

Rodney & Penny Clarke
4 Cowrang Ave
Terrey Hills NSW 2084

Hon Julia Gillard
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

15th March, 2009

Dear Ms Gillard,

After hearing you speak so passionately during Parliamentary question time on the Wednesday 4th February, 2009, regarding how, *"the children are the priority of the Australian Government"*, that *"children are the future of our nation"*, and the education of Australian kids is your priority, I was both inspired and compelled to write you a letter explaining an issue facing parents of **children with a disability** when the child transitions from Primary into High School, Year 7, in NSW.

The Issue

Our son, Daniel (12), has attended Terrey Hills Public School from kindergarten 2000 through to year 6, 2008. Daniel has moderate cerebral palsy, he uses a wheelchair, and requires a full-time teachers aide at school to assist him.

For Daniel's High School my husband and I have chosen for him to attend an independent school, Northern Beaches Christian School (NBCS) located at Terrey Hills, Sydney.

NBCS is close to our home, it already has the necessary facilities to cater for Daniel such as ramps, undercover walkways, single storey buildings, accessible toilets and existing technology due to other disabled children previously attending the school.

Unfortunately our local government High School, Davidson, has never had a child with a wheelchair disability and a conservative estimate to implement an accessible solution will exceed \$1 million - the cost borne by the Australian Government.

This is primarily due to the school's current structure being two storeys and requiring the construction of an elevator facility and raised walkways traversing the school.

Daniel requires the assistance of a full-time teachers aide to assist him with general mobility, toileting, eating and most importantly acting as a scribe for him throughout his school day.

As NBCS receives only minimal government funding for Daniel's teachers aide the burden to raise the additional \$20,000 to \$25,000 per annum, rests on our shoulders.

This means over the next six years of Daniel's High School my husband and I will need to raise \$150,000, on top of the existing school fees, in order to put Daniel through High School (This is over and above the numerous other costs we bare that are associated with Daniel's disability such as house modifications, a car equipped to handle a wheelchair, etc., for which there is also no funding available).

The effort required by my husband and I to raise these funds is applying an enormous stress on our relationship and our family as a whole.

Both my husband and I have written letters to local and state governments (copies attached) to help with funding the shortfall however, with you, and your governments strong and trusted relationship with the independent school sector, I have faith that a solution can be found.

About Daniel

Daniel is a bright boy who excelled in Primary school and was elected Prefect by his peers in 2008.

As a shining example of youth leadership, Daniel has raised around \$600,000 to save the orangutans in Indonesia. In 2007, at 10 years old, the Australian Orangutan Project (AOP) asked Daniel to be their National Children's Ambassador.

Over the past two years Daniel has had the good fortune to meet former Prime Minister John Howard in 2007 and in his words, "He (*Daniel*) is an inspirational young Australian".

With a pledge of \$500k from the government towards orangutan conservation, Daniel was elated to think that John Howard would help him achieve his dream. He is also very grateful that your government has kept that commitment.

With the assistance of an anonymous supporter Daniel, his brother William (10) and my husband and I, were fortunate to travel to Borneo in November 2008 to see first hand the destruction of orangutan habitat. We also were given the opportunity to visit the OFI Care Centre in Pangkalanbun, where he was able to hold a baby orangutan and play with the adolescents.

Daniel has come back from his trip even more passionate about his crusade to help the orangutans and the environment in general.

A Current Affair recently interviewed Daniel about his trip and this segment will be going to air in the near future.

As you can see from the brief overview of what Daniel has achieved over the last two years he still has much to offer.

In closing

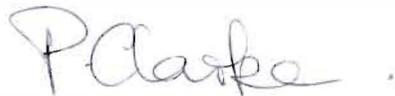
Should you have the opportunity to meet Daniel I am sure you will see first hand a future full of optimism and choice and, even with his disability, Daniel is determined to achieve great things and become a leader in our community.

With your help, and assistance from the government, Daniel will be able to achieve his goals and pave the way for students with a disability.

As a family we would be delighted to meet with you, and your ministers, to discuss the situation in more detail and I know Daniel would be very excited to meet you as well.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "P. Clarke".

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