

WOODEN TOYS TO HELP LITTLE PEOPLE HEAR

BLACKBURN

When Heath Bower was born 14 months ago, his parents, Jess and Cameron, knew that something was not right.

One of his ears was deformed, and he was subsequently diagnosed with Goldenhar syndrome, a rare condition that affected his heart and lungs. Treatment involved 132 medical appointments before he was one.

Goldenhar has also affected Heath's hearing and, as a result, the toddler is a regular at Blackburn's Taralye oral language centre for deaf children.

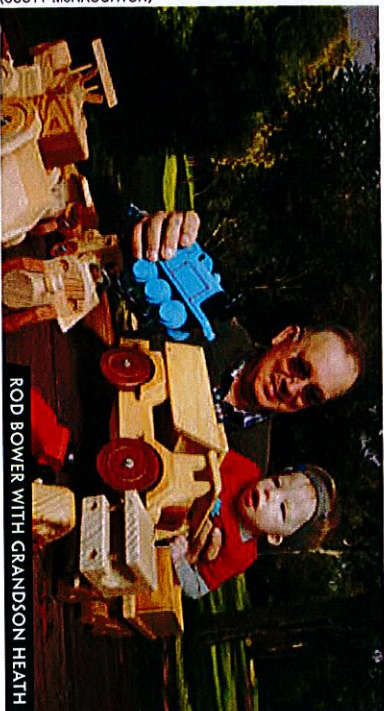
While he can hear most sounds with his headband-style hearing aids, the device does not pick up where they are coming from.

Ms Bower takes Heath to Taralye twice a week for playgroup; he also attends assessments and specialist classes. "It's good he gets an opportunity to see other kids with headbands and hearing aids," she says.

Heath is one of about 200 children who attend Taralye's specialist kindergarten programs. A further 7000 visit the centre each year for hearing tests.

The centre, which moved to Blackburn in 1971, employs audiologists, specialist teachers, speech pathologists, social workers and psychologists. Chief executive Therese Kelly says about half the centre's funding comes

(SCOTT McNAUGHTON)



ROD BOWER WITH GRANDSON HEATH

from government grants, and a further \$1.5 million in donations is required each year to keep its programs going.

The centre's big fund-raiser is an annual market and open day, to be held this year on August 24. The Bower family will be doing their bit to help with a stall set up by Heath's grandfather, Rod Bower.

"I offered to make some toys for Heath, so I thought, 'Why not make enough for a whole stall?'" he says. The selection of wooden

front-end loaders, tractors, trailers and cars has taken two months to put together.

Ms Bower says Heath's next step is learning how to swallow food properly. And, in time, more advanced hearing aids. "He's a good boy, he likes wearing his hearing aids to hear music, people talking and our dog." KS

» Taralye's Market Day is on August 24 at 137 Blackburn Road, Blackburn from 10am to 4pm.