

We have moved to an exciting new home 

Their very special gift

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Bernie and Janet Hawkins at their Woodend farm. DENNIS MANKTELOW

A LONG-held dream of Woodend's Janet and Bernie Hawkins is now much closer to reality.

On December 21 concrete was poured for two specially designed respite cottages for disabled children and their families.

The couple approached Very Special Kids almost a decade ago offering their 26ha farm, known as Glen Osmond, for accommodation for a respite, counselling and bereavement service.

Expected to be complete by July, the cottages could be the first of up to five, as well as a barn and extensive landscaping.

Designer and builder Peter Jackson has a personal motivation for the project - his 11-year-old daughter Eliza is a very special kid and lives with Rett Syndrome.

"I have an intimate experience with Very Special Kids and to be involved with this is undoubtedly the most satisfying and important work I've ever done," he said.

The cottages have wheelchair access, tracks in the ceiling to lift children, and a disabled access bathroom. Mr Jackson said the cottages with views to Hanging Rock and Mt Macedon were designed to be restorative and relaxing for often time-poor, stressed and financially challenged families.

Very Special Kids chief executive David Agnew said the gift of the farm was an incredible gesture.

He said it would be impossible for Very Special Kids, which cares for more than 800 families, to fund the project.

All Very Special Kids families have children with terminal or life-threatening illnesses.