

YOUTH ALLOWANCE

The recent changes to the granting of Youth Allowance have had a severe impact on our family.

We live in the electorate of Forrest in WA but in an area described as an Inner Regional Zone. We are two and a half hours south of Perth which is where my daughter has enrolled to study Drama and Performance at the Edith Cowan University. This course is not offered at the university in Bunbury.

Our other two children attended university in Perth having qualified as Independent by working hard in summer holidays with two or three jobs. One did not have a gap year but worked during his first two semesters as well as the two summer breaks. The second took six months off and earned her independence then and in the two summer breaks.

Our third child has worked solidly for eight months and has gone to Europe to travel. She still could qualify as Independent under the old rules if she works hard upon her return. Something which she is fully prepared to do.

She will not, however, have any chance of qualifying under the inner regional rules. She will not fulfil the requirement of the specific hours worked per week and the university is not prepared to accept another request for deferment.

When our eldest child turned 16 Centrelink suggested we apply for Youth Allowance for him rather than Family Tax Benefit (I believe this was a broad mail out to all parents of 16 year olds). At the time, I thought it was worth setting up so it could flow on to his tertiary years. Because we run a partnership and my husband is self employed, we had to complete an Assets Test and a Family Actual Means Test.

I would encourage you to obtain a copy of these documents and just see what is involved in completing them. It took me three days to gather together the information required and still we were declined. I cannot contemplate completing those forms again. They are prejudiced against a family who saves what they earn and also encourages their children to do the same. A Centrelink staff member told me that had we spent what we earned instead of saving it, we would have had a better chance.

It upsets me to think that if only my daughter could obtain a minimum payment of \$25-00 per week then at least she could benefit from the start up scholarships and ongoing scholarships to help her set up home and survive in Perth.

It has been calculated that it costs approximately \$10,000-00 to relocate a student to Perth to study. We have always encouraged our children to work during their degrees to give them a sense of independence and to set up a good work ethic. It is not always possible for them to have the time for that. Our second child studies physiotherapy and in second year particularly her contact time was so great and the course so difficult that she needed

all the non contact time to study. We have had to supplement the income of both our first two children and expect that we will have no choice next year with our third.

To do so for four years is something we are not sure we can commit to without some form of Government assistance.

We have many friends and family in areas classified as Outer Regional and find it unbelievable that our costs are not thought of as being equal to those of our family and friends in those outer zones. No-one can honestly claim that a student moving to Perth from Margaret River suffers any more hardship than one from Capel - the notion is ludicrous.

My daughter who is soon to return from Europe may have to live with her grandparents in an outer regional area upon her return, before going to university to qualify. This ruling will only encourage normally honest folk to come up with innovative ideas to even up the game.

I urge you to rule that all regional student fall under the previous rules to qualify for independence. That regional students of Australia be dealt with in an equal and fair manner and that the discrimination shown to the country folk of Australia be put to rest once and for all.