

Problem with Centrelink?

Welfare Rights Centre is here to help

Have you ever spent hours on the phone waiting to talk to Centrelink about Family Tax Benefit, Child Care Subsidy or perhaps a disaster-related payment? Are you confused about what Centrelink benefits you or your family might be entitled to? Has someone in your family been told they have a Centrelink debt that seems wrong or unfair? Impacted by the floods and need to know what you're entitled to? You may want to get in touch with Welfare Rights Centre.

Welfare Rights Centre is the most experienced organisation in NSW providing specialist, independent advice and assistance about social security and family assistance payments. They'll provide free legal advice to members of Tradies and their families about any payment administered by Centrelink including where you or a family member:

- **have left employment** - how to meet the 'activity test', waiting periods, and the income and assets test
- **can no longer work due to injury or disability** - eligibility criteria, evidential requirements and waiting periods
- **need help understanding family support payments** – how to report family income
- **are trying to sort out issues after separating** – proving separation, how assets and shared care of children affects payments
- **have a Centrelink debt** - appealing debts and debt waiver
- **are retiring or just planning retirement** – maximising income, and access pensions and concession cards

Their legal expertise regularly sees decisions changed and issues sorted.

If you contact Welfare Rights Centre, make sure you tell them you're a member of Tradies so you can be fast-tracked for advice. If your case has merit but isn't easily resolved, a Welfare Rights Centre solicitor can represent you for free in an appeal to Centrelink or to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

How to contact Welfare Rights Centre

- Anytime via their [website inquiries page](#) or by email: sydney@welfarerights.org.au
- By phone - 1800 226 028 (Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:30 am to 1:30 pm) or 9211 5389 (Monday to Friday if the matter is urgent)

Here are a couple of examples of the different ways we have helped members:

Pensioner gets an increase and backpay

We had a win for one of our clients who'd been surviving on a very low rate of Age Pension for over a year. Her pension had been reduced because she'd received a small payment from a trust after her husband passed away. By the time she rang us she was distressed and in genuine financial hardship. Despite her many phone calls to Centrelink her pension rate hadn't changed.

A review of her circumstances made it clear that her pension was way too low. It should have reverted to the full rate not long after she'd received the trust payment. We contacted Centrelink on her behalf and within 3 days the problem was fixed. Her pension was increased to the full rate ... and she received arrears of \$15,000.

Support for teacher supporting brother with intellectual disability

Rose, a primary school teacher, was referred to us by her union as she was struggling to support her brother Lucas, as well as her young son.

Lucas, who was born with a disability in the UK, migrated from New Zealand to live with Rose as he required ongoing care. Lucas's claim for Disability Support Pension (DSP) was rejected because the Australia/New Zealand Social Security Agreement effectively prevents payment of DSP if a person's disability arose before they came to live in Australia or New Zealand.

As Lucas was not eligible for any Centrelink benefits in Australia, the Centre made an application for an Act of Grace to the Department of Finance. To demonstrate there were no viable alternative options available to Lucas to secure payments, the Centre undertook an intensive and exhaustive process of gathering evidence to demonstrate that Lucas was not eligible for income support from New Zealand or the United Kingdom, and also had no prospect of obtaining Australian citizenship.

The Australian Minister for Finance granted Lucas's application for an Act of Grace payment equivalent to DSP until he would otherwise qualify for the Age Pension. Lucas and his sister were very happy, and the Centre held a Zoom meeting with him to celebrate!