

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE ENQUIRY ON YOUTH ALLOWANCE

I am writing to the Senate Enquiry to highlight the issues that my family is experiencing with the current criteria for Youth Allowance for students wishing to participate in further education. Many other families across Australia are also dealing with this issue, and will be facing financial hardship while trying to ensure that their children are able to attend University or other forms of further education.

While under the current system, there are higher income limits for children who are assessed on their parents incomes, while others classed as **outer regional, regional or remote** will qualify if their parents earn less than \$150,000, or their children may qualify if they earn the amount of approx \$20,000, in an 18 month period since leaving school, **THEN, there are the people caught in the middle, like my daughter.**

We live in Busselton WA, approx 225km from Perth, we are classed as **inner regional**, using the **Standard Geographical Classification (AGSC)** (which was never designed to be used to decide whether rural based students should qualify for Govt assistance). My child plans to Study for a Bachelor of Science (Anatomical science) and hopes this will lead to entry into medicine (I believe we have a shortage of doctors in Australia). This course is not available at Bunbury (50km away) where there is a campus of Edith Cowan University, **so she must relocate to Perth to study.**

The only option for our child is to achieve independent status, however, once again this is made incredibly hard for rural students. She must average 30 hours work per week over an 18 month period. Then she would be able to claim Youth Allowance 2 years after she has completed High School. This has now been clarified by Centrelink and reads as :- *The hours that you work each week can be averaged over periods of no more than 13 weeks (for example, you will meet the independence criterion if you have worked at least 390 hours in each of six periods of 13 weeks).* It is difficult to find work in rural communities, these jobs are frequently seasonal jobs, or in our town, tourism based. This system is far too rigid for children trying to qualify for Youth allowance so they can attend university. The averaging applied would make it impossible for some doing seasonal, hospitality, crop or vineyard work. Because of the peaks and troughs in hours in these jobs they are left for students to do as most people want regular hours and regular income. These students are filling a major gap in the employment market and are being disadvantaged.

My child holds down 2 part time jobs, one only became available when another worker left that job to attend further education in the city. While she is currently close to averaging over 30 hours per week, this does not tally with what the Govt requirements are.

If my child could live at home and attend the university in Bunbury, which is 50km away, we could manage, **this is not an option. She has to relocate to Perth**, will not be eligible for any allowance and will be treated the same as a student who will be living in the metropolitan area, who can live in the family home, without the stress or the cost of having to find alternative accommodation. How can our Government, who offer support, health care and allowances to refugees, both legal and illegal, not support the children of Taxpaying Australians to gain a higher education and fill voids in occupations that there are shortages in.

In passing the current Youth allowance legislation, the current government ignored the recommendations of a previous senate enquiry which *stated "that all students who need to relocate to attend the university that offers the course of their choice should automatically receive the youth allowance.*

There are many families trying to work their way through the realisation that helping their child attend university is going to create financial hardship for their whole family. We have three children, in our case, one wishes to attend university at this stage. I have heard of families relocating to the city so their children can attend or trying to work out which one of their children they can support through this process. How sad is that!

Rural students face so many other hurdles that students in the major cities would never consider. Rural students have fewer choices in subject selections and teaching staff in specialist areas are harder to obtain. Many have to do required subjects via distance education. Extra courses, extension work, revision courses, subject relevant excursions are all harder to source AND this is before most of the students even get to university. Let's not make it even harder for them to achieve their goals.

I sent a submission to the previous enquiry, I attended meetings with our local MP, I spoke to the media in the hope that people would realise that our youth should be encouraged to pursue their ambitions. I never imagined that the Australian Government and the Australian public would ever allow the current legislation to pass through parliament and disadvantage children in such a way.

For my family, we are trying to work out how we will cope. We implore you to listen to the people out there who this will hurt the most. If my daughter is able to follow her dream of doing medicine, and has to complete her Bachelor of Science first, that is a long time at university, at 18 years of age, and independent age being 22, that is 4 years of support. What about our 15 year old, what happens should he wish to attend university as well? If like me, people start looking at ways to add to their income and take on extra hours and extra jobs, there will be less part-time jobs available. This will affect rural areas which often have higher unemployment rates.

Our only hope is for this current Senate Enquiry to support our Youth in their endeavours to educate themselves further. It is essential for our country to continue to grow and prosper, these young adults are our future. Please ensure that the recommendations from the previous senate enquiry are reviewed and implemented. Alternatively, allow children to average their income over 18 months using common sense, not a rule that will ensure that very few people can qualify. These children are the victims of a cost cutting exercise. What price do you put on the cost of youth being supported to attend higher education?? Look at the job shortages for skilled workers, our Youth need to be supported if our country is to continue to flourish.

If the government wishes to achieve their aim of 40% of young adults having attended university, then let's start supporting their dreams and goals. Let's support all the Youth who are hampered by this system. **We need to ensure that the children who finished high school in 2009 and 2010 are covered by any changes to the Youth Allowance that will make it fair and equitable to qualify.** There is a danger that changes to legislation will only apply to children who finish school in 2011 and onwards. That would mean that students who finished in 2009 and 2010 would be ignored, this can't happen.

There are children all over Australia who this issue is affecting, if you refer to the **Standard Geographical Classification** you will see many areas across all states are impinged on. I am sure that many of your staff come from or have family in country areas and will be able to see what a major impact this will have on these children. Please look at the big picture, Country children usually return to country areas. How much money is the Government spending on employing professionals from outside of Australia who need to be retrained to our standards and qualifications, to fill specialist vacancies in rural Australia? Let's work at supporting our rural students so in the long term some of the rural shortages of skilled workers may be filled.

In closing, please consider this scenario:- you live 225km from the university that offers the course of choice to your child; both you and your partner work (earning a reasonable wage, but you're an average middle class Australian); you still have a child in high school; the child in high school travels to Perth regularly to complete in elite sport (another expense); you don't have family in Perth that your child can live with when she relocates and she will be treated the same way to qualify for the Youth Allowance as someone who lives 10 minutes away from the university. Doesn't seem fair does it? That is what 1000's of Australian families are facing, please help these students.

Regards

Di Riley

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