



MEDIA RELEASE

20 June 2011

Hearing and vision loss doesn't hold Sharyn back

Sharyn Mitchell, of Secret Harbour, is an inspiration to anyone with a disability.

Despite having a combined hearing and vision impairment as a result of Usher Syndrome, Sharyn is forging ahead with her life plans and refuses to let anything hold her back.

One of her greatest achievements was securing a part-time job in late 2010 with the Department of Premier and Cabinet – a role she loves despite the challenges associated with a three-hour commute to the city each day!

“Almost all of my work is computer-related,” explains Sharyn.

“I proof-read the Premier’s and other ministers’ speeches, enter correspondence data and I also work in media converting backdated files and media footage from video to DVD.”

This month Sharyn is helping Senses Foundation raise awareness of the challenges associated with her complex and unique disability by speaking out during Deafblind Awareness Week.

Deafblind Awareness Week is held internationally each year to celebrate Helen Keller’s birthday on 27 June.

Usher Syndrome is a genetic condition that is one of the most common causes of deafblindness. People with this condition are usually born with some hearing loss but their vision deteriorates as they get older.

“To me, Usher Syndrome means a life full of difficulty,” says Sharyn.

“It is a challenge just to get through each day and a constant battle to keep yourself safe and balanced as a person, without giving in to depression or solitude.”

Sharyn has been receiving services from Senses for about six years and was one of the first members of the Foundation’s Usher Support Group. Senses’ staff have also supported Sharyn as she settles into her new job.

“Senses has been a lifesaver in so many ways – for my sanity and for my general well being,” she says.

“The support group outings are extremely enlightening, fun and we have all grown close and very fond of each other over the years.”



For years Sharyn tried using hearing aids with little success. She now has two cochlear implants which enable her to hold normal conversations depending on the level of background noise. Her vision, however, is severely diminished and is getting worse all the time.

“It’s like trying to see through a very small letterbox,” she explains.

To help her get around, Sharyn relies heavily on assistance from her best friend and ‘seeing eye dog’ Versace.

“I could never do anything that I’m doing now without him, let alone go to work in the city like I do,” she says.

Staff at Sharyn’s workplace have also provided her with a magnifying device for use with documents and the computer and helped orientate her in the offices and through the city streets to the train station.

Sharyn says vision and hearing loss is unlike some other disabilities because it is not always obvious. Therefore it is important for people not to be judgemental.

“I don’t know how many times I have to explain to others that just because I look normal doesn’t mean I have normal vision,” she says. “Most blind people have some vision!”

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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.