



MEDIA RELEASE

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Disability training makes sense in Bunbury

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

But things are about to improve in Bunbury and the wider South-West region, with professional staff from Senses Foundation visiting on 17 and 18 November to run much-needed training and education sessions.

The trip is being made possible with funding from Telethon and support from the Disability Services Commission.

It will include a training session focusing on age-related dual sensory loss at the Stirling Street Arts Centre on Tuesday 17 November from 1pm-3pm.

Senses Foundation's Therapy and Specialist Services Manager, Matthew Wittorff says this session is aimed at the family and friends of people who are developing both vision and hearing impairment, as well as carers and support staff who work in the aged care field.

On 18 November Senses' professional staff will run a second session at College Row School for teachers and education assistants.

"We do a lot of work with children who have a sensory impairment and other disabilities and have some useful ideas and strategies that can help to enhance communication and learning," says Matthew.

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.

Combined, the City of Bunbury (6,429), Shire of Busselton (5,326), Shire of Capel (1,423) and Shire of Harvey (3,550) have 16,728 people with disabilities. Of these 4,243 have profound or severe disabilities and 5,545 have a sensory disability.

Matthew 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,” he says.

“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 country 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 Bunbury 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 Bunbury 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 Bunbury region in the causes of deafblindness and vision impairment with additional disabilities; and
- Develop key links with local stakeholders in the Bunbury region, including key personnel.

If anyone is interested in attending any of these sessions please call Matthew on 9473 5458.

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.

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