



Submission in response to
The Social Security Amendment
(Fair Incentives to Work) Bill 2012

July 2012

Australian Youth Affairs Coalition

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) is the national voice representing young people aged 12-25 years and the sector that supports them.

AYAC represents a growing membership of State and Territory youth peak bodies, national youth organisations, researchers, policy makers and young people themselves, who work with AYAC to create an Australian community that supports and promotes the positive development of young people.

AYAC aims to:

- Provide a body broadly representative of the issues and interests of young people and the youth affairs field in Australia
- Advocate for a united Australia which respects and values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, promotes human rights, and provides justice for all
- Represent the rights and interests of young people in Australia, at both a national and an international level
- Promote the elimination of poverty and to promote the well being of young Australians, with a particular focus on those who are disadvantaged
- Recognise the diversity of Australian society, to promote the cultural, social, economic, political, environmental and spiritual interests and participation of young people in all aspects of society
- Advocate for, assist with and support the development of policy positions on issues affecting young people and the youth affairs field, and to provide policy advice, perspectives and advocacy to governments and the broader community
- Facilitate co-ordination and co-operation within the youth affairs field AYAC and its members are committed to working for and with young people and seek to ensure they have access to mechanisms, which allow them get involved in decisions about issues that affect them in the Australian community.

Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA, ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary,

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a supplementary submission to the Senate Education Employment and Workplace Relations Committee regarding the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Fair Incentives to Work) Bill 2012 (the Bill).

In preparing this submission, AYAC consulted a number of young people receiving sole parent payments. Their experience and key concerns are the focus of this submission. We also have included two case studies of successful and innovative community-based programs that assist young parents through the transition from dependence to independence. AYAC acknowledges the input from those programs and the young sole parents who contributed to this submission.

AYAC also welcomes the recent announcement of an additional \$20 million from the federal government to provide vocational training for single and teenage parents to help them enter the workforce.

We would like the opportunity to meet to discuss these assistance measures and to discuss other measures that best help young sole parents successfully raise their children as well as improve their employment outcomes. Several support programs that work directly with young single mothers have expressed their desire to meet with Senate Committee members to share their first-hand knowledge of the support needs of young parents. We would welcome the opportunity to make those introductions.

If you have any questions in relation to our submission or wish to seek to arrange a meeting with AYAC please contact Natalie Lammas or Maia Giordano on 02 9212 0500, natalie@ayac.org.au or maia@ayac.org.au.

Sincerely,

Andrew Cummings
Executive Director

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We acknowledge the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures, and to the elders both past and present.

Recommendations

In the absence of full employment in Australia, adequate income support for young single parents is vital to support young people while they care for young children and prepare for the workforce. The single parent payment does not act as a disincentive to work or study but can enable those young people to move towards independence. When young single parents are looking for paid work, they need an adequate income and multiple supports to effectively navigate this transition. AYAC is committed to ensuring all young people - especially those at great risk of extreme hardship such as young single parents - get a genuine opportunity to prepare for their future without being forced further into poverty.

AYAC recommends that:

1. Income support payments for young parents on low incomes reflect the real costs of living so they can afford basic living costs, e.g. food, rent, health, education, clothing and transport.
2. Policies that aim to encourage struggling young single parents engage with study or enter the workforce should be based on evidence and achieve good outcomes for young people.
3. Greater funding be allocated to innovative support programs that provide multiple supports for young sole parents and are tailored to individual needs.
4. More tailored assistance with work readiness skills and job searching support be provided through Jobs Services Australia providers and related services, and that these job services agencies better understand the specific barriers faced by young single parents.
5. There be funding for an adequate supply of alternative education programs that cater to young parents.
6. That all education and employment programs catering for young parents are linked to safe, appropriate and affordable childcare nearby.
7. Young single parents be consulted about their income support needs in all related policy decisions.
8. The government institute a rigorous, evidence-based review of all allowance payments - including the single parenting payment – in collaboration with community sector and welfare recipients.
9. The government delay the introduction of the payment cuts until later in 2013, as January is a costly period for families due to school holidays and back-to-school expenses.
10. Youth support services be resourced to specifically address the mental health issues that young single parents experience.

