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### Parents come to Senses and take a break

Imagine that 24 hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week you care for a child with such severe health problems that every night you monitor them constantly just to ensure they keep breathing.

The Senses Foundation (formerly the Royal WA Institute for the Blind) has many clients like this and is treating the people who are mainly responsible for their care, to a well deserved break on March 8, when it hosts its third parents respite weekend, this one at the Swan Valley Oasis Resort at Henley Brooke.

Senses social worker Karen Wickham says having a child who has disabilities can have an enormous impact on family life. For the primary carer, like Natasha Hrabar, pictured here with two year old daughter Abbey, days are often filled with one specialist appointment after another. These include physiotherapy and occupational therapy provided by the Senses team. Abbey's sister Leah (4) also attends the Senses sibling support group.

Abbey was born with a rare neurological disorder called Agenesis of the Corpus Callosum, where the part of the brain that connects right and left spheres is partially absent. Her early life has been a series of hospital stays. Seizures are one side effect of her condition, as is poor muscle tones (which means Abbey rolls rather than crawls or walks although is firmly on target to master a walking frame by her birthday on March 7). She has had two operations on her skull to released fused sections.

Natasha says the respite weekend is a great opportunity to get away and spend some quality time with her husband, Ward. In addition, it was a chance to meet other parents who share the same experiences and learn from experts who host workshops on relevant topics, like grieving, across the weekend.

But Senses social worker Karen Wickham says it's not all work and no play. On the contrary, games include Laser Corps (war games using lasers) and golf interspersed with lots of down time and lovely lunches and dinners.

She said people who are the primary carers in a family often find it difficult to take a holiday because their role is so important in meeting the needs of others in the home.

"But it is important they take time off, to mix with others with similar experiences and to recharge their batteries, so that they go home with renewed energy," she said.

Anyone who is interested in working in respite care at the Senses Foundation can call Senses Respite Co-ordinator Clare Long on 9473 5443.

Picture shows Abbey (right) with Natasha who is taking a little respite break next weekend.

Ends

This media release prepared by; Kerry Faulkner, Senses Media Liaison Officer, on mobile 0432 098878. For more information about the respite weekend call Karen Wickham on 9473 5400.

