



MEDIA RELEASE

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Foundation makes sense of deafblindness

When International Deafblind Awareness Week kicks off around the globe on June 27, Senses Foundation will be flying the flag for Western Australia.

The Burswood-based Foundation is planning a number of activities in honour of the week that celebrates the birthday of the late Helen Keller.

Top of the agenda is the official opening of a new 'sensory garden' at Senses Foundation's community home in the southern suburb of Success on June 29 at 11am.

This garden was developed with generous assistance from the Rotary clubs of Victoria Park, Curtin, Bentley and Attadale, as well as the Gosnells branch of Rotaract, who each will be presented with a Certificate of Appreciation at the opening ceremony.

Senses Foundation social worker Karen Wickham says the project took over a month to complete, but has completely transformed the outdoor area into a stimulating and relaxing environment for the three young men in their 20s who are permanent residents at the home.

It incorporates paving, timber decking, mulch, gravel and stones along with a trampoline to provide exercise and stimulation and a covered area offering shade and temperature contrast.

Plants were deliberately selected with different foliage, form, texture, smell and colour and a water feature and wind chimes are included to stimulate and relax.

"We also included edible fruits, vegetables, herbs, and spices that provide both sensory and teaching opportunities in plants, cooking and nutrition," says Karen.

House Senior Joni Miller says the garden is a wonderful addition to the home that provides the residents with another form of stimulation.

"They particularly enjoy having fun on the trampoline and listening to the water feature for relaxation," says Joni.

The Success home was the first opened under Senses Foundation's Housing Development Project, just over a year ago.

All three residents require round-the-clock care. They all have a hearing impairment and some level of vision impairment, combined with other conditions such as autism.

Joni says since Senses Foundation began providing support to the men, all three have made dramatic progress. She attributes this to the stimulation, structure and generally happy environment created by the support workers.



"It's a challenge at times, but we all feel very lucky to be working with these young men. It is a privilege to be accepted into their home," says Joni.

"Without a home like this and support from Senses Foundation, these guys would probably be in and out of institutions for the rest of their life."

Three additional community homes are planned under Senses' Housing Development Project, and will provide a further 15 much-needed accommodation places for people with disabilities.

These homes are funded by the Disability Services Commission's Community Disabled Housing Program and being built through the Department of Housing and Works.

Construction has started on the first property in Gosnells, which should be complete by November 2011. Land has been secured for two other properties in Medina and Swan View and design is underway. The Foundation also has a proposal for an additional property in Perth's north-west corridor.

Senses Foundation's Chief Executive Officer Debbie Karasinski says over 9000 West Australians live with a combination of hearing and vision impairment known as deafblindness.

"The two impairments impact on each other and amplify the effect and difficulties faced by the individual," says Ms Karasinski.

"Many of these people feel incredibly isolated, have little means of communication and find it very difficult to be active members of their local community."

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

About Senses Foundation

Senses Foundation had its origins 110 years ago as the Royal WA Institute for the Blind, then amalgamated with the WA Deafblind Association in 2001 to become Senses Foundation Inc. The Foundation is a charitable, not for profit organisation providing disability support services to people of all ages throughout Western Australia. Its unique speciality is the provision of services to people who are deafblind.