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Zoe's future at St Paul's College looks bright

Zoe is a vibrant, sociable and loving 17-year-old who makes her parents Edmond and Natasha extremely proud.

Her development over the last ten years at Villa Maria Catholic Homes' specialist school St Paul's College is nothing short of extraordinary, her Dad says.

"We visited so many schools who wouldn't accept Zoe. She was a handful with some challenging behaviors and didn't 'fit the categories' many schools had. Then we found St Paul's."

Edmond says with love, patience and compassion shown by teachers, by the end of Zoe's first year at St Paul's, she'd "transformed."

"Zoe went from a seven-year-old who would kick and scream to a student who couldn't wait to get to school each morning. In her earlier years she went to class knowing three words, and 18 months later could approximate 37 words – it was incredible."

Fast-forward ten years and Zoe is gearing up for her final year at St Paul's. Before she moves on, the family is excited about the school's impending move from Kew to a new site in Balwyn, where educational opportunities are set to soar.

VMCH has just launched its Donate to Create appeal, raising funds for the school's new Discovery Centre of Imagination; an integrated learning environment where each child is given the best possible springboard from which to learn to live as independently as possible.

"Zoe is really looking forward to the move, and we are very excited. The school is now a bit old and it's awkward to get around, the new school will be one level and modern. The Discovery Centre is going to be incredible for Zoe... she'll love the stimulation, colour and excitement. It will be a breath of fresh air."

Zoe's teacher, Hygenia Lobo, said a new Black Cat Café and Kitchen Garden at Balwyn will give senior students the opportunity to develop essential life skills to pave the way for their future employment and independence.

The café, which has been running at a smaller capacity at Kew, will be more like the "real deal", with a kiosk-serve window and potential to extend to canteen orders.

"It took 18 months for students at the cafe to get where they are today; doing things independently and taking so much pride in it. Some of them now go home and offer to make tea or coffee for their parents – which is beautiful to see."

Hygenia said she expected Zoe and others to thrive in the new environment.

MORE



PAGE TWO

“I’ve got big dreams and hopes for our kids. This new site will enhance these opportunities and give us our own space to work - the sky is the limit.”

For Edmond, the only downside to the move is that Zoe will be there just one year before she graduates. But he takes heart in what it means for generations to come.

“I personally believe that St Paul’s is second to none in Victoria. It’s fabulous for the development, care and compassion shown for the children – who are given full dignity and met with kindness. We’re blessed for the time Zoe’s had there and we can’t wait for her final year to be the best yet.”

VMVH will hold a free Art and Craft Exhibition on Saturday, November 17 in Hawthorn to raise funds for the Donate to Create appeal. For more information please visit www.vmch.com.au/artcraftexhibition or www.vmch.com.au/donatotocreate

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About Villa Maria Catholic Homes

Through our passion and commitment to everyday people, Villa Maria Catholic Homes (VMCH) works in partnership with people of all ages and abilities. From all faiths and backgrounds, to achieve their goals, remain connected to their community and maintain independence.

We’re a Catholic not-for-profit organisation, providing services to 7,600 people across Victoria. Ask anyone at VMCH and you’ll find we’re driven by wanting to achieve outcomes that enhance the lives of older Australians, people with disability, families and carers.

We have a long history in listening to what people want and need. By making sure we can deliver services to match those needs, we can offer greater choice and opportunity to our customers. We want to help build compassionate and sustainable communities, so everyone is included.

Today we offer services that cover affordable housing options, residential aged care, retirement living, home community and disability services and specialist education. We’re an agile organisation constantly improving how we do things.

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