

“She Would Love That”: Identifying Community Needs in a Multisensory Environment

Deborah Mayersen, PhD,¹ Roselyn Dixon, PhD,² Sim Lau, PhD,² Andrea Garner, PhD,² Pippa Burns, PhD,² Allison Cameron, MEd,² Carly Pascoe, MA,³ Michael Szafraniec³

(1) University of New South Wales Canberra; (2) University of Wollongong; (3) CareWays Community

What is the Purpose of this Study?

- The Sensory Made Inclusive Leisure Environment (SMILE) collaboration seeks to explore the needs and wishes of a community in the Illawarra region of Australia to enable the creation of a multisensory environment designed to meet local requirements.
- Multisensory environments offer diverse sensory experiences for individuals with cognitive and behavioral impairments. They are spaces in which sensory input can be controlled and manipulated to provide an environment that soothes, or sometimes stimulates, the senses of users.
- To share information from focus groups, interviews, and surveys about what potential users of a multisensory environment would like to have in the space.

What Is the Problem?

- There are few data available as to what potential users of multisensory environments require and would like within these spaces.
- There is insufficient data available as to the potential benefits or popularity of specific items of equipment within multisensory environments.
- Caregivers of people with disabilities may be socially and economically marginalized in their roles. A community-based participatory research approach seeks to address this through explicit attention to the knowledge of community members.

What Are the Findings?

- Community members want a space that is safe, clean, and can meet the needs of diverse users (including adults and children, and those with a wide range of disabilities).
- Community members want a multisensory environment to be available as often as possible, including evenings and weekends. They prefer to be able to book exclusive access to the space. Affordability is a concern for potential users.
- Community members want a multisensory environment to have equipment that can stimulate all senses. They want a dynamic sensory environment, and for users to have as much control as possible.

Who Should Care Most?

- Organizations considering establishing a multisensory environment.
- Community leaders and health care practitioners.

Recommendations for Action

- Consultation with local community members before the design and implementation of a multisensory environment.
- Adopting an evidence-informed approach to the creation of a multisensory environment.