

Therapeutic Recreation: What is it? How can it help?

Enjoyable activities and social relations are significant in promoting the quality of life and productivity of the individual with a disability. Recreation therapists offer individuals with disabilities the opportunity to establish/re-establish skills for successful social integration. In addition, the therapist will employ treatment modalities which promote physical skill development, enhance feelings of well-being, foster successful experiences, facilitate continued involvement in the rehabilitation process, and establish new life activities for continued growth. (adapted from the American Therapeutic Recreation Association website – www.atra-tr.org)

Tia Sager, CTRS
Program Administrator, WSA

Therapeutic Recreation (also known as recreational therapy) is the use of recreation and leisure services and activities to improve or maintain physical, mental, emotional, and / or social functioning. It assists individuals with varying needs in developing lifetime leisure skills that allow them to achieve their full potential. Therapeutic recreation services are delivered by qualified professionals with training and education in therapeutic recreation/recreational therapy service. The professional certification designation is Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS)

The benefits of therapeutic recreation

There are countless benefits to Therapeutic Recreation. Among them are:

Physical functioning: Improvement in perceptual motor skills, balance, agility and coordination skills, as well as increased flexibility, strength and endurance.

Cognitive functioning: Increased focus and attention span, problem solving skills, critical thinking, organization, sequencing and decision making skills

Communication & Social Skills:

Improved skills in making choices, and requests and sustaining conversation.

Improved self-determination skills as well as friendships and social support networks.

Greater self-reliance: helps to manage stress and anxiety and can directly impact successful transitions in the community.

How are therapeutic recreation services different from other therapies?

Recreation therapy embraces a definition of "health" which includes not only the absence of "illness", but extends to the enhancement of physical, cognitive, emotional, social and leisure development so individuals may participate fully and independently in chosen life pursuits.

The unique feature of recreation therapy that makes it different from other therapies is the use of

recreation modalities in the design of intervention strategies. Recreation therapy is individualized to each person, their past, present and future interests and lifestyle. The recreation therapist has a unique perspective regarding the social, cognitive, physical, and leisure needs of the individual. Incorporating the client's interests, and the client's family and/or community makes the therapy process meaningful and relevant. Recreation therapists weave the concept of healthy living into treatment to ensure improved functioning, but also to enhance independence and successful involvement in all aspects of life. (adapted from www.atra-tr.org)

How can therapeutic recreation help an individual with WS?

Individuals with WS often experience difficulties with leisure, social and life skills. Therapeutic recreation addresses those issues in a fun and realistic environment that is both safe and structured for success. Activities in the community require planning, organization, money management, social appropriateness, problem solving, and communication skills, just to name a few.

Many life skills can be taught individually or in small groups. Grocery shopping, cooking, laundry, scheduling transportation, and time



Tia and a group of young people with WS and other disabilities enjoy a meal that they planned, shopped for and prepared.

management are all areas that can benefit through recreation therapy. Many of the skills overlap, which is real-life training.

Melissa - age 26 "I am learning how to handle money better, and I help plan the activities we do. I am able



to go out with my friends more. I work on cooking, and my attitude with my parents. Tia talks

to me like she knows I can do things, and doesn't talk to me like I am a child."

Ben - 21 yrs. "I make the coffee every morning at home and I make my own lunch for school and get up to the alarm clock. I am doing

things that I didn't think I could do like walking long distances and carrying boxes.



I am getting stronger because of that. It isn't always easy, and I don't always like it, but I am learning how to be an adult, and to be more responsible. I like that."

Kate G. - 21 yrs - "[recreation therapy] has taught me how to be more independent. It has helped me to learn better money skills when I am out, and not to let people take advantage of me. I am learning how to manage my time and to balance my life with work, my friends & family. I am learning how to deal with stress. Tia helped me to get

my drivers license, and has taken a lot of us on several trips to become more independent. We even went to New York City."



How do I find a CTRS?

- <http://www.atra-tr.org> - the website for the American Therapeutic Recreation Association (ATRA), provides a list of contacts for state chapters for recreation therapy

- NTRS (a branch of the National Recreation & Park Association). 22377 Belmont Ridge Rd. Ashburn, VA 20148 Phone: 703-858-0784. E-mail: NTRSNRPA@nrpa.org

- Check with your local universities to find Therapeutic Recreation programs. (Students need volunteer and service hours during their coursework).

- Check with your local park and recreation centers

Vocational Rehabilitation Offers Transition Support

Sean Roy, PACER

**Reprinted from Pacesetter-Summer 07*

"Transition," or the movement from school to adult roles and community living, is a crucial time for youth with disabilities and their families. Transition experts recom-

mend a solid plan be in place to ensure a smooth segue between school and adult supports.

Competitive employment affects the ability of youth with disabilities to live independently and contribute to their communities. Employment not only provides wages but also combats isolation and provides much-needed social outlets.

Studies show, however, that adults with disabilities experience much higher rates of unemployment and underemployment than do their peers without disabilities.

There is help. Families and youth can explore options found within state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies. VR is funded under Title I of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and is mandated to help eligible individuals with disabilities prepare for and engage in gainful employment that is consistent with their strengths and interests.

VR counselors can work closely with school districts, as well as families, to help in transition planning for youth with disabilities. Transition experts advise parents and youth to invite VR counselors to IEP meetings at least two years before the student exits school. VR counselors know about community employment. They can also discuss the student's occupational goals and what skills he or she must have to reach them.

Connie Giles, field services director for Minnesota's VR program explains, "We work with people who experience all different types of disabilities, and for students we want to play a big role in a smooth transition between high school and the next step, which may be employment or postsecondary training. Individualized programming is recognized as best practice in employment programming and is a strength of VR activities, therefore, it will not be identical from person to person. Situations vary, so parents should always explore the program themselves instead of basing decisions on what other recipients have received."