

**Sole Parents' Union is a non-profit community advocacy organisation that works on behalf of all sole parents, representing their views and issues to government. We work on behalf of both female and male sole parents, share-care parents, and children.**

Welcome to the Sole Parents' Union newsletter. **9 May 2011**

This fortnightly newsletter is designed to bring you news and events of interest for sole parents. That is people are, who might be, and who have been sole parents.

Whether you are a sole parent yourself, or you work with sole parents, we hope you will find something of interest here.

## **F**rom the Chair



First of all I'd like to welcome Michelle Dixon to Sole Parents' Union.

Michelle is our new Community Partnerships Manager, so she will be talking directly with a lot of the organisations we work with to help us to meet your needs for information about sole parent issues.

Since the last newsletter we've finalised our submissions for a number of enquiries that are occurring simultaneously. It makes you wonder if they do this on purpose to stretch you so thin you can't do them justice.

In the last week we've lodged submissions for:

- ALRC Family Violence and Child Support
- ALRC Family Violence and Social Security
- Family Law Legislation Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Bill 2011
- Discussion paper for FaHCSIA on child support policy

Feedback we receive from you, and through our website helps enormously in writing these submissions, so thank you to all who have raised issues with us.

## **M**eeet Michelle



I have been a single parent for 31ys, so have great understanding of and empathy for the role of sole parenting and the many diverse types of sole parents we have throughout our community.

I have previously worked in relationship management, most recently roles in the community sector.

I'm very excited about my role with SPU, and will be contacting many agencies across the country to hear about the needs and issues that face single parents in different areas.

I will also be holding focus groups with many sole parents, this way we will be able to get to the grass roots of the issues. If you have a group you would like us to come and visit please give me a call and let me know. We'll do our best to get out to you.

I'm looking forward to meeting up with lots of you and hearing about your issues, and how SPU can help you.

Please feel free to contact me directly 0421 580 564 or [michelle@soleparentsunion.org.au](mailto:michelle@soleparentsunion.org.au)

**The average child support payment for 1 child is \$64/week**

**29.3% of liable parents pay less than \$10/week**

## Your questions answered:

**Q** *I read your blog about Centrelink and had a similar experience. My son was refused youth allowance even though he has to live away from home. How can they do this?*

**A:** The rules for Youth Allowance are very complicated. As you can see from the blog, even though we at Sole Parents' Union deal with these issues all the time, we can still have problems.

In fact, the rules are so complicated that the Youth Allowance Fact sheet, with payment rates, is six pages long.

And it is complicated even further if you live in a rural area, if you over 25 or under 25 and studying (eligibility for Austudy), if you're Aboriginal (ABstudy), etc.

For youth allowance, the government generally deems children to be dependent until they are 23. Up until then it is your responsibility to support them, even if they are not living with you. The rules for independence can be found here.

This rule is different to Child Support Legislation, which says children only need to be supported by their non-residential parent until they are 18.

That means that even though you might not be getting support from their other parent, you are still financially responsible for your children.

At least the tax office now recognised that the cost of studying is a legitimate tax deduction, even if you are on youth allowance.

If you have problems with Centrelink - if you don't think you're getting the right information, or they unfairly reject or cancel your claim, or raise a debt, etc - you can call **Centrelink Customer Relations on 1800 050 004** (although this is hard to find on their website).

If you get no joy there, call the Ombudsman on **1300 362 072**.

**If you're unsure whether the information you have been given is correct, try the National Welfare Rights Association ([welfarerights.org.au](http://welfarerights.org.au)). The website has links to their state based services.**

*Your questions answered will be a regular feature of our newsletters. If you have a question you would like answered please send it to us at [admin@soleparentsunion.org.au](mailto:admin@soleparentsunion.org.au).*

## Sole Parents' Union forum

We are very pleased to announce that the live forum on our website is now up and running.

This is a place where single parents can raise issues, ask and respond to questions, and chat with other single parents.

We've started four discussion topics in response to feedback we have been getting on what are major issues for single parents. They are:

- Breaking up is hard to do: it doesn't have to be dirty as well
- What makes a parent?
- Shared custody
- Centrelink

If you register to take part you can start your own discussions or respond to other posts.

We ask everybody who takes part to remember that although this forum is restricted to members (you need to register to take part) it is still a public space. When posting to the site be courteous and do not provide any personal details that can identify you in any way.

While we take all care with who takes part, like all such sites we cannot guarantee absolute security.

Posts that are offensive will be removed. Repeat offenders will be barred from further posting.

**In 2006 there were 823,254  
sole parent families  
of which 87% were  
headed by mothers**

## National Law week

Law Week is an annual event that aims to promote greater understanding within the community of the law, the legal system and the legal profession.

Law Week Grants of up to \$1000 (inc.GST) per region are available to assist regional activities conducted in partnership with regional law societies, local courts, schools, NSW Police, libraries or Legal Aid.

## Addressing violence

4th May was National Day to Remember those who have died because of Family and Domestic Violence.