AYAC's position on the cuts to the single parenting payment

AYAC is concerned about the proposed cut to parenting payments for single parents when their youngest child turns eight years of age, which will severely impact the lives of many thousands sole parents and their children, and in particular young parents, who are already living below the poverty line. This move will drive many struggling low income parents deeper into poverty as they will lose around \$55 per week when they are forced onto the lower paying Newstart Allowance when their youngest child turns eight years of age.

AYAC supports any policy that encourages improved engagement with study or work, but we are concerned about the mandatory nature of the policy and the threat facing young parents of losing vital basic income support. There is little evidence to show that moving sole parents onto lower payments will increase their job prospects and that the vast majority of these parents are already required to seek part-time paid work whilst on parenting payments. Moving single parents onto lower payments will simply see them locked further into welfare dependency without much hope of achieving independence.

The experience from community groups who work in employment, youth support and family support services, as well as experience of sole parents themselves shows that the kind of measures that make a difference to their employment prospects include: intensive career counselling and support, training for those with low skills, youth development programs that address underlying barriers to labour market opportunity, and ongoing jobs with predictable working hours. This submission gives two case studies of innovative services to young parents that demonstrate the kind of essential support young parents need if they are to move towards independence.

Around \$50 million a year is being cut from Job Services Australia programs despite the fact that the funding available to assist even long-term unemployed people is minimal – on average, enough to interview an unemployed person once every two months and spend \$500 on training. The current programs and funding levels are incapable of addressing the real barriers that many young people - especially young parents - face in accessing meaningful employment.

AYAC does not believe that the punitive approach of reducing payments is the answer to giving sole parents an incentive to find paid work and will certainly disadvantage more than foster positive outcomes for young sole parents. It is clear that cuts will increase their frustrations and move young single parents into an even tougher situation financially.

We would endorse policies that provide genuine support and training to give single and teenage parents the skills and job-readiness they need to participate in the modern workforce. Implementation strategies must also ensure the job opportunities on offer are actually appropriate for young parents with small children and that there is adequate assistance in the form of childcare and parental leave embedded in these work opportunities. We urge the government to rethink the changes outlined in the Bill and to consider funding effective and innovative programs such as the *Babymum* and *Steps to the Future*. AYAC has provided case studies of these two programs that are constantly working on new and creative ways of not only

supporting these young single parents, but also improving their education attainment and employability in ways that encourage their attachment and nurture of their children.

AYAC is committed to capturing and promoting the voices of young people directly affected by the changes outlined in this Bill. In the preparation of this submission AYAC has consulted directly with young single parents. The following outlines personal stories of young parents and innovative case studies of programs that support and assist young parents.

Vanessa's story

Vanessa¹ is 19 years old with a one year old daughter, Lailah. She is currently facing a number of financial challenges.

“There are day-to-day costs like everyone else - rent, water, groceries. Being a young mum adds to this, and with rising prices in rent and utilities it doesn't get any easier, even with the family assistance package. For most people that only covers the last overdue power bill, not everything else on top. Lailah still needs nappies, formula, clothes, and the needs are never ending!

“A mother and child need to be in a safe, loving, 'homely' environment. For some of us, this is so very hard; a lot of the time teenage mothers are in volatile, on & off relationships, which goes without saying... NOT IDEAL! Either that, or they are in share accommodation with other young people who don't have kids and can't understand the 'homely' environment we need. Typical peer share houses are often full of booze, poor manners and immaturity. A lot of us single mums don't have a great relationship with our parents and find it worse for everyone living under the one roof. Just because they are our parents, it doesn't mean it's the best environment.

When asked what assistance she genuinely needs, she speaks warmly of the young mother's program that supports her and Lailah.

“They provide shelter, in their own homes and in the cottage, education, good nutrition, the wellbeing and motherhood skills. Need help getting your license? Doing the groceries? Going anywhere – the program workers will provide anything and they do.

“They do photography, so in the late stages pregnancy and the first weeks of motherhood, all these special moments are captured by a professional and given to us to treasure. They provide a mother/sister figure; an ear to listen, a shoulder to cry on, a hand to hold and a loving family environment full of support and encouragement.”

Vanessa also recognises the immense responsibility of her new role as mum.

