

Name and address withheld

05 April 2024

Re Submission to Inquiry into financial services regulatory framework in relation to financial abuse

I write to you to bring your attention to my lived experiences of financial abuse. I am aware that some of these experiences fall outside the terms of reference of this inquiry and would urge you to find ways to expand the terms of reference outside of 'financial services regulatory frameworks' and encompass the ways government institutions are used to financially control.

I left a high control (cult) Christian family and community aged 19. I was then cut off from all financial, emotional support. I was studying, but unable to access Centrelink benefits due to the income of my parent, my mother. She withheld financial support from me, for leaving our religious community and behaving as a 'worldly' person. I was also LGBTIQA identifying, which further compounded her reason for cutting me off, which was considered a grave 'sin'.

You will be aware that you are dependent on your guardians until you're 22 currently under Centrelink, and unless you are declared 'independent' you cannot access Centrelink benefits as an individual. I was unable to get my mother to admit that she was not financially supporting me, and she would tell anyone who asked (including the Centrelink administrators) that she was supporting me. She was not.

In order to be called 'independent' by Centrelink, I had to have an independent expert, such as a councillor sign off that I was not being supported. Due to the nature of the community I came from (a cult essentially) I did not trust outsiders, which meant there was no way I was speaking with a councillor or telling anyone what my financial circumstances were.

I spent the final 2 years of my study living in extreme poverty, eating from foodbanks and living in housing that was insecure. I lived in flats with no furniture, studying in libraries and hallways at university so that I did not have to pay for electricity or heating. At times I weighed 55kg (10kg underweight) due to being unable to afford nutritional food. I worked 2 jobs and studied full time. I could not afford to buy the medication for depression (later I realised it was actually CPTSD not depression) and was suicidal for most of my last years of study.

After a time, I was able to convince my mother to admit to Centrelink that she had excommunicated me, and a Centrelink employee helped me get a stat dec to that effect. It took approximately 18 months from the time I was cut off, to the time I was able to be called 'independent' by Centrelink.

I urge you to incorporate systems abuse like this into the review. I urge you to consider the ways that young people and LGBTIQA people are financially abused by their family and how government policies about the age of 'independence' do not work for deliberately marginalised people. I also urge you to consider the ways that women abuse and control their

children financially. It is not simply a men-abusing-women situation. It's also women controlling and harming children/young people financially.

Years later I realised that my mother had also added herself as a signatory to my bank account when it was set up (when I was a minor) and had never been removed as a signatory. She had been able to access that bank account and see my balance (which was always very low, so she knew how much poverty I was living in). There were no alerts about who had access to that account online, and no one in a branch ever mentioned that someone else had the ability to see my account balance. There should be a check by banks regularly that the account holder KNOWS who can access their account.

<Name withheld>