



MEDIA RELEASE

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Pilbara's deafblind to benefit from Royalties to Regions

Living in regional Western Australia can make it incredibly difficult for people with a disability to access vital specialist services.

But things are certainly about to improve in the Pilbara, with professional staff from Senses Foundation planning a series of visits to provide specialist communication education, training and resources to people who are deafblind or vision impaired with additional disabilities.

The three trips are being made possible with funding from Royalties to Regions and Telethon and support from the Disability Services Commission.

They include a three-day visit to provide a day's training each in Dampier, Wickham and Karratha in mid October 2009, a two-day training workshop for Port Hedland in mid March 2010, and a further two-day trip visiting Tom Price and Paraburdoo in May 2010.

A recent study commissioned by Senses Foundation titled "*Unseen and Unheard*" revealed that 29,100 people in Western Australia in 2003 were either deafblind (8,800) or blind with an additional disability (20,300).

Of these, more than 11,000 lived outside the metropolitan area and 2775 of these resided in areas classified as either outer regional or remote.

In the Town of Port Hedland, 1882 people with disabilities were identified in 2003. Of these, 371 had profound or severe disabilities and 807 had a sensory disability. Remarkably, only 64 received disability services.

The Shire of Roebourne was found to have 2,256 people with disabilities. Of these 442 had profound or severe disabilities and 956 had a sensory disability, and only 61 received disability services.

Senses Foundation's Therapy and Specialist Services Manager Matthew Wittorff says the needs of people who are deafblind or vision impaired with additional disabilities are unique and individual.

"People who are deafblind or vision impaired with additional disabilities are often isolated in our society. Service providers, families and carers often require highly specialised support in order to secure the best outcomes for this group of people," says Matthew.

“What we are aiming to do is work with local organisations to provide information, strategies and resources to support this disadvantaged group. As the statistics show, people with disabilities in the bush miss out. Hopefully we can improve the life of some of these people, by working with those who know them best.”

Senses Foundation’s education and training program for the Pilbara aims to:

- Increase the knowledge and skills of service providers working with people who are deafblind or vision impaired with an additional disability in the Pilbara region;
- Provide resources and training to assist people who are deafblind or have a vision impairment with additional disabilities, and their families and carers, that maximises their life outcomes;
- Train and educate key health care workers in the indigenous communities of the Pilbara region in the causes of deafblindness and vision impairment with additional disabilities; and
- Develop key links with local stakeholders in the Pilbara region, including key personnel within the local indigenous communities.

Senses Foundation was formed when the Royal WA Institute for the Blind - one of WA’s oldest charities - amalgamated with the WA Deafblind Association.

It is now WA’s primary advocate and service provider for people who are deafblind or vision impaired with additional disabilities, providing highly specialised programs and services to improve communication, socialisation, mobility and quality of life for both adults and children.

For more information about the Pilbara program contact Matthew Wittorff at Senses Foundation on 9473 5458.

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