

Home Away From Home

By Jodie O Sullivan, Border Mail.



Home away from home ... Harry Janetzki, 19, with his father John at Henty's Avondale Place respite home. The service has been a "godsend" for the family. Picture by Mark Jesser.

When John and Di Janetzki arrived to collect their son Harry from respite, the 19-year-old walked out proudly bearing containers of food he'd made them. The couple, who run a mixed farming operation on 2500 acres at Yerong Creek, couldn't quite believe it.

"There were even pizzas to heat up," John marvelled.
"Harry has really taken to cooking during his stays – he just loves it; although at home it's a different story."

Indeed Harry appears to love everything about Henty's Avondale Place – from the staff to the social stimulation and, of course, meal planning. The short-stay respite service has been a "godsend" for the family, according to John.

Before Avondale Place opened its doors in 2023, there had been "no option" for a reprieve for the Janetzkis.

The NDIS is on track to cost \$50 billion in 2025-26 and keep growing, a trajectory which has some warning it is at risk of collapsing under its own weight unless drastic changes are made.

Harry, who has mild autism, anxiety and a slight intellectual disability, can be quite challenging with his behaviour, his father explained.
"Di and I have had to battle along on our own – and also try to balance Harry's special needs with our other sons Jack (now 22) and Tom (16)," John said. Coupled with the demands of the farm and the loss of John's father Harold and brother Mark in the space of four months last year, it has been a struggle for the family at times.

“We haven’t been able to get respite through the NDIS – they wouldn’t support it,” John admitted.

“It can be really tough – and it does take a toll on you.”

Thanks to the efforts of the Henty Respite Trust board, Harry spent a week at Avondale Place in September 2023, followed by a more recent stay in January 2024. It’s been the only breaks the couple has been able to have.

“We were absolutely knackered,” John said.

“We were able to get away for a few days to Yackandandah, have some time to ourselves and recharge the batteries.”



Harry Janetzki, who has autism, anxiety and a slight intellectual disability, has learned life skills like cooking during his stays at Avondale Place, Henty. Picture by Mark Jesser.

As for Harry, well he feels like he’s on a holiday “as Avondale Place is like resort style living”, Di said.

“We are blessed to have this service in our community so that Harry can still access his local surrounds and regular activities while enjoying visits from family and friends,” she said. “The carers are local and they know Harry and he feels safe and comfortable spending time there.”



Henty Respite Trust board members Mary Liston and Alison Campbell with John Janetzki and his son Harry, who has loved his stays at Avondale Place respite home. Picture by Mark Jesser.

Trent Dean, the chief executive of Mercy Connect (which delivers the respite supports at Avondale Place), said it was heartening to receive positive feedback from local families utilising the respite services.

He added community support continued to drive the success of the facility, which offers reprieve to families and carers in the Greater Hume and Lockhart shires and surrounds.

Avondale Place encompass two forms of accommodation on a large site – a four-bedroom respite care centre and up to four two-bedroom independent living units. A groundswell of community support and fundraising helped bring to life a project kickstarted by a \$1.5 million donation from Peter and Alison Campbell, who have their own lived experience of the burden that comes with caring for a child with a debilitating health condition.

Supports can be provided (but are not limited to) families and carers of loved ones with physical and mental disabilities; autism spectrum disorder; personal or environmental crisis; mental health issues; and, illnesses such as chronic fatigue, Parkinson's or Motor Neurone Disease.

- For more information on the services Avondale Place can provide, contact Mercy Connect on (02) 6043 3500 or email enquiries@mercyconnect.org.au

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