

In conclusion

Benefits to participants in the 'Sense & Grow' programme will include increased confidence and sense of worth, a chance to make friends, to look after oneself, to make choices and an opportunity to care for other people, animals and the environment, plus an increased knowledge of the world around them.

about st. joseph's

We are the only centre for the education and training of blind and partially sighted children who range in age from birth through to young adulthood.

We seek, through education, training and social care to provide students with the knowledge, skills and confidence to fulfil their individual potential, so each can lead the life of his/her choice. Our Services comprise:

- Assessment Service
- Preschool & Early Intervention Service
- Primary & Secondary Education
- Residential Service
- Occupational Therapy
- Speech & Language Therapy
- Physiotherapy
- Ophthalmology Clinic
- Library Service
- Family Resource Centre
- National Braille Production Centre
- Vocational Training
- Horticulture & Pet Therapy

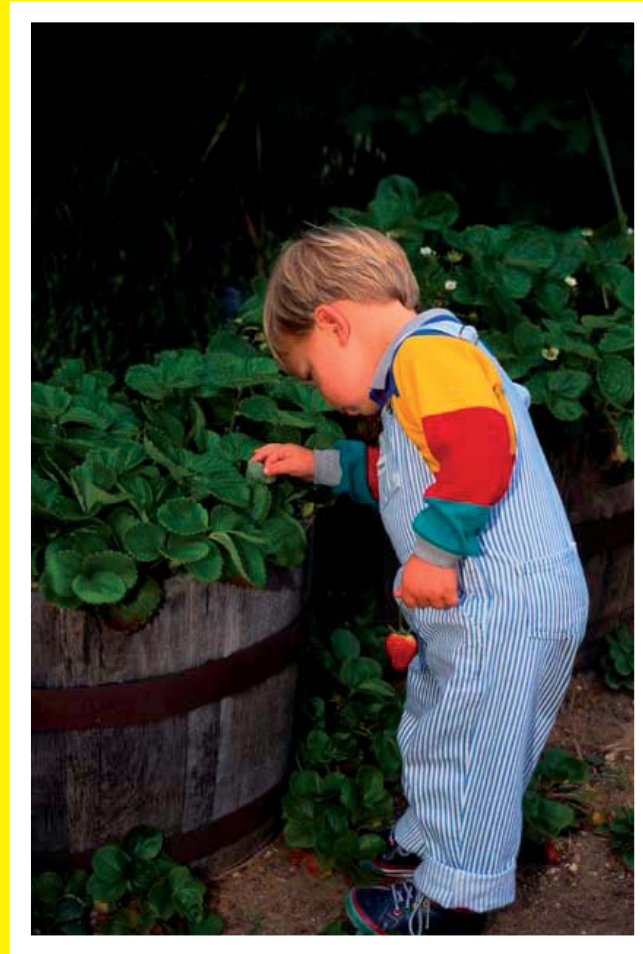
For more information on St. Josephs please visit our website at www.stjosephsvi.ie


**St. Joseph's School
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Visually Impaired**

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sense & grow project




**St. Joseph's School
& Services for the
Visually Impaired**



**Better
Ireland
Programme**

What is the 'Sense & Grow' programme?

The 'Sense & Grow' programme at St. Josephs is funded by the **AIB Better Ireland Programme**.

Located in a secure, outdoor walled area on-campus, it comprises a horticulture section for growing vegetables and flowers, a sensory garden featuring tactile and scented plants, a dedicated classroom plus an area housing animals such as rabbits and guinea pigs as well as dogs and a friendly donkey to facilitate our Pet Therapy Programme.

A significant part of any child's learning comes simply by observing his/her environment. For children with a visual impairment, such learning is often restricted and gaps in knowledge and understanding can result. They require opportunities to explore, relate and understand their environment.

Children who are visually impaired can also be tactile defensive. Overcoming an unwillingness to use hands to explore and understand objects and the environment can take time. By providing on-site facilities via our 'Sense & Grow' programme, they can return time and again until they are comfortable with the plants and animals around them and overcome their fear of the unknown. This will be achieved via hands-on fun workshops set in a safe and comfortable environment.

Horticulture

For young people with disabilities horticulture offers an opportunity to participate equally with non-disabled peers. It awakens curiosity, stimulates awareness of the world around us, promotes sensory integration and engenders creativity.

On a practical level the opportunities that horticulture offers young people with special needs are many. It offers the chance to take responsibility for growing, nurturing it and caring for something in a non-threatening setting. The creation of a **sensory garden** will call upon residual senses and serve to widen experience and paths of enquiry

Pet Therapy

The value of contact between young people with disabilities and animals is well attested by research. Often they see animals as peers and relate to them at times better than they can other people. Animals are naturally accepting and do not judge. This in turn can stimulate young people with special needs to experience empathy and adopt an outward focus.

Amid the simple fun of enjoying an animal's company, nurturing skills are learnt and when a person nurtures, his/her need to nurture is also met. The additional bonuses of relaxation, sense of fulfilment and oneness such experiences give a participant have long been recognised as a valuable aspect of an holistic development.

Animals, dogs especially, have long been associated with the visually impaired as a way of promoting independence. Many of our young people with sight loss will require the assistance of a guide dog in adult life.

For young people with tactile anxieties animals offer a safe opportunity for experiencing touch. For young people who are often themselves highly dependent on others, the opportunity to care for a small and vulnerable creature can be a wonderful introduction to what it is to be responsible in the world.

