

Why Australia makes being a single mum easier

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Amelia, a single mum from New Zealand, moved to Australia three years ago because she was finding it so tough to get by at home. She desperately wanted to provide for her children but simply did not have the capacity to meet all their needs. Back-to-school costs for one child at school were not just a burden, but an impossible expense.

"While I was studying full-time in New Zealand, working casual hours, and on the benefit, I had to borrow money every year from Work and Income for back-to-school costs, the debt effectively taking more from my weekly budget than I could really afford, until it was paid.

Even then, my school-aged child would still be short of some items, which the teachers would sometimes cover, or I would buy one item a week. But because I was constantly paying back the debt to Work and Income, we always needed the remaining money from my weekly pay for food. It was very humiliating, and I felt like a failure as a parent.

In Australia, I don't receive the benefit, I work all kinds of jobs, just like as I did in New Zealand. Some of my employers don't always pay me so well, but I take what I can. And here we survive the start of the school year because of Government help. We receive the Australian equivalent of Working for Families irrespective of the number of hours of work I do each week, which vary because of the casual nature.

We also receive a \$400 bonus for school kids to help with back-to-school costs. Because of this, I can afford to buy my children the things they need, without going into debt for the rest of the year.

However, I do have to buy an iPad for school, which my child has already been without for half a year. I cannot find the money to buy one, so my child is left behind at school.

Children should keep up with evolving technology, but poor children are being left behind. This worries me, because I want my children to have equal opportunities when they are grown, but I can't afford the tools they need to keep up.

I'm truly disappointed that the Schoolkids payment is soon to be stopped in Australia due to new Government policy, but we are already better off through other supports than we would have been [in New Zealand].

My mother teaches in a low decile school in New Zealand, where a company has funded all devices, plus internet access in the local community. Her students are progressing at a faster rate than previously.

This is such an amazing initiative, and it would be a good solution for all children living below the poverty line – but the Government should realise that if schools have to rely on generous benefactors in order for the children to thrive with the new curriculum, then Government should better resource schools so that each child has the same opportunity as the next.

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Parents should not be experiencing the stress of extra debt for equipment at state schools, and children should not be educationally disadvantaged by having less money available to them than their peers."

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