

**The Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600**

Rural and Regional access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities

Dear Ms Radcliffe

Our Son finished year 12 at a Regional/Remote school in 2008 and then applied for his chosen course in Melbourne, he was accepted, and then decided to defer. Our daughter is currently doing year12 VCE.

Two years ago we met with Centrelink and our son's Career Advisor in VCE and were advised he should take a gap year and work to qualify for independent YOUTH ALLOWANCE to assist with living away from home expenses in Melbourne. (Due to the Regional disadvantage for country students)

Proposed Youth allowance changes have hit our family extremely hard. Our son is a third of the way through his gap year working 45 hours a week (doing two jobs) to be eligible for Independent Youth Allowance and the new changes make it impossible for him to qualify.

Answers regarding Youth Allowance vary depending on who you talk to at Centrelink and the DEEWR calculator shows we can't qualify because of previous two years income. The consequences of these changes suggest we will not qualify under the new arrangements.

Although our Family income for 2009/10 will be down 40% due to the economic climate we don't appear to be able to access Youth Allowance for him because of retrospective Centrelink rules.

These are the immediate issues that we are facing now;

- 1. To go heavily into further debt to allow our son to gain a Tertiary education**
- 2. To cancel his University placement altogether**

FURTHER ISSUES

- Civil engineering course **not offered** locally (Warrnambool University) **so he must relocate!**
- Universities need to have residential places submitted now, but his plans are in disarray
- After the University accepted the deferral he has been working two jobs to gain the recommended \$ value to qualify for Independent Youth Allowance
- Relocation expenses are between ***\$15,000 & \$20,000 P.A. over and above** that of a student that goes to a local university and can stay at home with their family. (Residential University fees, food, public transport)
- ***This is excluding** books, amenity fees, university fees and the ultimate HECS debt
- Our son will have to find extra work to assist in covering expenses even though the University recommends study hours (2-3 times) amount over & above contact of hours (25 lecture hours)
- Where will he be able to find the time to adequately study, retain good marks and cover necessary employment as well?
- This limits the trained professionals that will ultimately come back to the regional areas and puts strain an added strain on the bush!

Thank-you for giving our information due consideration,
Yours sincerely, Carolyn & Peter Jennings

7th August 2009
Carolyn & Peter Jennings