



Sharyn's a true battler

SECRET Harbour's Sharyn Mitchell is determined her hearing and vision impairment will not hold her back and is speaking out about her disability to raise awareness for Deafblind Awareness Week.

Sharyn's cochlear implants allow her to hold conversations if there is not too much background noise, but her eyesight is deteriorating, and she called on people not to make judgements.

"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 said.

"Most blind people have some vision. For me, it's like trying to see through a very small letterbox."

Sharyn's beloved seeing-eye dog Versace helps her in her three-hour journey to the city where she is employed by the Department of Premier and Cabinet – a role she loves.

"Almost all my work is computer related," she said.

"I proofread 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."

She paid tribute to the Senses Foun-



Sharyn Mitchell with her guide dog Versace.

Picture: Neil Mulgan

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dation, where she is a founding member of the Usher Syndrome Support Group. Usher syndrome is a genetic condition, and one of the most common causes of deaf-blindness.

"To me, having Usher syndrome means a life of difficulty," she said.

"Senses have been a lifesaver in so many ways; for my sanity and for my

general wellbeing. 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."

Deafblind Awareness Week is held annually to coincide with Helen Keller's birthday and runs from June 22 to 28.

SENSES FOUNDATION TO BUILD 24-HOUR CARE HOME FOR DEAF-BLIND PEOPLE IN MEDINA

A HOME specifically built to cater for people who are vision and hearing-impaired will be built in Medina.

Senses Foundation secured land in the town and design is already under way for the house, which will provide residents with round-the-clock care.

A similar home was recently

opened in Success, housing three residents who all have a hearing impairment and some level of vision impairment.

Senses Foundation chief executive Debbi Karasinki said that more than 9000 West Australians lived with a combination of hearing and vision im-

pairment known as deaf-blindness.

"The two impairments impact on each other and amplify the effect and difficulties faced," she said. "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."