

# Survival

## True Stories We Can Tell

(with names changed to protect the innocent)

**Louie** was sharing a flat with two others. He was getting the Student Allowance and decided not to work part-time during the trimester. He enjoyed going out with his friends. For a while he was fine since he had \$1,000 course costs from the Student Loan to spend and he could use his overdraft. He wasn't watching his account and when the rent payments went out they were reversed because of unavailable funds. Before long he owed six weeks rent (\$810) and his flatmates told him to leave. He had no money to move and no money to pay up. He had to find a job fast, but assignments were due so he was stressing out.

**Moral:** A roof over your head is essential! Make sure you always pay the rent first. Don't let rent or bills pile up until they are too big a problem to handle.

**Jeremy** received a Student Allowance and worked on-call at his job. Often he worked extra hours and he regularly earned over the income limit for the allowance. He got a letter from the Ministry of Social Development advising him of a debt of \$1,349 due to an overpayment of his Allowance. Data matching occurs regularly and Jeremy got caught. He regretted not getting his allowance adjusted for the weeks when he earned over the limit.

**Moral:** Be aware of your income threshold. If you don't advise StudyLink, you will end up with a debt to repay.

**Kate** signed a term lease for her flat at the beginning of Trimester 1. The lease end date was 20 February of the following year. During the year two flatmates moved out. Their names were not on the lease. It wasn't easy to find replacement flatmates and it took longer than expected. Kate had to work extra hours to pay the extra rent during that time and this affected her studies badly.

**Moral:** Everyone should sign the lease and be clear on their commitment; or the head tenant should make sure the others in the flat sign a flat sharing agreement to reduce his/her risk.

**James** and his parents put together a plan that they would pay his first hall instalment. His StudyLink income and wages over the following weeks would build up to enough to pay the second instalment. He kept all his money in one bank account and it was slowly increasing. But by the time the next instalment was due, he was \$1,500 short! When he checked his bank statements, he realised he had been spending about \$100 per week on food and drinks, beyond the meals provided at the Hall. He had eaten the money needed for his accommodation.

**Moral:** Check bank statements regularly to make sure your money is going where it should be. Have a system to limit personal spending.

**Deanna** was getting a Student Allowance and casual work with a catering company. In an average week she would get about 10 hours of work, which was enough to cover her essential living costs. Sometimes she would work a lot in one week, and she would reward herself with a big night out with friends or a new pair of shoes. Then there were three weeks in a row where she had very little work, and she couldn't afford to pay bills or bus fares.

**Moral:** If your income varies, base your budget on the minimum income. In times where you earn more, put some money aside in savings for the times when you might have less.