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## BEACHES & VALLEYS

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SEWAGE UPGRADE PUSH PAGE 2

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ICU's top Alumnus



**BRAVE WOMAN:** One of newest arrivals at Sun Pacific College at Kewarra Beach, Japanese student Maho Nagarekawa was born with athetoid cerebral palsy.

Picture: TOM LEE

# Incredible journey

## Overcoming the odds

A JAPANESE woman with a spirit of adventure and a desire to learn English has refused to let her severe disability and communication difficulties deter her from studying at a Kewarra Beach language school.

Twenty-year-old Maho Nagarekawa is one of the newest arrivals at Sun Pacific College and has difficulty speaking, walking and even doing simple things like eating, brushing her hair and using a pen.

Born with athetoid cerebral palsy, Maho suffers involuntary muscle spasms and needs a motorised wheelchair to get around, but has relished the chance to travel overseas, learn a new language and stay with an Australian host family.

"I think she is very brave to have undertaken such a trip and I cannot imagine the process she must have gone through to get here," said Sun Pacific general manager Hans von Dietze.

"The thing that's impressive is she's gone about this by herself. She has no carer with her. She wanted a home stay experience. She wanted to get out there and do this. We've got a local family hosting her nearby, so she can come to school by wheelchair.

"The fact that she is studying English in Cairns in itself is amazing," Mr von Dietze said.

He said the community had helped Maho settle in - from the caring host family, to a

● ROZ PULLEY

local electrician sorting out a wheelchair problem for free, and others taking her to meet local Spinal Awareness Association members.

Maho said her parents had encouraged her to be independent from an early age and sought out the best medical help so she could learn how to speak, move and do things for herself.

"She went to the same kindergarten that normal children go to and she did everything herself from when she was little," said Sun Pacific administration officer Kiyomi Shinzato.

After attending mainstream schools - where her favourite subject was maths and the only blemish on her report card was low marks in physical education - she enrolled at Tama University in Tokyo and is now in the third year of a four-year degree.

"She is interested in working in welfare in the future and she wanted to know what foreign countries do - maybe Japan and Australia are doing it in different ways," Kiyomi said.

"Also she would like to do things by herself."

Maho said she had made many new friends from around the world during her Kewarra Beach stay and was looking forward to seeing more of Cairns and the region before she returned home this month.

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