

(SAMANTHA - from previous page)

involved in the Jewish community. She really enjoys lighting Shabbat candles and insists on lighting one for her baby sister.

Samantha started the kindergarten at the beginning of this year. Last year when I was choosing which school I was going to send her to, I was looking for the most flexible, the one most eager to have her and the one which would help me develop the right program within the school structure. I think I made the right choice.

be away from me although she never told me any morning that she did not want to go. It was obviously different from her crèche. Now there were more children in the room, a new set of rules to follow, and a new environment to get used to. A lot of time was spent in trying to distract Samantha and keep her from thinking about Mummy and home. She signed for Mummy and Daddy throughout the day and her tears were real.

Still I felt that I had made the right decision of where Samantha would get the best chance to develop her potential. We had regular meetings - together with her teachers, therapists and me. I felt enormous pressure to get this to work and although everyone

was willing to do what I suggested and had good suggestions of their own, as Samantha's Mum I was the one up all night planning and thinking. After about 3 months the tears and the need for distraction stopped, thanks to the big effort of all her teachers. In this time Samantha was accepted as part of the group as only children can accept someone so different from themselves. She had made her "click" of friends. Towards the end of the first semester she received her first invitation to go to a friend's house. This boy insisted on speaking to Samantha on the phone and told her that she can bring her walker to his house! What a great afternoon we had.



Now, well into the year, we are developing programs and structures to ensure Samantha continues to thrive and develop along her way. The school, teachers and therapists are amazingly supportive and willing to go out of their way to ensure Samantha's integration is successful. Samantha is so very happy to go to "kinder" every morning. I have increased her hours there, as she was becoming bored and frustrated at home and anyway she wants to be with her "boyfriend" at kinder.

It is an endless task of planning and re-planning and there have been big and small disappointments and successes along the way. Of course it is all worth the effort when I watch with amazement as many of the children in her class use sign language to her and to each other; rush to help guide her walker and become so excited when Samantha vocalizes even when it is obvious they do not really understand what they hear.

We have many years ahead of us but I think for now and for the near future at least, Samantha is in the best environment for her and for our whole family. I look forward to the time when our second daughter - Natalie (unaffected) will be joining her at school. ML4



We began in February. Our first day, like any first day of school was filled with a mixture of anxiety and happiness. That in itself, going through the same emotions as any other mother, was a new and less isolating experience for me. Samantha was pretty keen to go. She knew she was going to a new place and understood that this was the start of something big. She had even agreed to throw away her pacifier. The teacher and Samantha's assistant had visited our home twice during the lead up to the start of term and had got to know Samantha a little. At least there were a few familiar faces. The first semester was pretty difficult for Samantha I think. She was quite upset to