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Deafblind Event Needs Helpers

Prominent Perth singer Karen Magistro and Fremantle hospitality manager Anthony Brandis are just two recruits from a small army of volunteers needed to help with a very unique conference next month, which is being organised by the **Senses Foundation (Inc)**.

The Sense Foundation is the primary advocate for West Australians who are both deaf and blind (or blind with an additional disability). Between September 25 and 30 it will host the **14th Deafblind International World Conference, at the Burswood Convention Centre**.

The conference is the most important event on the calendar for the international deafblind community and is expected to attract more than 500 delegates from afar afield as Brazil and Norway. Among them will be the world's leading authorities on deafblindness.

The event's theme is 'Breaking the Isolation and Building Worldwide Connections' and included on an impressive guest list is Federal Human Rights Commissioner, Graeme Innes (AM) who is the Commissioner responsible for Disability Discrimination.

But Sense Foundation Chief Executive Officer, Debbie Karasinski, says as the conference draws nearer, many more volunteers, like **Como** couple Anthony and Karen are needed to help with a variety of jobs.

Karen is well known on the Perth entertainment scene, most famously as Agnetha from **ABBASALUTELY** and a vocalist in Pretty Fly and Strutt. She will perform out front of a three-piece band in the Conference's hospitality room. Her partner, Anthony, is helping organise the opening and closing ceremonies and is a long-term Foundation volunteer.

The volunteer couple caught up with Senses Foundation client Cassandra (aged 5) and her parents Marie and John Ingley, from Applecross, during the week. The family utilises the Sense Foundation respite care and specialist communication services for Cassandra, who was born with CHARGE syndrome. She is deafblind and was this week celebrating some major milestones including attending her first dance

lesson, pedalling her bike and unlocking the car for her embarrassed dad, who had accidentally locked her, and his keys, inside.

Volunteers at the International Conference could be asked to help with a range of jobs that could include caring for guide dogs, interpreting sign language and acting as guides for the vision impaired.

Senses Foundation, Chief Executive Officer, Debbie Karasinski, says the conference poses some very unique challenges for organisers and help from volunteers is essential to making it a success.

“We estimate that we need 1,800 hours of volunteer time and while we’ve already had a lot of people commit to helping out, we need more,” Ms Karasinski says.

“People can feel assured that for many of the roles, they don’t need any special skills.

“They could just hand out name tags, show a delegate with vision impairment to their seat and of course someone is needed to walk and water the Guide Dogs.

“This is a great community service project for a club or organisation that wants to help out a not-for-profit organisation in a very practical way.”

Volunteer training days are scheduled for September 14 and 15.

Anyone who can help is asked to contact **Senses Foundation (Inc)**, Staff Training and Development Officer, David Canham on 9473 5400.



Photograph shows Anthony (back left) and Karen (back right) with Senses Foundation clients Cassandra (age 5) and her parents Marie and John from Applecross.

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Press release issued by Kerry Faulkner, Senses Foundation Media Liaison Officer on 0432 098 878.