

Your full name: Eileen van der Stel



This submission is from: the organisation listed below

Organisation & your position: UnitingCare Burnside, Family & Youth Support

Why are you submitting to the enquiry?: I am a caseworker, working closely with young people (12-19 yrs) who often live independently (due to family circumstances) and go to school. I am witnessing every day their financial struggle. They can't just live from the youth allowance and are not eligible for anything else. How much are your average weekly living costs (or those of a student you know)? How much of this is for accommodation?: The young persons that I support receive ca. \$350.00 a fortnight each (incl rent assistance) and go to high school. They pay \$180.00 rent a fortnight each (excluding bills). Due to family circumstances (domestic violence/abuse by father) they are forced to find accommodation in the private sector as they don't fit in the refuges for the young persons. So there is \$170.00 a fortnight left for everything else: groceries/toiletries (\$120.00), electricity bill (\$15.00), phone bill (\$15.00), transport (\$10.00), school fees/uniform etc (\$10.00).

Are the current student income benefits (Austudy, Abstudy and Youth Allowance) adequate?: No. There is only \$20.00 a fortnight left for clothing, leisure time and unexpected events. Last week the washing machine broke down. It cost \$80.00 just to have it looked at. How does the 'age of independence' impact on the adequacy of student income benefits?: They are young people and have no money to go out with their friends and do the things they should be doing at their age. They are studying really hard and have no time to get a part time job. They do work during summer holidays to have at least some extra money but that only last through half way the year.

How does the 'parental income test threshold' impact on the appropriateness of student income benefits?: Because of the family situation there is no support from their parents and they are not yet eligible for Austudy (under 18 yrs of age).

How does the unavailability of rent assistance for Austudy recipients affect the overall adequacy of Government student income benefits?: N/A

What is the impact of the current student income benefits system on students and their families?: They can only work during the (summer) holidays because otherwise they will lose money on their income. It is not worth it because they then rather choose to use that time for study.

Is the adequacy of student income benefits connected with the increasing cost of higher education? : No. They are now only going to high school. Unsure if they would be able to cope with higher school fees even if they would have a part time job.

How much do students you know work to supplement their study benefits? How does this impact on them, their family and their studies?: It brings a lot of extra stress

because they just don't have any holidays as any other young people. They are often tired because of school and not having time out.

Are student income benefits an important way to ensure access to education?: Sorry I don't really understand this question

Are student income benefits an important way of achieving fairer access to education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds?: No, their circumstances are not fully taken into account.

Any alternative student income support measures that the Australian Government should consider?: Hardship circumstances? Any other comments?: I have been working in this particular field for over 3 years now. The system is not looking after young people from disadvantaged background. The gap between the poor and the rich is increasing every year.