

From:
To:
Subject: RE: Hansard Corrections - Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (2014 Budget Measures Nos. 1 and 2) Bills 2014
Date: Tuesday, 26 August 2014 5:12:14 PM
Attachments:

Hello Jeanette,

Thank you, we are happy with the transcript.

I undertook two questions on notice,

The first from Senator Rachael Siewert was what percentage of single mothers are aged under 30. The answer is a quite significant proportion and I have provided a link below from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 as evidence for the figures aged under 35.

Most mothers, partnered and single are aged between 35 and 44 years. Only 10% of single mothers are aged 15-24, but 39% of all mothers aged up to 24 are single mothers. 43% of single mothers are aged under 35. I'm sorry not to find the exact figures for under 30 but obviously this could still be at least as many as one third of all single mothers.

<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/F4B15709EC89CB1ECA25732C002079B2?opendocument#DEMOGRAPHIC%20CHARACTERISTICS>

The second from Senator Claire Moore was to provide some more of the stories we have been hearing from members seeking our support. Of course while we receive many hundreds of calls a year and each would show the effects of the barriers to work our social services and other systems create here are a few that will be directly and negatively impacted these budget measures. I haven't written up the story I narrated which is in the transcript but I am happy to do so.

Sarah* is mother to two boys who are both in primary school. Her oldest boy is prone to panic attacks and has been diagnosed with PTSD and severe anxiety disorder as a result of the family violence he witnessed and experienced at the hands of his abusive father. Because of this, Sarah has to be there to drop her son off at school in the morning and pick him up in the afternoon.

For her own and her children's safety Sarah had to move. She doesn't know many people in the community where she is now living and has no family support to rely on. Her ex-husband pays no child support.

Sarah would love nothing more than to find part time work and is doing everything she think of can to keep her skills up, including participating in volunteer work. She's recently applied for a part-time position at her local Office Works and again at Bunnings, but as all employees must commit to one night or weekend shift a week Sarah had to withdraw her applications. Without family support it is impossible for Sarah to work nights or weekends and her children are too young to leave on their own, even without accounting for the medical condition of her son.

Another single mother, Lena*, lives in regional Victoria and works in the Home Care industry. Lena didn't expect she would ever be parenting alone, but like Sarah, Lena's ex-husband was physically, emotionally and financially violent. Her ex-husband is self employed and has successfully found ways to minimise his income by running his business in his new wife's name, so Lena is lucky if she sees any child support. When she does receive child support it is rarely paid in full.

Lena's daughter is in primary school. There are no before or after school facilities at the school and Lena's job requires her to drive distances up to an hour away from her home. She relies heavily on the support of her elderly father and her friends to drop off and pick up her daughter during the week.

Some mornings Lena gets up at 5:00am to get ready and to get her father's house to drop her daughter off, before driving more than 100 kilometers to see her first client for the day at 8:00am. Lena isn't paid for the hours she is on the road driving between client's houses, but driving these distances is necessary as many of the clients she is responsible for live remotely or outside of the major towns.

She worries because her father recently suffered a stroke, which has impacted his memory and makes it harder for him to help out. The guilt and the anxiety she feels can be overwhelming and Lena worries what will happen if her father has another stroke, or something happens to her daughter and she is too far away to do anything.

She is grateful she has friends who are willing to help out, but relying on her friends requires a reciprocal arrangement, which can be exhausting and challenging. The work is physically and emotionally demanding. By the time she gets home, cooks dinner and helps her daughter with her homework, Lena is exhausted.

Lena wants to work. In fact, Lena has a mortgage to pay and has no choice but to work. To ensure she is able to maintain her hours Lena must take every shift she is offered. Any refusal is likely to lead to the agency penalizing her by withholding work – a fate Lena has seen other Carers suffer.

Without regular shifts Lena wouldn't be able to make the mortgage payments on her tiny house, which is the one security she feels she has managed to ensure for herself and her daughter. Because her hours fluctuate quite significantly however, (and she rarely sees any child support from her daughter's father), budgeting can be a challenge. She's only just managing to keep on top of her mortgage payments and she knows it will only take one thing, such as her car breaking down, or an emergency repair on her house to put Lena in financial crisis. Lena is terrified of what the cuts to government income support will mean for her family.

Karen*, another single mother, recently made the transition to Newstart from Parenting Payment. Karen is studying full-time to complete the final year of her Law degree and she also works one day a week as a medical receptionist.

While she was on PPS Karen's income was too low to affect her payments, but now she is on the lower Newstart payments her allowable earnings have been reduced, compounding her loss even further. On top of this Karen is no longer eligible for the JET Childcare supplement and she is facing the very real prospect of having to give up on her education right when the finish line is right within her sight. Karen knows without her degree she will be stuck in dead-end jobs for the rest of her life, giving her little opportunity to help her kids gain their own financial foothold in the future.

Jennifer* spent 10 years married to the father of her three children – a well respected business man and active member of his community who spent most of their marriage terrorizing Jennifer and her three children behind closed doors. For the past two years Jennifer has been in and out of family court countering her ex-husbands claims she is an unfit mother and fighting to retain custody of her children, who she is desperately trying to protect. She is not eligible for Legal Aid because her ex-husband pre-empted her leaving and deliberately made his own inquiry, knowing this would prevent Jennifer from accessing legal support. Jennifer's husband on the other hand, is well resourced and can afford to hire a good attorney.

Jennifer could not have considered leaving her husband if she wasn't eligible for Parenting Payment and Family Assistance and she is incredibly grateful for the payments she receives from Centrelink. She has every intention of getting back to work once she has dealt with her legal issues, but because she can't afford a lawyer all her spare time is taken up with her Family Law issues and taking on a job now would risk her custody of her children.

All of these women are hardworking women and dedicated mothers who want the best for their kids. Their stories represent common themes CSMC hears from single mother families who are doing everything in their power to keep their heads above water. All of these women want nothing more than to love and protect their kids and give them the best possible start at life.

*All names have been changed and identifying details removed

Kind regards
Kerry



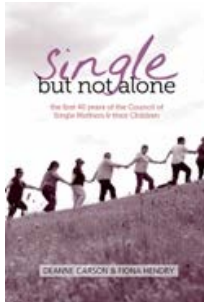
COUNCIL OF
SINGLE MOTHERS
AND THEIR CHILDREN
VICTORIA INC

Ground Floor, 210 Lonsdale St MELBOURNE 3000

P:| (03) 9654 0327

W:| www.csmc.org.au

Single but not alone: the first 40 years of the Council of Single Mothers and their Children



In 1969 a group of 'unmarried mothers' banded together to challenge the systems and social attitudes preventing single women from raising their own children. At a time when women were being forced to give their babies up for adoption and children born out of wedlock had no legal status, these women fought for legitimacy and their right to be mothers and won, forever changing the political and social landscape for single mothers in Australia.

Essential reading for anyone interested in feminist history, the rights of women and social policy reforms, *Single but not alone* tracks the journey of CSMC from grassroots movement to powerful political lobby group and an organisation that has never wavered in its commitment to provide compassionate support for single mothers and their children.

Copies can be purchased through www.trybooking.com/CATE