

Making Sense of Sensory

Think of a trip to a sports centre, and thoughts of working up a sweat whilst working out usually aren't far behind.

But Newburn Leisure Centre is turning that image on its head with the introduction of a special sensory room.

The area, which has been installed by leading Multi-Sensory and Soft Play company SensoryPlus, is designed to help stimulate the senses and induce relaxation for people with disabilities. It is equipped with the latest sensory products, including:

- A fibre optic carpet, which creates a "sky at night" effect with twinkling stars.
- A light projector, which uses different slides to mimic moving and coloured environments.
- A heated waterbed, the ultimate aid to comfort and relaxation. There is even an overhead hoist to allow full access for wheelchair users.
- Bubble tubes, which draw attention with constantly changing bubbles and colour.

The sensory room is part of a £2.5 million refurbishment at the Newcastle-upon-Tyne centre and sits adjacent to the reception area. It has only been in place since the start of the year, but is already proving a massive hit with the people who use it, as duty manager Joe Laws explains.

"It's been really popular and brought a lot of people in," he says. "The feedback we've had has been very good and all positive. People with disabilities and their carers who attend the centre say it's one of the best they've ever seen. It's very calming in there – but then that's the whole concept!"

The room may, at first glance, seem a fairly modern and unique facility within a leisure centre environment, but for Mr Laws it's been years in the making. *"I've wanted a sensory room at the leisure centre for about the last eight years, so it's been the realisation of a long-term ambition," he says. "It cost about £20,000 in total to install and equip. It's certainly money well spent – just for what it's giving back to adults and children with, for example, autism, and the reactions I'm seeing from people going in the room."*

The Newburn installation also features one of the SensoryPlus' newest developments; ModuSense – the modular seating solution that seamlessly integrates sensory equipment into the users immediate environment. Contoured and curved to provide a more aesthetic experience and carefully manufactured to protect and house sensory equipment whilst simultaneously allowing users to get as close to the effects as possible.

The centre charges £5 for one person to have a one-hour session, with prices rising to £7.50 and £10 for two and three people respectively. Staff are on hand to assist or advise, and helpful information sheets are also available.

And Mr Laws has nothing but praise for SensoryPlus – a company recommended to him by word of mouth. *"Someone from a healthcare company that sells disinfectant came in by chance. We got talking about what I wanted to do, and was pointed in the direction of SensoryPlus."*

"I phoned David Payne (SensoryPlus manager) and he came up for a chat and we put the wheels in motion from there. I had a couple of quotes from other companies, but they were suggesting that I needed this and that. SensoryPlus were different – they made it personal to me, listened to what I wanted, and were more than helpful. I'm just delighted I got what I wanted."

Newburn Leisure Centre is based in Grange Road, Newburn, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and can be contacted on 0191 264 0014.