

22 November 2010

To Whom It May Concern

I am writing to complain about the ridiculous system of Youth Allowance that you currently have in place, and the difficulties that I, and I'm certain other people, have faced in attempting to become independent.

When I finished school in 2008 I was under the impression that if I made \$19,532 in a period of 18 months over two years I was then classified as independent and could therefore receive Centrelink while studying. As a result I began university in 2009, and have struggled to keep up with my full-time course load, which is approximately 40 hours/week, while working enough casual hours, usually 25 hours/week, so that I could earn enough money to become independent.

I then became aware of the numerous changes that were made in relation to Youth Allowance and becoming independent, with the exception of a clause for 2008 school leavers who were still able to become independent on the basis of how much money they had earned upon finishing school.

I recently looked at my payslips, with the hope that I had made the \$19,532 in 18 months, and realised that I have earned \$21,300 in 15 months. This led me to believe that I was then able to become independent and finally receive some sort of assistance from Centrelink. Upon talking to Centrelink they informed me that not only did my claim have to be in by June 30, 2010, but that the exception for 2008 school leavers was only for those students who had taken a gap year in 2009 and who had "worked really hard" to earn the money. So I am writing this letter to ask why it is that those students who "worked really hard" while not studying are able to receive Centrelink support, but for other students who not only studied full time, but also found employment and "worked really hard" to earn the money in the hope of eventually receiving some sort of support, are still the ones who are missing out.

After speaking to Centrelink I have found that there is no possible way for me to become independent from my parents until I turn 23, at which stage I will then be finished my studies and will no longer need any assistance. I am wondering how it is that I am still not considered independent, despite being an adult who is 19 years of age, having lived out of home since the beginning of the year, and receiving no support from my parents, but yet my financial status is still based on their income, which is above the threshold for me to receive Youth Allowance. I moved out of home as I often have to work until midnight, and then begin work or university at 8.30-9 the next morning, and so I no longer had the time or the energy to travel back to my parent's house, which is 42 kilometres away. I also could not afford the fuel anymore, and felt that it was to exhausting to be driving to my university or work each day, and there is very little public transport that is available for me to take. I am also unable to work the average of 30 hours/week for a period of 18 months to become independent, as it would be impossible for me to keep up with my university studies.

Not being able to receive Centrelink is putting me in an even more difficult position next year, when I will be working full-time for work placement for four months, whilst still doing full-time study. I am now left wondering how I will be able to support myself for the four months while I will have virtually no time for part-time work, which is the only source of income that

I receive. I have looked into Scholarships, and although there are a few Scholarships that I can apply for, I have noticed time and time again that many Scholarships are purely for those people who are already receiving Centrelink, which is the same for Rent Assistance which I still cannot receive because once again, that is only for people who are already on Centrelink.

For a government that encourages its many school leavers to continue on with their education by studying at university, you do not make it very easy for people to do so. I am now left with two years of full-time study to complete, and 980 hours of work placement to do, in which the only income I will be receiving will be from my own part-time work, which already makes it very difficult for me to keep up with my studies. I would encourage you to take a good look at your criteria for Youth Allowance and the Independence Test, as I believe that it needs a serious review, not only for my benefit but for the many others who are in the same position. After continually working hard for two years in every spare moment that I have had, I am now left wondering what it was all for.

Yours sincerely

Camilla Berger