

i am a sole mother to 4 teenage children. I work from 27 hours per week at 22.42 per hour casual rates. I dont get paid for public holidays, so as much as I look forward to a day off, I know that this will negatively affect my next pay.

My budget prior to the changes on January 1 was tight, since the change that forced me onto the newstart payment (a payment suited for jobseekers rather than families) my budget is impossible. There are more bills than there is income, and that is without going out, drinking, smoking or drugs, that is without the kids having extra curricular activities.

I cannot afford clothing for the kids, my son has had a massive growth spurt and he has to wear school shoes that are too big for him, and clothes that are too small - his uniform I am forced to keep up to date by taking items out of the lost property at school.

We eat by getting items that the supermarkets are throwing out (dumpster diving if you like) as my pay and the benefits that I receive cover ALMOST all of the bills, but even then I am having to juggle bills, pay huge amounts in overdue fees, and work with the financial services departments of the utility companies. Currently I am trying to work out how to pay for my car registration this month.

The stress is constant, night and day, it keeps me from sleeping. I have considered getting a second job, but then I get taxed higher and still lose 40c in the dollar from Centrelink, but at the same time this would give me less time with the kids - one of whom is doing school by distance because she was raped last year (at the age of 14) - so please tell me how I am supposed to help her with her schooling if I am working night and day. Please tell me how I am supposed to clean the house and deal with a real estate agent who doesnt fix anything in my rental property when I am working night and day. Please tell me how I am supposed to sleep or relax when I am working night and day 365 days a year?

I was working in the city and commuting 4 1/2 hours a day until February this year. This job was on a contract that was ending. I was paid more, but I was exhausted and sick all the time as well. When I knew that the contract was coming to an end I started looking for other work. I was offered a job 10 minutes from home and I jumped at the chance. Unfortunately it meant less money and less hours and its casual rates. My old job is now gone completely, the whole department has closed down.

During the time that I was working in the city and away from home for 13 - 14 hours a day, my daughter was raped, for which I blame myself because I wasnt there to protect her, my family was falling apart, and I wasnt there for the kids school appointments, concerts, doctors appointments, or anything else, unless I took time off work. A lot of the time that I took off for these things, court cases, AVO hearings (some against the childrens father), doctors and specialists, I had to take time without pay because I used all of my sick and holiday pay when I get sick in winter (I have respiratory issues which cause regular bouts of pneumonia).

Recently I phoned the department of housing for assistance because trying to make ends meet is getting too much to bear, they advised me that even if my 4 children and myself are living in the car they are unable to help us with assistance because I am working.

For me there is nothing to live for, when I retire I will have none or very little super as I have had to cash it in to pay bills (the first time was to pay bills that my ex husband ran up before he left), I get no child support because of the violent nature of my ex husband - we have had no assistance from him for 10 years, and even when he was supposed to pay he never did, got himself sacked from his job and worked cash in hand and didnt put in tax returns. He even refused to pay \$17 per month for our 4 children!

I feel that what the Government is doing by removing our parenting payments is akin to domestic violence. I have known many sole parents who have had to go bankrupt, have lost their homes, cannot afford to run their cars, and like myself, have no hope for the future once their kids grow up.

I will never have any sort of retirement as I will have to work right up until I either die or get moved into a nursing home (my mother was in a nursing home at 67 - I cant afford to visit her because she is 3 hours drive from my home). What sort of future is that? I see retired people all the time at work who are travelling within australia or abroad, this will not be me, I have always struggled and cannot see that I will ever be able to because I will still have housing costs and utilities after the kids move out. Going by the age that my relatives have lived, and the age that the Government is raising the retirement age to, I will never have the opportunity to retire.

What you have effectively done is take away any freedom that sole parents may have had. At least I was able to pay my bills and eat then, now I cant even do that.

I feel like a second class citizen, not worthy of what others have, all because I married a man who turned out to be a violent alcoholic.

Recently my toaster, microwave and clothes dryer all blew up within a week of each other. I cannot afford to replace any of these items. I was able to get a second hand toaster and microwave from friends, which is where the majority of our furniture comes from, including lounges, beds, mattresses and TV's. I cannot afford to replace items that stop working, even if they are only \$10 or \$20, I just dont have it to spare. I only buy myself a couple of cups of coffee a year with friends, other than that its cups of tea at home with friends because we cant even afford to go out!

I have written to politicians before and I get a standard letter back telling me all of the payments that I am entitled to... then "I hope this is helpful". No, its not helpful, I know what I am entitled to, and I know what I got before the changes were made on January 1. I have a better idea than they ever will have, because I am the one living it, I am the one constantly trying to work out how many loaves of \$1 bread we can buy this week to fill everyone up.

These changes are not an incentive to work, they are an incentive to climb into a hole and stay there. Yes, it is great to show your kids that you are working, but is it really worth this struggle. While working is great, I now cannot afford to live, I cannot get assistance with housing other than the \$162 a fortnight that I get in rent assistance (which is the maximum amount I can get whilst paying \$720 a fortnight in rent)

I think that you assume we are either paying less in rent or have family to look after our kids, or get

massive amounts in Child Support allowing us to survive, or live in share accomodation (not really practical with more than 1 child).

I beg any of you to live on what I get for 6 months and hen you will find out that what you are really doing is killing people physically and emotionally.