structured repayment plan put in place with Citizens Advice help contain the financial risk. Her mum's determination and the routines she maintains provide real emotional safety for Carrie.
What this child shows us	Carrie shows that visible financial stability can hide serious emotional and mental health strain- reminding us that inequality and risk sit in family histories as well as in incomes.





## Lewis

*Comfortable today. But responsibility is getting closer.*

Section	Content
Home and family	Lewis lives near town with his parents and older brother. Both parents have steady, skilled jobs- a nurse and a classroom assistant- and extended family live close by.
What daily life feels like	His childhood feels secure and full of opportunity. Activities, decent clothing and healthier food are all affordable, and his parents have the time and energy to support his interests and development.
Pressures behind the scenes	His grandparents, who have cared for his uncle with severe learning disabilities for many years, are ageing and struggling. Lewis's dad- as the nurse in the family and the person others naturally turn to- feels growing pressure that care responsibilities will soon fall to him, and no one yet knows what that will mean for his family.
What helps	A strong family network, some respite and growing community support for his uncle all help. Small steps- like his gran being encouraged to attend a walking group- relieve some strain and give her space to focus on herself.
What this child shows us	Lewis shows that higher income does not remove the weight of care. Intergenerational disability and ageing parents shape choices and anxiety even in comparatively comfortable households.





## Lottie

*Well-supported. Until the people who supported her weren't there.*

Section	Content
Home and family	Lottie lives with her parents and older sister in a comfortable home near town. Her parents run their own business and, after tax and mortgage payments, have a disposable income of nearly £48,042 a year.
What daily life feels like	Her life feels busy, secure and full of opportunity. Activities, good housing and planned trips are normal- a family well-placed to absorb rising costs and weather the unexpected.
Pressures behind the scenes	Her great-grandfather, Lowrie, now struggles alone on a remote island, in an ageing, hard-to-heat home with the nearest shop and GP around 30 minutes away. His decline meant the only realistic solution was for Lottie's granny to move back to care for him- separating her from her grandchildren, her friends and the community she had rebuilt for herself.
What helps	For years, her granny's childcare from the end of maternity leave made full-time work possible and helped the business grow- and that foundation still underpins the family's stability. Business income and home ownership now provide flexibility as responsibilities shift and distances grow.
What this child shows us	Lottie shows how caring for older generations in remote places can reshape even comfortable family lives- exposing the fragility of informal childcare and the hidden costs of distance, at every income level.

