

Try living off youth allowance

“I think I need to get a job”

Think waking up in a dirty share house after a trashy night in with a cheap cask wine ‘goon’ bag.

All you want is a \$3 coffee to get you through the day. So after a one minute shower before the hot water runs out, you dress in your \$5 op shop outfit, push past a pile of dirty dishes to make a vegemite sandwich and run to the tram. Damn, you miss it by two minutes and there are 20 tram inspectors waiting with their handy booklets, so goodbye to that coffee - looks like you’ll have to buy a ticket. Fast forward eight hours ... and when you get home you discover your laptop isn’t working, conveniently right before final essays are due tomorrow.

A typical day for many students on Youth Allowance, worth a measly \$371.40 a fortnight.

Financial and housing advisor Susan Barnes says there has been a 30 per cent increase in students seeking advice at the Swinburne Hawthorn office this year. “A good number of students that we do see are on Centrelink or Youth Allowance. But what the majority are then talking to us about is ‘I think I need to get a job.’ Where Centrelink used to cover life; just, they are now saying ‘I have to get something even if it’s 5 – 10 hours a week to keep me above,’” Barnes says.

This year’s budget will make it even harder for students to be eligible for Centrelink payments.



For students to be classified as independent and receive benefits when they start university, they will now be required to work at least 30 hours per week for 18 months.

This means around 30,000 students will be ineligible for the payments. Hardest hit by the rule changes have been gap year students who decided to work this year because their income made

them eligible for Youth Allowance under the old rules.

Universities are now offering financial advice to students online. Most have an example of a budget for students to follow. Swinburne’s website suggests the lower the income, the more need there is to budget. The website is able to tell you where most of your money is going and helps plan for those

bigger expenses, such as rent and laptop breaking.

Barnes says students need to plan for the year ahead. “You need to think: ‘alright worst case scenario if I get sick three times this year I should probably have \$200 set aside for medicine.’ So okay that’s \$4 a week. That doesn’t sound much.”

But there are still ways to save money so you don’t miss out on the

sweeter things in life. Try and take advantage of student discounts wherever possible, attend cheaper or even free events.

Melbourne politics student, Bronnie Abbott is an expert at this, “I often go out to Sister Bellas, which is in a laneway off Lonsdale Street, they have cheap drinks; \$15 for a carafe of Sangria.” Proof it’s still possible to be classy on a budget – it’s not all about the goon.

If you are going to go out drinking, you should line your stomach in preparation for the night ahead. Veggie Bar on Brunswick Street is great for all the vegetarians out there and Tiamo’s on Lygon Street is famous for its \$15 pastas.

But you can’t eat out all the time and with food being the one thing that Barnes believes has increased most in price during the recession, she recommends students shop at their local market. “Shop in bulk and cook in bulk. These are really the best ways to save yourself some money.”

For clothing, go to op shops and factory outlets. Bridge Road in Richmond and the Direct Factory Outlets in Spencer Street and Waterfront City offer discounted brand name clothing.

If you are serious about saving money, Susan Barnes recommends opening up a second bank account. Do your research to ensure the account has no fees, and doesn’t automatically send you an ATM card or cheque book. “We do say one of the best ways to save is to put money into a secondary account that you can’t touch, because then you can’t see it.”

Shakari Silvestri
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