“Being a single mum adds a whole new dimension. The sleepless nights, the emotional rollercoaster, 'pooley' nappies and never getting a break with the house work. It gets so overwhelming and girls without support have turned to alcohol and drugs and, in turn, bad parenting, as an escape.

¹ Names have been changed

² AYAC acknowledges the assistance of the staff at Babymum Australia for their help with this case study. For more

“We are pulled so strongly by our peers to keep up a social life, yet also so strongly by doing what is right for our precious new gifts. It is so hard to find a balance. As teens we tend to have to make our own mistakes to learn those lessons as opposed to an adult who has children out of want, who does what is right out of their maturity.”

Vanessa also shares how difficult it is being single.

“Being single at this age, we are looking for Mr Right. At this stage in our life we are vulnerable and tend to settle for the first thing that comes along who accepts us both. Not good! It is hard to get your head around settling down by ourselves.”

Transport can be a big issue for many young single parents.

“Catching the bus! Gosh, this can be a task with a pram, groceries, yourself and your child and everything else you need to take for the day. Unloading everything, asking a stranger to mind your child while you collapse the pram and put everything on the bus. Because I don’t drive or have a car, it makes leaving the house such a task and along with the baby blues, you’d sooner rather sit at home than get anxious about going out! I mean, yes we can walk but that’s not always a safe or practical option.”

Vanessa is very concerned about the stigma that is continually placed onto young mothers.

“Stereotypical stay at home young mum, living off the taxpayer. Makes you feel inadequate, less of a mother, immature, frowned upon, not even worthy of such a title. I felt this so strongly that I felt pressured into picking up any kind of paid work I could. It turned out to be the hardest, worst possible thing to do. And leaving Lailah without her screaming at me. The separation anxiety was too hard on my daughter.”

Case Study 1:	BABYMUM AUSTRALIA²
<p><i>Background</i></p> <p>Babymum is based in Launceston, Tasmania and assists young mothers who are first-time mothers under the age of 21 years with accommodation, education and support in a home-like environment.</p> <p>The young mothers in this program face multiple challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separation from their natural family • Unstable relationships and relationship breakdowns with child’s father • Homelessness and insecure housing • Loneliness and social isolation • Difficulty juggling relationships with the child’s father and/or new partners on the scene • Securing adequate and affordable accommodation • Low incomes and an inability to meet basic costs of living let alone save for a 	

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- car, home or medical emergencies
- Judgmental attitudes and - including their former school friends, their own family, government agency staff, childcare services and even people in the street.
- Lack of basic skills - many young parents are not used to budgeting, cooking or cleaning for themselves let alone for a young child.

What prevents young sole mothers from successfully entering the workforce?

Many young mothers have stopped their education in order to have a baby or have been unable to continue in education when they have become pregnant. Some young mothers have had a short and interrupted time in education. Some may not want to continue their education as they do not value it and would not benefit from traditional formal education. Others may want to continue but would not fit into the traditional courses being offered nor would they find many areas of study relevant to their current lives.

Many young parents do not have driver's licences or someone to teach them to drive. Most young mothers rely on public transport to travel anywhere, and in Launceston this can make accessing workplaces and support services difficult.

Young parents in the Babymum program want to be "good parents" and spend the early years with their child rather than separating from their children by placing them in childcare in exchange for a fairly low income. In any case, adequate childcare may not be available, may be hard to find in their area, may not be affordable or they may not want to leave their child with other people.

Some young sole parents do not have enough education or training or the confidence to communicate well enough to look for or land a suitable job. Community attitudes do not always support this process.

What do young single mothers need to move them towards independence?

- Young sole parents need access to independent/reliable/affordable transport.
- The lack of adequate childcare placements and the high cost of the available spots is also a big challenge, so young parents need affordable/accessible/supportive childcare.
- It is also critical that there are sufficient alternative education programs where their child can be close by.
- Young mothers need work readiness skills and job searching support.
- Community acceptance is also important, so that young mothers can feel supported and empowered and to make the tough and brave choices towards independence.

Babymum is forming an association with Launceston College with the aim of accrediting the invaluable Life Choices Program, and other short courses and informal sessions currently offered by Babymum. Formal recognition of these essential courses via the VET certificate courses and the TQA courses offered at Launceston College would be beneficial to young parents in their parenting roles and also in their future job search .

