

SOCIAL SECURITY AMENDMENT (INCOME SUPPORT FOR REGIONAL STUDENTS) BILL 2010

Our daughter left school in October 2009 at the end of her HSC year. She gained a 12 month traineeship in Aged Care and began work in December 2009. As the end of her traineeship is approaching she has been rewarded with a year of extraordinary personal development and experience and neither she nor ourselves would wish to change any of it.

Our daughter also gained acceptance into university which she deferred for one year to allow for the completion of her traineeship. This month we received a letter from the university offering her the opportunity to take up her offer of a place at university in 2011, if she declines this offer will lapse. The university is located approximately 5 hours drive or 400 kms from where we live.

We were disappointed and perplexed following an interview at Centrelink to discover she will not be eligible for Youth Allowance. As our daughter left school in October, beginning fulltime work (30 hours per week minimum) in December and needing to begin university in February there is not time to accumulate 18 months work.

Our hopes were raised when we discovered our daughter may be able to qualify as a rural student living in a remote, outer regional area. We live in a town in NSW which is well serviced and provides a great lifestyle but could not be considered more than a small rural centre, we are situated more than 100kms from our nearest capital city which was enough to qualify for additional credits on completion of the HSC to help gain tertiary entrance, however, according to the maps and guidelines used for Youth Allowance we are classified as inner regional, this combined with the fact that once again she would need to have left school for 18 months means that she will not be eligible on this point either.

Our question is: How can you leave school in October of any year, only be able to defer university entrance for 12 months, be ready to begin University in February, yet fit 18 months of either work, or allow for a period of 18 months since leaving school, into this time period, it is not possible. Surely we will not be the only family to now be faced with the dilemma of wanting to provide every opportunity for young people to follow their dreams yet be faced with the extra pressure placed on families financially.

Our daughter has been in various forms of employment since her first casual work position at the age of 15 years, she has spent time in the hospitality industry, is a qualified pool lifeguard and Austswim teacher and still works in these positions casually, and has now completed Certificate III in Aged Care. The field of study our daughter has chosen is Nursing. This profession is indeed in need of more skilled personnel. It is our hope that she not only attends Bathurst University to obtain this degree, but goes on to have a caring and professional career. The guidelines as set out by the criteria for Youth Allowance as they presently exist do nothing to bring this to fruition.

The changes to Youth Allowance as we understood them were to create a fairer system with more assistance for more young people to follow their dreams, however we feel the changes exempt young people rather than help. We would strongly urge that the criteria for independent Youth Allowance be reviewed.

Allan & Colleen Hood