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Romeoville Based Special Recreation Association Adds Sensory Room

The Northern Will County Special Recreation Association (NWCSRA) now has a certified Snoezelen Sensory Room for individuals enrolled in their programs. Snoezelen rooms are designed to reduce anxiety and engage the senses through the use of lights, sounds, and touch. "This room has taken about two years to come together," explained NWCSRA Executive Director Kaillee Kordas. "We did a lot of fundraising and financial planning to figure out how we were going to be able to afford it all." The room is flush with colored lights, bustling bubbles, and raised surfaces that encourage touch.



Sensory rooms have become popular among special recreation associations in Illinois and even some hospitals and schools have them. They provide benefits for everyone, even the staff. "Just stepping in here to make sure everything is working brings a calming sense," said Kordas. Of course, the main goal is to serve the SRA's participants: individuals with special needs. People with autism will greatly benefit from the surplus of sensory input in the room. Individuals who may not be verbal might look at the bubble tube and, when it changes colors, they might say "white" or "pink". That may turn out to be one of the few words they're saying at the moment. There is a projected image on the floor that changes as you interact with it. For someone who has a physical disability, they'll be getting movement with their arms and legs. Participants will also learn cause and effect with the projector. If you touch something, it spreads across the screen. "Individuals work on gross motor movements with the balance beam or the floor projector," points out Megan Siebert, Youth Program Coordinator. "Fine motor movements are practiced with the touch screen or grabbing the wall wheels and spinning them."

The room also promotes choice. "A lot of times people with special needs are given schedules," said Kordas. "They have to go to school, they have to go to therapy, their parents maybe make decisions for them. But when they're in here, the whole point is they can choose what types of equipment they want to interact with."

Right now, the sensory room is for people signed up for programs with the SRA. The room will be integrated into their existing programs, but they will also offer programs that specifically use the room. "Down the road, we are going to look into the possibility of schools reaching out to us if they have a special needs classroom and want to do some sort of field trip," says Kordas.

Many of the elements in the room are tied together to a central panel. A sunshine theme turns all the lighting yellow while an underwater theme makes everything blue. That being said, every piece of equipment turns on and off individually. If someone is sensitive to sound, the speakers can be muted or completely turned off. Everything in the room doesn't have to be used at the same time. "We want to make sure everyone feels safe. We don't want anyone to go into sensory overload," concludes Kordas.

To learn more about the Northern Will County Special Recreation Association, visit their website at nwcsra.org.