

Ashleigh's Story

11 April 2016

Ashleigh, a low-income earning solo parent, found herself happy in a new relationship, only to have her Working for Families compromised - and then cut completely - because the state demands that her new partner be equally responsible for the household finances, including where Ashleigh's children are concerned.

"I am a low income earner, and my problems with Working for Families and other government assistance lie with the definitions around relationships and families with children living in two homes.

"Any assistance I received was means tested on my partners income pretty much from the moment we made any kind of public declaration of our relationship. You can look up the IRD and WINZ definition of relationship; if my partner and I were to break up, we aren't entitled to half of each other's money but she is expected to support me AND my children if my income isn't enough to support myself.

"Because of shared care with my children's other parent, a marginal increase in my wages, and the means testing our eligibility is subjected to against my partner's income, I have lost all of my Working for Families entitlements. Of course when the kids aren't here we don't consume as much food, power and water, but our house doesn't magically turn into a two-bedroom unit every other week (with rent to match). I still have to buy clothes for my children - my partner isn't going to pay for that stuff! So it means that I have less money to spend on my children's needs.

"Working for Families doesn't take into account the changing dynamics of the modern family. My partner is not my children's parent; she does not parent them - she supports me in my role of parent to them. I don't remember reading some code of conduct for re-partnering that requires her to financially support me. Its certainly not the arrangement we would prefer. While I may have a better situation than those who are parenting on their own, it's inconceivable that the state relinquishes all support of children because their mother is in a new relationship. Is this the price we pay for happiness?"

This is unfair. When the state disadvantages parents for re-partnering, the children lose out.

Not only does Ashleigh have her financial independence limited by having her WFF cut and having to rely on her new partner, but Ashleigh's partner - and therefore the household income for the children - is also financially worse off because the system tells her she must pay for children who are not her own.