All the recent enquiries for which we've made submissions have been about family violence and how to improve safety, particularly for women and children.

One thing we've pointed out in our submissions is that violence crosses all the boundaries and cannot be addressed for each particular issue individually.

It is the culture of violence, and the attitude that says it's a "family issue", or that insists women make it up for advantage in family court that is the base of the problem.

In NSW alone, domestic violence related deaths account for 42% of all homicides. This statistic is just unacceptable.

Sole Parents' Union receives calls regularly from women desperately trying to protect their children from the effects of violence and abuse. Yet, the family court still awards access, or even custody, to men who are violent and abusive.

The annual conference of the Domestic and Family Violence Crisis Lines of Australia Network was held last week in Parramatta. We await news of any papers or outcomes, and will let you know when they're released. The Minister for the Status of Women, the Hon Kate Ellis MP, made a speech today at the Parliamentary Roundtable on Ending Gender Based Violence in the Asia Pacific Region during which she announced \$5.3m to a regional fund to reduce violence. As she said:

*"Reducing violence against women is not just good for women. It is good for families, it is good for communities, it is good for economies and it is good for countries."*

If you are running programs to address violence, Community Action Grants under the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children are now open.

## If you are experiencing violence

Domestic violence is the major cause of homelessness among families, with families making up between one quarter and one third of Australia's homeless population. The Women's Refuge Resource Centre provides information and links to services and refuges nationally.

For resources and information on domestic violence see the Health Insite Australia website.

For 24 hour assistance if you are experiencing violence call 1800 656 453.

## Sole Parent's Union submissions

Our submissions to the enquiries detailed earlier in this newsletter can be found on the submissions page of our website. If you go straight to the site, the submissions page can be found under "About us" in the top right hand corner of the homepage.

**In NSW alone, domestic violence  
related deaths account for  
42% of all homicides.  
This statistic is unacceptable.**

## Single parents, work and the federal budget

The Federal Budget is due out next week, and indications are that it's going to be a tough one for sole parents, with the government talking about getting even tougher on welfare.

Sole Parents' Union is supporting a call from ACOSS and other community sector organisations for the government to take a positive, effective approach to social security. There are growing concerns that the upcoming budget will have bad news for sole parents through a more punitive approach to forcing them into paid work.

This is on top of changes to income management; child support and family law which have already made life tough for many.

See our blog for details on all these changes and how they affect sole parents.

The ACTU is undertaking a survey of workers to find out what their challenges and experiences are. Let them know your experiences as a sole parent in the workforce.

Sole Parents' Union is also working on making welfare to work policies fairer, and trying to improve flexibility in the workplace. To help us with that please tell us your story and how you manage -or otherwise - in the paid workforce.

All stories, positive or negative, are welcome. It's only by hearing from those who have good experiences that we can tell others how to improve.

The Prime Minister has declared war on idleness. This reminds me of the time I did a radio interview. Also appearing was a government minister (who shall remain nameless as he's not there any more) who said punitive measures were needed to force single mothers into paid work because *"otherwise they would have no reason to get out of bed in the morning."*

Yes, really. That's a quote.

And the PM has said the budget will be targetting teenage mothers. Apparently threatening to remove their social security when their child turns one will provide them with opportunities!

The rate of teenage pregnancy is highest in rural and regional areas, particularly in Indigenous communities which will be unfairly targeted by this program.

We're all for providing programs for young single mums to help them with education and/or job training. In groups and other discussions we've had with young mums they are all desperate to give their kids the best possible start in life, and know that this depends on getting a good education and a good job themselves. They are all really keen to do something positive but keep getting knocked back for jobs or training.

That the government is going to provide more programs for them is a great step forward.

Next newsletter we'll bring you an analysis of budget announcements and what the changes mean for sole parents and their children.

## Paid Parental Leave or baby bonus?

Australia's first national Paid Parental Leave scheme commenced on 1 January 2011. The scheme is funded by the Australian Government.

Parents who are planning to have or adopt a child need to be aware of the scheme and consider how decisions they make about the work they do before the birth or adoption could affect their eligibility for the scheme.

Claims can be submitted up to three months before the expected date of birth or adoption. Parents are encouraged to claim before their child arrives so their payments can start on time.

The Paid Parental Leave scheme aims to help Australian families balance work and family commitments and help employers retain the valuable skills and experience of their staff. It will help employers enhance the family friendly workplace conditions many already offer. Parental Leave Pay can be taken in addition to existing employer-funded schemes, at either the same time or consecutively.

The information in the link above was provided by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and provides key information on the Paid Parental Leave Scheme.

In our travels we have found that a number of parents are confused about the difference between Paid Parental Leave and the Baby Bonus. For more information download the fact sheet comparing the two schemes.

**Sole Parents' Union works with government to try to improve outcomes for sole parent families. We recognise that people move in and out of different family types, but that many of the issues of sole parenting, such as child support, family law, and parenting across households, remain even when people repartner.**