

New heights for training

By JULIAN WRIGHT

THE now-empty Stirling Towers was the site for a group of abseilers in training last week.

The 11-storey Highgate public housing high-rise, once bustling with hundreds of tenants but now boarded up, was the perfect training ground for a handful of Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) staff.

DFES rescue officer Cliff Williams headed the eight-person team, which had just started its 14-day vertical rescue course.

The group rappelled down the side of the building and the elevator shaft.

"This team has got a special ops paramedic, a few members from WA Police, as well as our five guys backing them up," Mr Williams said.

"We also have two guys working towards being an instructor.

"Most of these guys have not done this before."

Mr Williams said the training teams get around Perth trying out different buildings and environments.

"We have a number of sites. We've been really well supported by a number of locations in Perth; we've been given access to Perth Arena, the WACA (Ground), Central Park and CBH," he said.

"We do a couple of days in the natural environment too, so we go to Boya

Quarry and we head to North Fremantle on the last day of our training.

"There's some cliffs that we go off with poor condition limestone and loose rocks, so it's a good final day for the guys."

He said he preferred to have trainees who were wary of heights at first.

"I'd rather have nervous people on the course because nervous people are going to do their checks really well," he said.

"We really work hard to graduate the guys up but this first four days is getting them comfortable with the heights, then we start to load more technical gear into them."

Department of Communities acting assistant director general commercial operations Nigel Hindmarsh said the department was securing a development partner for Stirling Towers.

"The successful proponent will be announced later this year," Mr Hindmarsh said.

"It is proposed the site will be fully redeveloped to deliver a high quality, contemporary residential development that is well integrated with the broader community, offering a mix of housing options."

SEE THE VIDEO AT
Communitynews.com.au



Department of Fire and Emergency Services held part of its vertical rescue course in Highgate.