

## **SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS.**

As parents of teenage children living in regional Australia we feel changes made to the eligibility criteria for Independent Youth Allowance significantly disadvantage our children.

We live within the township of Mudgee in New South Wales. Until five years ago we lived about 40 kilometres from Mudgee on a grazing property managed by my husband. Our family's income has relatively stayed the same. Our two children are the same children who lived with us on the farm and they go to the same high school they would have attended if we still lived "out of town". What has changed is their access to tertiary education. Without the financial assistance available through Independent Youth Allowance it is unlikely my children and many others in regional areas will be able to afford tertiary education. If we still lived out of town my children would be able to meet the criteria simply by residing on one side of a boundary line that delineates regional areas from remote and outer remote areas.

Why should special consideration be given to students from regional and rural Australia? Because for these students to pursue a tertiary education, they must leave home and relocate. This isn't a choice - it is a necessity. City children can continue to live at home and still attend university. This is not an option for my children - to attend university they will need to leave home and relocate many hundreds of kilometres away from home. With this relocation comes the added expense of relocation and accommodation not to mention living expenses. As parents we obviously expect to shoulder as much of these costs as possible. As middle class wage earners we are not going to be able to afford all the costs.

My children work part-time now and will need to continue to work to pursue their tertiary educations but they will not be able to work the hours needed to meet the current criteria for independence. It will be impossible for them to find 30 hours a week work for an 18 month period in a town the size of Mudgee. The unreasonableness of this is only accentuated when you consider that a school friend of one of my children who attends the same school, whose family has the same income as ours will be eligible for the Independent Youth Allowance with only 15 hours work a week because she lives only a few kilometres from the town outskirts but happens to live on one side of the "dividing line". Another child with identical circumstances who happened to live on the other side of the "dividing line" (directly across the road) would not be eligible. How is this fair?

The changes made to Independent Youth Allowance has severely disadvantaged rural school leavers and is denying them access to tertiary education and it is unfair students should be disadvantaged simply because of where they live. These kids are already disadvantaged because they live in regional areas. The access to facilities; sporting, educational, cultural and medical which people in the city take for granted is non-existent in many regional areas and it is only through the persistence and sacrifice of parents both financially and time wise that some regional children experience or access these things.

My daughter will complete her High School Certificate in 2011. She wishes to pursue a career in medicine. It is not possible for her to work 30 hours a week for 18 months in order to be eligible for Independent Youth Allowance. University courses can only be deferred for 1 year, which is why lots of students in the past have taken a “gap” year. It will also be impossible for her to find work for 30 hours a week in a country town like Mudgee. Without access to Independent Youth Allowance, she may not be able to pursue this education. As parents we will give her every help we can but we may not be able to meet the costs of living – this is even before HECS fees. The irony of the situation is we are so short of doctors here in the bush but the government is not prepared to help my daughter and many more like her get the education needed to bring back these skills to the bush. The current wait for a doctor’s appointment in Mudgee can be any time up to six weeks and if I wanted to see the doctor of my choice, the wait could be even longer. There is also a shortage of teachers and many other professionals in regional areas. Surely it makes sense to educate rural children in the hope they will bring those skills back to the regional areas.

We would ask that the committee consider the circumstances of regional students and the disadvantage the changes to the eligibility criteria for Independent Youth Allowance have placed children like my son and daughter under. The future of our country lies in the hands of today’s young people and we are systematically denying many wonderful young people a tertiary education simply because of where they live.

Robyn and David Harris