

The Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Reference Committee
PO BOX 6100
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600



Dear Sir/Madam

I am a working parent of an 18 year old daughter who has been unfairly caught in the 'gap year debacle' that is threatening to affect her ability to study at university. I am writing to strongly urge the Rudd Government to re-think its decision to make changes to the criteria for qualifying for the Youth Allowance. When my daughter made her decision to defer her studies she was unaware of any changes that may be made by the Rudd Government and she had intended to work for the year, earn the required \$19000 and then start her studies in 2010.

Her life and career prospects are now in disarray and I have real concern for her future and her continuing state of mind.

Over her entire life I have encouraged her to work hard, maintain good study habits, contribute actively to society and to have an achievable goal. I am very proud to say that my daughter exceeded all my expectations gaining a scholarship for academic excellence, earning citizenship prizes and working as a prefect at her school and as a volunteer life saver. Her final TER score was higher than she had hoped due to her diligence and she was elated to the point of tears at the news that she had gained her place at university taking her to the next step in achieving her goal of a career in communications. I shared her joy and encouraged her to take a gap year as I knew that supporting her through her studies would be beyond my means.

To earn her money she now works three jobs but still struggles to get enough hours to support herself. As a casual worker, she often has weeks where she works twice as much as others and some not at all. Despite many letters and resumes and a constant search for full time work she has been unable to secure anything other than the 3 part time positions. We live in a regional centre where work is hard to find, especially since the economic downturn has flooded the market with experienced workers.

I have struggled to keep her from despair as she constantly worries about where her future lies. She has very real and well-founded fears that she will not be able to complete her much dreamt of university degree and when she came home in tears a week ago I asked her what was wrong. She explained to me that she had just heard the story of an acquaintance, the same age as her, who dropped out of school after causing her mother much heartache with bad behaviour and very poor work ethic. This girl then worked sporadically in part time jobs being sacked by most of her employers. She is now pregnant and living on welfare. This same girl is also building a house with assistance

from the first home buyer's grant. My daughter wanted to know why this girl is getting government assistance at every turn and will probably continue to receive such assistance for her entire life due to her lack of training and 'welfare mindset' whereas my daughter can not even get a few years of assistance while she trains to work in a skilled workforce and pay tax for the rest of her life. She can't live at home so that I can support her and must move to Perth because that is where her course is offered. This will be at great personal expense to both her and myself. I could not give her an answer and I am extremely angry with a government that clearly treats my daughter with contempt.

I will continue to encourage my daughter not to give up but I have real concerns that she will wake up to the fact that the Rudd Government doesn't value people like her and will continue to reward the welfare mentality that drains our society of a sense of fair play while financing the interests of those who choose not to help themselves.

Education is one of the most important vehicles to ensuring a progressive and healthy society and yet this government is perpetuating a situation that makes education available only to those who can afford it or who are in close enough proximity to access it. Once again rural or remote communities are treated as a poor relation to those in the city who have access to services not offered equitably.

My daughter has always been encouraged to be an active and contributing member of society but she is now wondering why she should bother when obviously she can get a lot more money by following in the footsteps of those who don't. All she needs is four years of support and she can then go on to a career that will be personally satisfying and lead to a lifetime of tax income for this government. As it stands, she would be better off to have several children without a partner, have no career and no ambition other than to fleece this government and subsequent governments, of as many welfare handouts as possible. It doesn't take a degree in Mathematics to work out which is the better investment in government funds.

My daughter's fragile self-esteem is hanging by a thread and I am also despairing at how to answer her questions about the inequity of this situation. I don't have the answers because I don't feel as though I should be defending a government that will change the rules mid year thus adversely affecting those students who made a decision in good faith based on the information that was available at the time.

At the very least, the decision should be reversed for those in her situation and reviewed for those who will find this ruling unfairly disadvantages students in rural and remote areas. I am disgusted at the way this government treats people like my daughter and feel it is about time the rules were changed to reward hard work. Having worked my whole life without any baby bonus, paid maternity leave, first home owners scheme or welfare assistance of any kind I am very angry indeed that this situation exists and will be voting accordingly in the next election.

Sincerely
Anne Williams

Anne Williams

15 July 2009