



MEDIA RELEASE

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Reducing the isolation

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 the Central Wheatbelt, with professional staff from Senses Foundation, including an occupational therapist and deafblind consultant, planning a visit to Narrogin on 15 and 16 February.

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

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

Senses Foundation's Therapy and Specialist Services Manager, Matthew Wittorff, says the visit will include a training session focusing on age-related dual sensory loss at Narrogin HACC in Jessie House on Tuesday 16 February from 3.3-pm-5pm.

This 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.

In addition to providing practical assistance and ideas, staff will also bring a range of equipment designed to improve the independence of someone who has vision and hearing loss.

"What we are aiming to do is work with local organisations to provide information, strategies and resources to support this disadvantaged group," explains Matthew.

“As the statistics show, people with disabilities in the country miss out. Hopefully we can improve the lives of some of these people, by working with those who know them best.”

The visiting staff have also organised a morning session at Narrogin District Education Office 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 study commissioned by Senses Foundation titled “*Unseen and Unheard*” revealed that in 2003 29,100 people in Western Australia 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 Town of Narrogin (910), Shire of Narrogin (135), Shire of Cuballing (156), Shire of Wagin (413), Shire of West Arthur (197), Shire of Wickepin (160) and the Shire of Williams (183) indicated they had 1971 people with disabilities. Of these, 554 had profound or severe disabilities and 691 had a sensory disability.

“The needs of people who are deafblind or sensory impaired with additional disabilities are unique and individual,” says Matthew.

“They are often isolated and service providers, families and carers require highly specialised support in order to secure the best outcomes for this group of people.

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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