

Hi, my name is Peta Miller. I am a first year Psychology student, I work 1 day a week, and I'm the single Mum of a 2 year old boy.

When I first met my ex partner I owned my own business. When I fell pregnant we both decided I should sell my business so that I could stay at home and look after the baby. We then separated 5 months after he was born.

I didn't have much choice than to go on welfare while I stayed home and looked after my young baby. He's now 2 so I'm up and ready to get going again. I'm not lazy and I'm not stupid.

But I left home and school when I was 14. So, although I once owned my own business, I don't have any formal qualifications or training. I'm now unable to get myself a decent job. I was also left with no money when the relationship ended, thus I'm no longer in a financial position to open another business. So, I intend to get myself an education.

I did a fair bit of work to update my skills so that I could sit the STAT test, and when I was accepted at Murdoch I felt really proud of what I'd achieved.

I'd also been assured by Centrelink at the very beginning of the year that I was eligible for JET, so I felt really confident that everything was going to be O.K, and I was really optimistic about the future.

However, 5 weeks into my study I received a letter from Centrelink saying they'd made a mistake and that I wasn't in fact eligible for JET, because the entire length of my course is longer than 12 months in duration.

I'd been under the impression I was being covered by JET, and after receiving this letter, I was hit with a bill of over \$500 from my childcare provider for that 5 week period.

I'm now paying \$110 per week for childcare and I'm facing such financial difficulty as a result of these new changes to JET, that I'm facing the very real prospect of having to quit study.

Centerlink's Parenting Payments provide just enough each week to scrape by on the bare necessities. A bill of \$110 a week for childcare, while I undergo a 75% study load, is financially impossible to manage.

Because my whole degree would take longer than a year to complete, I don't even get my first year covered by JET.

If your entire course duration is longer than a year you get absolutely no

help from JET whatsoever.

Not even the equivalent year's worth of assistance that those doing a low skilled course of a year or less are receiving.

This legislation is extremely discriminatory. Especially against women.

What it says to me is that the government will support me, a single Mum, as long as I train to do something menial, like answer telephones for a living. But they'll punish me, by taking away any support, and thereby making it impossible to survive, if I aspire to anything better in my life.

Single Mum's and our already vulnerable children are the sacrificial lambs- we're only being offered financial support if we retrain at a very, very low level... so we're being groomed for only one future.... that of filling up all the low paid, part time and casual positions, down the very bottom end of the labour market.

JET childcare assistance has been available to single Mum's for 10 years to enable them to get an education. This government has just ripped that away from us.

Perversely- they've also introduced their "welfare to work" policies. So, at the same time as they are pushing us to get into the workforce, they've removed the very financial assistance we absolutely need to meet such expectations.

We're being held up as being bludgers- lazy and stupid.

Forcing us out of a University education, by financially excluding us, is just going to perpetuate this myth... Very conveniently it seems, for the government.

But we're intelligent women. We're more motivated, driven, and hard working than most people. We've got a hell of a lot more at stake.

And we're out there doing the right thing!

We're working, studying and have the responsibility of raising children and running a household on our own.

I travel 3 hours a day just to get here and back on top of that, so I'm regularly up until midnight trying to get my housework done- then I'm up again at 6 the next morning. But that's how important this is to me.

We hate being on Welfare. We desperately want to get educated, get off Welfare and do something important with our lives. So that blows their myth right out the water.

But the really insidious part, is that it's our vulnerable kids, who have already been through enough often times, that are ultimately going to suffer.

While I've been studying we've been really struggling to survive week by week. I'm getting into insurmountable debt, just to pay for my childcare. There's no way I can sustain this debt and I'll be forced, like many others, to drop out of University if we aren't given some assistance soon.

We can't get out of poverty without an education. And if we don't get out of poverty, it's going to have a very negative impact on our children.

We all know that poverty breeds violence, criminal activity, drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, poor health. the list goes on...

We also know that children living in poverty tend not to do as well at school and drop out earlier.

Children that have been brought up on welfare tend to end up on welfare.

It makes me angry that the government wants to condemn my son to this sort of potential future.

And it frustrates me that because I'm a single parent, I'm being financially excluded from the *right* to get an education, and thereby to reach my full potential as a person.

So, I'm not lazy, I'm not stupid & I'm not a bludger.

I'm just in an unfortunate position right now.

I don't need to be judged or punished or forced back into the work force by the moralistic and self righteous. I just need a little help to get back on my feet.

..... I just need a fair go.

Thank-you