



*Ending the isolation.*

**September 20, 2007**

## Technology provides eyes and ears for deafblind boy

A JAPANESE teenager who uses a mobile phone with refreshable Braille to communicate, is one of the presenters focusing on improved technology at the 14<sup>th</sup> Deafblind International World Conference hosted by the Senses Foundation Inc in Perth next week.

Junior high school student Atsushi Mori was born deafblind and is one of more than 450 delegates, many leading authorities in their fields, travelling from afar afield as Russia, India, Africa and Brazil for the event.

He will outline how his Braille phone, which was developed by researchers at Tokyo University, has helped his education and socialisation, and his efforts in working with researchers to improve its effectiveness.

The conference starts at Burswood Convention Centre on September 25 with a keynote address (by video) by acclaimed **American inventor Raymond Kurzweil**.

He created the Kurzweil Reading Machine in 1976, a breakthrough invention that allowed people who are blind to convert text into language. Kurzweil was inducted into the American National Inventors Hall of Fame in 2002 and is a widely acclaimed innovator.

In other technology presentations, American Jim Halliday, president of the Emeritus division of HumanWare, will outline his company's work in creating a portable deafblind communicator that provides TTY (text telephone) communications, face to face communication using a Braille keyboard, Braille and large print output and the option of email and Internet.

In addition, German researcher Andreas Hub will showcase a portable electronic navigator that helps people with a vision impairment move independently in new and complex environments like large conference sites.

The unit utilises GPS and a three dimensional inertial sensor for precise navigation with up to one step accuracy.

Senses Foundation Chief Executive Officer Debbie Karasinski says technology has broken down enormous barriers for people who are deafblind and as it improves so too do opportunities.

“Keep in mind that deafblindness is one of the loneliest, most isolating disabilities and research shows that in Western Australia alone, 40,000 people are deafblind or blind with an additional disability,” Ms Karasinski said.

“It’s an enormous privilege to have someone of the calibre of Ray Kurzweil, whose achievements in the field of technology, and speech and hearing have been so many and so remarkable.

“We can expect his keynote address on the acceleration of information based technologies and its implications for human biology to be visionary and a very suitable start to this event which is of world significance.”

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