

New room at children's treatment centre will stimulate senses

BY DIANNE GOULQUER

Parents, children and well-wishers gathered at the George Jeffrey Children's Treatment Centre, June 21 to celebrate the grand opening of North-western Ontario's first Snoezelen Room, a chamber designed to stimulate the primary senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell through the use of music, lighting effects, gentle vibrations, tactile sensations and aromatherapy.

"It's a wonderful room just for a parent and their disabled child to have respite time together," Murray Luck, George Jeffrey Children's Treatment Centre Board of Directors Chair, said. The room includes many features and soothing activities that can be therapeutic for children.

Snoezelen was originally developed in 1975 in the Netherlands to provide an appropriate

into Canada in 1992.

Luck said he knows of one of the Centre's clients who has used a Snoezelen Room in the Toronto area, but now that the Centre has its own, 800 children that otherwise would not have, now have access to the Room on an on-going basis.

Snoezelen has been used for a wide spectrum of people, including children and adults with mild to severe disabilities. It is used for adults and children with autism, learning disabilities, sensory

disabilities, developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, emotional disturbances, dementia and visual impairments.

Luck said the greatest benefit of having a Snoezelen Room is that it helps strengthen the relationship between parent and child.

"A parent's role as therapist can be very difficult," Luck said. By having a facility where parents can spend some private time with their children, it allows the parent to be involved in the therapy, while at the same time establishing a trust between an individual and caregiver and optimize therapeutic intervention.

Aside from that, though, Snoezelen may improve behaviour, mood and vocalizations and positively affect concentration and responsiveness. A session can be used as a learning tool to improve an individual's communication and attention task. It can also be used for simple enjoyment.

The Centre's Snoezelen Room was funded entirely by a \$3,000 grant from Ronald McDonald Children's Charities of Canada and a \$3,000 donation from the Kiwanis Club of Thunder Bay, Luck said.

"If we had to rely on the government, this wouldn't have been possible."

While the facility is funded by the Ministries of Health and Community and Social Services, Luck said no money was taken from the Centre's budget to develop the Snoezelen Room



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ERICA MAKI, 5, helps Mayor Ken Boshcoff cut the ribbon to officially open the new Snoezelen Room at George Jeffrey Children's Treatment Centre.

relaxation and leisure environment for people with sensory and learning disabilities. Barbara McCormack, a mother who had seen the benefits of Snoezelen with her two-year-old daughter, Sarah, introduced the concept