

Kat: Sole Parent On Newstart (Adelaide, 2015)

I am a 55 year old sole parent with a 16 year old son living with me. Along with so many other sole parents, I was removed from Parenting Payment and placed on Newstart in 2013.

Since that time, I have struggled to keep a roof over our heads; the cost of private rental virtually takes my complete Newstart payment. Trying to survive on the Family Tax Benefit for food, gas, electricity, phone, internet, transport fares and clothing for both of us, and anything else that comes up, is nearly impossible.

My rent is \$250 per week, but I also have to pay for water. When this is added to this the cost of other utilities, I am left with almost nothing. My son is vision impaired, and the constant need to replace his glasses adds yet another burden onto an already struggling budget. I hardly sleep, and I only eat every second day (so as to make sure my son has at least 2 meals a day). I have an injury to my right hand that really should be operated on, but there is just no way I can afford the upfront charges of seeing a specialist, so it remains untreated.

I do not go out, and I do not meet with friends. I spend most of my time at home. I would really like to work, but because of raising my family (I have 7 other children) and because I allowed my ex-husband to be the bread winner for the family for so many years, I have no recent work history. Although I have certificates from courses I have completed, they account for nothing as they are not actual "work experience", and this is what matters to an employer. Not only does my lack of recent work history go against me, but so does my age. No one wants to employ a 55 year old when there are so many younger people out there going for the same jobs.

I have even been told by my job network agency that they will not help pay for any other course I may want to do, because it would not be likely to lead to employment. They would prefer to spend their money on someone who is more likely to obtain a paid position. Therefore, I may as well volunteer my time and wait till I am able to obtain the age pension. This is not exactly what I want to hear. I feel that I am a burden on society with nothing to offer. I worry about my son's future, and I worry where we will be by the end of the year. I fear that we will be living on the streets, because with rising prices, and a diminishing income, there is no way I will be able to continue to afford the house I now rent.

This is not the life I planned for myself and my children when I married and had a family. You have no idea how many nights I lay awake dreading the future, how many times I cry myself to sleep, and how often I wonder if my children and grandchildren will be left to pick up the pieces of our broken country.

I exist day by day; I cannot call it living. I go without food, stress about the roof over my head, and worry about the health and future of my children. It would be wonderful if just once, the ones in government could just step back, take a moment to think, and listen to the people before they make choices that impact so wrongly on so many in the community.

Thank you for allowing me to tell you my story, which I know is not nearly as bad as some, but is bad for my son and myself.