Emily's story

Emily is 19 years old and has a four month old called Dante. When she fell pregnant she found out Dante's father was unfaithful and they split up, spending the pregnancy and first two months of Dante's life without his support, although she is lucky enough to live in her mother's home and have Dante's father now part of his life.

Emily pays \$150 rent each week to live in her mother's house.

"I can't expect my mum to have to support us both, so I pay rent to contribute to the household. I would have a very hard time surviving outside my family home, mainly because my car costs a fair bit, I chose to get a nice big car that's safe for us and that will last a while, so while I pay off that, I probably wouldn't be able to survive outside the family home because welfare benefits aren't anything luxurious, so I wouldn't be able to afford to rent anywhere decent."

Emily receives rent assistance, family tax and single parenting payments. Although the child's father is in Dante's life, he doesn't earn much and can't contribute financially. We asked Emily what she spends her payments on:

"Just on normal things required to live: nappies, formula, food, toys, clothes, rent, car repayments, petrol, car insurance, phone bill, and very very occasionally going out with Dante's father, as I have some money saved."

When asked whether she could find paid work in her community, she says:

"As my child is young, I haven't been looking for work at the moment but it is hard to find a job, I know that. Dante's father was out of work for two months before getting a job with minimal hours despite having a lot of retail experience. There isn't much hope for me then."

Emily left senior high school in year 12 and then went on to do a certificate course in business. Her big dream is to raise Dante and also to study property management and get begin a career in real estate. However, she needs to save a significant amount of money for the real estate licensing courses, which is challenging on government payments.

"It would be good if there was a government course in my chosen future career or at least VET fee help for real estate licensing, but there isn't."

Emily faces several challenges in her role as single mother.

"The hardest part of being a single parent is looking after a bub all day while trying to do other things when his father isn't around to help. Also a single income can be very stressful. But of course the best part is being able stay at home mum and raise my little boy."

What does Emily want to say to the federal government?

"The government needs to realise that single parents cannot work and look after a child at the same time! Work won't give you sick days for your children, they won't

give you school holidays off. What happens when your child is sick and needs to stay home and you have no sick days left to take off? Or your child has surgery and needs a few weeks to recover? Children under 12 cannot be left home alone, by law, so why must single parents be forced to work when their child is only eight?

“Then have to find a job that allows parents to drop off and pick up their children at the designated hours, allow for parents to take sick days for their children and take time off for their child's appointments. News flash: jobs like this DO NOT EXIST. Especially when there are a whole lot of people looking for work who have no children or their children are teenagers. The jobs will be given to these people, who can actually commit to work with no hesitations. Then to say they HAVE to be thrown into a situation like this, there they will become financially burden and open the possibility of mental illnesses caused by the stress of money, such as anxiety or depression.

“Making single parents struggle to make ends meet, just because their children aren't old enough to be independent yet. This is an insane plan by the government and it will cause problems rather than fix any.

“I don't have to worry yet, but in a few years time when I am forced to be in that position, that will be very stressful, and with a history of anxiety and depression, I am really not looking forward to when that time come.”

Case Study 2:	STEPS TO THE FUTURE: LEARNING PATHWAYS FOR YOUNG MOTHERS³
<p>Background</p> <p>Steps to the Future is an innovative project based in Glenorchy, Tasmania specifically for young mothers aged 17 – 25 years aims to provide positive, supported and flexible pathways to personal learning and development, formal education and training, work opportunities, and enhanced health literacy and wellbeing for young mothers and their children.</p> <p>Issues facing young sole parents</p> <p><i>“You are very isolated as a young parent – friends who don't have kids, don't understand and you can only socialise with other parents.”</i></p> <p><i>“I tried going to a parent group that was not for young parents – I was not confident in this group, I felt judged, the stigma of being a young parent”</i></p> <p><i>‘Perhaps we could look at whole of life stuff – being active, our mental health, communication skills’</i></p> <p><i>‘We need certificates so we can get back into the workforce’</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>- Responses from young single mothers</i></p>	

³ AYAC acknowledges the assistance of the staff at Steps to the Future for their help with this case study.

What are the barriers that young sole parents face in entering the workforce?

"I can't wait to get back into work – I think about it a lot."

"We need skills – it's hard to get back into work after having a baby and being out of it and people discriminate against you because you have a child."

