

Meghan loves her home away from home

Mater Dei offers the Family Resource and Residential Program for our students aged between 12 and 18 years of age. The program is designed to compliment the students' education at school and at home and provide them with the valuable life skills that many of us acquire naturally and take for granted. The Fahy Family are a new family to the program and we asked them to share their story with us.



Meghan in her room with her favourite doona.

Our introduction to Mater Dei occurred in 1996 when we attended the William Syndrome Association annual picnic day held in the school grounds at Camden. We were at that time living in Goulburn and teaching at St Patrick's College. Although we were very happy with the care and education our daughter Meghan was receiving at Wollondilly Primary School, we were aware that Meghan's secondary school education demanded our attention.

Fortunately, one of the children in attendance was a senior student at Mater Dei and her mother strongly recommended the school to us. We were soon convinced that the school was an attractive option for



Meghan prepares her lunch for the following school day.

Meghan in her secondary school years.

Following several visits to Mater Dei we applied for a school and residential position for Meghan. Meghan's future needs have always weighed heavily on us. As older parents we realized that Meghan needed the best possible education in the immediate future and vocational and life skills training which might ensure her happiness and well being in the more distant future.

The school and residential program were attractive to us for several reasons. First, it would ensure Meghan would learn life skills and receive an education in the context of a caring Catholic school. Secondly, we were impressed by the attention given in the senior years to vocational training and placement in the local workforce. Thirdly, as working parents with an able younger child we felt Meghan would profit by being in a live-in situation and that her sister, Gabrielle, would benefit by receiving a little attention of her own. Like so many parents with a disabled child we had often heard Gabrielle complain "what about me?"

We moved back to Sydney early in 2001 and maintained our contact with Mater Dei. Meghan was accepted and with some reservations we also opted for her to spend four nights a week in residence. Fortunately Meghan had enjoyed two nights a month respite at St Anthony's, Croydon. She enjoyed the experience so much that she would start packing some days ahead of her next respite weekend. The positive experience at St Anthony's had prepared Meghan

for longer stays away from home and we have found she has adapted enthusiastically to residential life.

The weekly boarding program not only offers Meghan a real opportunity for the best possible preparation for adult life but also gives us a welcome respite from the constant grind of caring for a loving, loveable but very demanding daughter. A further advantage for Meghan in the residential program is that her afternoons are spent constructively in play or on excursions and forming a wide variety of relationships with children in her own and other houses.

As Meghan's first day loomed our doubts grew despite our sure knowledge that our earlier decision was correct. The night of Tuesday, 1st February, was one of dramatic thunder storm activity all over Sydney. The worst possible introduction to residential life for an insecure twelve year old away from the security of her own home. Despite some tears all round, we survived that night and indeed the whole first week. Numerous phone calls home proved a great reassurance for Meghan and her anxious family. We were greatly relieved to find she needed no persuading to attend school the following Monday. Since then, Meghan has grown very comfortable with the whole Mater Dei experience.

All in all we could not have hoped for a better start to the school year. We feel we are very blessed indeed.

Anne and Lawrie Fahy