



Multi-Sensory Environment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CareWays Community, is a non-government organisation which provides a range of community services in the Illawarra. In 2015, CareWays approached the Global Challenges Program (GCP) at the University of Wollongong (UOW), to find researchers to support the implementation of a multi-sensory environment (MSE) in their Horsley Community Centre. A team of researchers from multidisciplinary backgrounds including Education, Public Health, and Computing and Information Technology was brought together by GCP to support CareWays to explore an evidence-based world's best practise approach to delivering an MSE for the local community.

MSE's provide a safe, non-threatening environment for people with conditions such as cognitive, emotional or behavioural impairments to engage in a range of sensory experiences to stimulate or calm their sensory systems. MSEs are typically found in institutional settings such as hospitals, occupational therapy clinics, schools and aged-care facilities.

- The team was successfully awarded a seed grant from UOW's GCP in 2015.
- Participants were recruited via email, fliers, and telephone to participate in focus groups and interviews, the aim of which was to gain an understanding of what the community was seeking with regard to the design and implementation of a MSE at Horsley Community Centre.
- Twenty-one people participated in four focus groups. In addition, three one-on-one interviews were conducted in June and July 2016.
- Data from the focus groups and interviews was analysed using thematic analysis. Results indicated that the community participants require further guidance around the purpose of MSEs. The participants would like the MSE to:
 1. Be able to be individualised to meet different users' needs
 2. Provide opportunities for sensory experiences to be integrated along thematic lines.
 3. Provide users with the ability to control the equipment
 4. Be a safe place that is easy to maintain and keep clean
- The community has some concerns about potential barriers to accessing/using the room, including cost, booking system, age, size or weight restrictions, transport and the small size of the room proposed for conversion to a MSE.
- The community expressed appreciation about being consulted in the planning of the room and would like to continue to have input as the project progresses.

Next Steps:

- The MSE research team was successfully awarded further project funding from UOW's GCP as well as successful in receiving a UOW Community Engagement Grant.
- The additional Global Challenges project funding will be used to conduct a process evaluation of the establishment and utilisation of the MSE.
- The Community Engagement Grant will be used to create online materials to support the implementation of MSE's in community settings.

