



MEDIA RELEASE

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Making sense of deafblindness

Imagine not being able to hear and see properly. Communicating with your friends and family, as well as the wider community, would certainly be a challenge.

You may be surprised to know there are almost nine thousand people in Western Australia who live with deafblindness - a complex and unique disability distinct from the single sensory disabilities of hearing or vision impairment.

The two impairments impact on each other and amplify the effect and difficulties faced by the individual. A person does not have to be completely deaf or blind to be considered deafblind.

In 2010, Senses Foundation is hoping to raise awareness of communication techniques for people who are deafblind during Deafblind Awareness Week from 23 to 28 May.

The Foundation has invited visiting communication expert, Paul Hart, to be the key presenter at a free public forum on Friday 28 May in Northbridge.

Paul is the Principal Officer for Practice at Sense Scotland. His presentation will focus on "Building the Foundations of Communication - Roles and Relationships between Communication Partners".

The forum will also include three presentations by experienced Senses Foundation staff, highlighting the successful ways the support agency assists people with this unique disability. These presentations will focus on:

- Tech Heads: Introducing Technology to Young Children who are Deafblind - Melanie Robartson, Speech Pathologist and Fiona Kemp, Occupational Therapist
- "Super Sibs" Sibling Support: A Program for the Brothers and Sisters of Children who are Deafblind - Karen Wickham, Social Worker
- Introducing Communication Guides to Deafblind Services in Western Australia - Angela Wills, Deafblind Consultant

This event is being held at the Emphyrean Function Centre, Lake Street, between 9am and noon with generous sponsorship from Cochlear and Emphyrean. Platform Auslan interpreters will be provided.

If you are interested in attending please RSVP to Elvira Edwards on 9473 5422 or email elvira.edwards@senses.asn.au.

Deafblind Awareness Week is held internationally each year in honour of Helen Keller's birthday.

While in WA as the guest of Senses Foundation, Paul will also join forces with Megan Mann from the UK's Deafblind Studies Consortium to deliver a series of targeted training sessions on dual sensory impairment and communication.

Senses Foundation will also mark the week with a 'Family Fun Day' at Perth Zoo on Sunday 23 May for clients of all ages and their families.

More information: Leanne Pitcher, Media Liaison Officer, 0408 923 249.