"I want help to decide what's important for me to do – for example, I like art but can I ever make a living out of art? Should I do something else for a career."

- Responses from young single mothers

Some of the barriers facing young sole parents include:

- A lack of family-friendly workplaces and working hours.
- A lack of accessible, affordable and supported education and training pathways and opportunities and tailored training support.
- A lack of with 'case management' services such as pathway planning, career advice, personal support, mental health support agencies
- 90% of Steps to the Future participants have been diagnosed with either depression or an anxiety disorder, often along with other chronic health issues.
- A lack of flexible and tailored model or framework for working with young parents as successful programs require a specific mix of skill sets from trainers, training providers, job services and other agencies.

What helps young parents reengage with education and work?

Steps to the Future develops the young parent's confidence, self-esteem, problem solving skills and understanding of the opportunities and pathways available to them and key issues and barriers facing young mothers. Specifically tailored programs and other activities to develop participant's literacy skills and life-long learning. Steps to the Future also assists participants to support and guide their children to become successful learners.

"No guilt here – the kids are here so I am not leaving them to go off and do something."

"Being able to attend courses in my own community is great, not having to travel all the way to Hobart."

"It is a supportive group."

"We want to learn how to present yourself better – to potential employers, how to dress for my size, language in interviews, makeup and hair care."

"How to cook easy and nutritious foods, cooking well on a tight budget."

"Help to get my driver's license."

- Responses from young single mothers

The program provides an inviting and accessible venue, adjunct childcare, shared meal, and support with transport. Young mothers can also access a support worker at each session, and one to one pathway planning services with project staff. They can also access a wide range of information and referral services at sessions.

All Steps to the Future programs involve sharing a light meal or snack. Building social connections and the sharing of meals helps young parents learn about healthy nutrition. Most Steps to the Future programs also involve some level of physical activity and other health literacy building, with a walk, or relaxation activity factored into sessions.

Steps to the Future delivers a range of tailored individual and group family literacy programs to young mothers. Programs that can be run flexibly, entered at any time, and which would allow participants to choose the level of engagement they want to have with the program and its activities. Some Steps to the Future courses are ongoing while others are short programs of one or two sessions. Program length varies from 1-2 hours to two half days a week, over several months.

Training offered includes:

- Centrelink services and payments
- job services, job seeking, career pathways
- art and craft,
- alcohol and other drugs,
- positive relationships and child-rearing skills

More substantial accredited training opportunities are also offered to young parents via a partnership with a local registered training organisation. These include: childcare, first aid training, customer service, public speaking, report writing, OHS, and risk planning and management.

Success measures

"I have decided to do social work since I have been coming to this program. It has given me the confidence to be able to do what I want to do with my life. I am enrolling in a certificate course now."

- Young single parent

An increasing number of young mothers engaged with Steps to the Future have now re-entered formal education and training with external providers to undertake hospitality studies, small business management and community services.

- The positive outcomes of this highly supported model include
- Finding out about other support services and community groups
- Making friends
- Gaining return to study skills
- Finding out about volunteer and work opportunities
- Gaining ideas for how to get into external study/courses
- Deciding what to do to make a good future– life pathway planning
- Improving confidence, self esteem and communication skills
- Gaining and using employment readiness skills - such as resume writing, interview techniques, writing letters.

Becka's story

Becka is 22 years old and her son Jay is two years old. She has very unstable relationship with her immediate family (her parents are separated and living in different states) and she is estranged from her sister after suffering physical abuse in that relationship. She is wholly dependent on the single parent payment and does not receive any financial help from Jay's father or her own family.

She spends her payments on bills, loans, groceries, and public transport. There is not much left for anything else - like medical emergencies or education expenses.

"Yes it is very tough. If the payment drops I would not be able to pay my bills and loan repayments and would not be able to able to feed myself and my son."

We asked her whether she had looked for any paid work.

"There is not many paid work in my area. I have looked and applied for heaps of jobs. I don't know what it is but they won't hire me. The last year of school I finished was grade 11 and I haven't done any study since. I have no support services helping me but I would like help to get a job. But I would like to look for more jobs and get a job and go and work."

Natalie's story

Natalie is 22 years old, a single mum of a seven month old boy, Kohan. She is an Indigenous woman currently dependent on the single parenting payment.

