Budgeting case study – 1

Student boarding with friends

Mai is 22 and is studying a Bachelor of Business/Bachelor of Laws full-time at Parramatta Campus. She has completed her business subjects, and is in her final year of law subjects. She had to move out of home last year due to family difficulties, and is boarding with a family at Bossley Park.

Mai receives Youth Allowance at the living away from home rate of $355.40 per fortnight. She works two shifts each weekend in a local restaurant, and earns around $100 per week, depending on tips. This session she had to borrow $400 from Centrelink to pay for textbooks, so her Youth Allowance will be reduced to $280 for six months. Her HECS is around $2700 per session, and she has deferred this until she is working full-time.

Mai pays $100 a week board, which includes electricity costs and some meals. She spends around $50-70 extra each week on food—lunches, snacks, etc. Mai doesn't use the home phone, since she has a mobile phone her parents bought her when she had to move out, and she uses pre-paid calls. She bought furniture for her bedroom gradually, as she could afford it.

Textbooks are Mai's most expensive uni cost, with law texts costing a minimum of $300 per session. She has to buy all essential texts because they are often used in open book exams. Occasionally she has been able to find second hand texts.

Mai doesn’t have a computer. She does all her assignments in the uni computer labs, which are open 24 hours a day. She prints her assignments in the labs.

Mai doesn’t have a car, she catches public transport (a bus then two trains) to uni and gets a bus to work or the shops. She doesn’t buy many clothes, but shops at bargain outlets or looks for specials at jeans shops, etc. She says that when you haven’t got much money, it's really important to write out a budget and to have the willpower not to overspend.