

To whom it may concern,

I am 47 years old with 6 children, four over the age of 21 and two girls living with me aged 12 and 9. When my husband left us suddenly twenty months ago I was emotionally destroyed. I physically shook for about 4 months and getting out of bed every day to get the girls off to school, to do household chores and take care of my responsibilities, took every ounce of energy and will power I could find. My daughters had too many tummy aches to count and needed lots of cuddles and reassurance. Each of them were sent home from school feeling "sick" for many many months. The trauma was so great that I do not remember many details of the first 6 months or so. It has taken me, struggling through every single day of the last two and a half years, to finally realise that the man that I married forever is not coming home.

From what I understand, with the proposed changes, the government would expect me to find work after 6 weeks!!! For me that would have been totally impossible. How do you expect women who have just had their lives destroyed to just pick themselves up, dust off, take an "I don't care" attitude and find some non-existent job during school hours.?

I am also very concerned about women leaving a domestic violence situations. The emotional trauma of giving up the man you love to save you and your children's lives is not the best place to start looking for work. I expect that the difficulties imposed on families by Centrelink will mean many women will stay in violent and abusive relationships because they have no other option.

Actually, I think encouraging single mothers work part time is quite a good idea and every one I know does have a job except me but I am just finishing study. I fully intend to look for work next year because I am now emotionally ready and the fact that living on a pension is impossible anyway. I am constantly ending the final week of each fortnight living off my credit card because there is no money left for fuel and food.

I am very scared that single mothers will be worse off with the new changes. I do not understand how you can contemplate reducing the amount of money that women with children will have to live off. Will forcing them out into low paid casual work, paying for childcare and transport while still trying to manage the responsibilities of a family on their own fix anything? Children will be left alone at home, meals will become fast food and mothers will be stressed out.

Rather than forcing women to find work, why not try encouraging them, make it financially worthwhile, promote education and training programs. I am very grateful for the assistance with the TAFE course I am about to complete and it will give me the qualification to find a job.

Or perhaps the real reason for these changes is to boost the underclass. Uneducated, low skilled workers forced to work for pathetic wages. It has happened quietly in the USA for years, and now it seems our government is doing all in its power to replicate their disastrous social problems. It is pretty blatantly obvious.

I believe the role of mother is the most important job on this planet. It beats politics any day. Children need love and guidance 24 hours a day. I have always been home for my children after school because I think that this is the most important time of the day where they can leave the hustle and bustle of school behind and feel secure with a hug from Mum and a plate of pancakes. If the government can create jobs that offer 9.30 to 3pm and the Parenting Payment is left to be available to all single parents then perhaps this program may work. If not - you will create more despair in this already painful world.

Jeannete Martin