"It is very hard to make ends on the single parenting payment. I'm living in a share house, my son is formula fed (due to problems with colic). I'm a non-drinker and a non-smoker, yet it still becomes hard to do things at the end of the day. I have to budget really well which can still be hard with day to day living."

Natalie disagrees with the proposed changes to the sole parent payment, and wishes the government would consider the separation between mother and baby; the cost and the availability of childcare centres; and the cost of getting to and from school and childcare. It takes Natalie over an hour to get to the closest childcare centre, but is not sure whether they will have a spot available if she finds work.

"I think the government just thought that we all sit on our butts and do nothing! And yes I must admit there are some 'lazy' mothers, but we shouldn't ALL be forced into doing something when not ready to. Some people think young, single mothers do nothing for/with their children and I guess it's those mothers that have made it a little harder for the ones that do the right thing. But I don't drink and I don't smoke everything I get goes on my son."

Natalie's week is full. She cares for her son, and attends to daily duties like washing and keeping her house clean and also makes all Kohan's baby food. She also takes her son to his water safety classes and she attends a mum's group every Friday.

Natarsha also runs a Facebook page where mums of all ages are welcome to come and ask questions or seek advice.

We asked Natalie what she would like to do more of.

“I would like to be able to do different things with my son, as he doesn’t like sitting at home, so I love taking him out but as my budget is tight and doesn’t allow much fuel we are stuck at home most of the week.

“I would love to do more swimming/water safety classes. I hope that one day I can take my son overseas. And I would like to get into photography and sewing - I've done a short course in sewing, I would also love to do a class in photography but again with a tight budget, I cant afford too.”

The message Natalie wants to give to the government about the changes they are making is this:

“The government needs to think about how young single mums are going to get to and from work or to childcare places. Some mothers don’t have a car or a licence so they will have to catch a bus to and from work and how are they meant to drop their child off at care? What about the lack of availability of childcare?

“Being a young single mum is not a curse, it's a pleasure! It meant I got to meet my son sooner than other mums. It’s a struggle to handle at times, and with the government cuts, it is going to make it harder and more stressful.”

Conclusion

“Research tells us that the best behaviour guidance strategies are not through threats, bribes, withdrawal of privileges or imposed punishments as these methods create hostility, frustration and resistance. Rather, the best outcomes arise from clear and consistent messages, good communication, explanation at the right level, development of self-help skills, supportive and attentive guidance, good role modelling, actively engaged learning, allowing choice and negotiation of outcomes, redirection of behaviour to what is desired and rewards for appropriate behaviours.”

- Babymum, Australia

Many, if not most, young sole mothers do continue on to work or study while negotiating becoming a parent for the first time. Like all parents, they need to juggle their employment and education with their unpaid (and undervalued) caring role in society. In our consultations with young mothers themselves, what they say they need most is support and training and a flexible approach that allows them to learn and grow at their own pace. What will not help them are measures that force them into desperate circumstances and into unsuitable work when they are not ready to make that transition.

Young people and support services have told us that the most critical supports that genuinely help young single parents move from dependency on welfare payments are:

- Single parent support services that cater for young parents and help them to overcome multiple challenges by helping them to develop skills in: relationships, first-time parenthood, confidence-building, reengaging with study, employment readiness, life planning etc.
- Alternative education models that help them gain qualifications and skills delivered in a flexible way with adequate and free childcare nearby
- Career counselling and guided support to help young people become aware of their employment options and services available to them. A telephone counselling service is simply not enough.
- Family-friendly employment options that allow single parents to work a flexible number of hours per fortnight so that they can care for children when they get sick and on school holidays.
- Safe, appropriate and inexpensive childcare that is close to their place of work or study
- A greater supply of affordable housing or public housing options located in areas where work is actually available.
- Public transport options that make getting to and from the workplace and childcare simple and quick.
- Sufficient access to youth support services that specifically address the mental health issues that young single parents face due to the multiple stress factors.

Without policies that directly target these multiple areas of need, struggling young single parents will continue to face difficulties in gaining suitable employment. We urge the government to consider these stories of young mothers before implementing a measure that will see them forced deeper into poverty without the necessary supports that address entrenched disadvantage and help them gain the necessary skills to move from dependence to independence.