

The American Therapeutic Recreation Association Information Sheet

Recreational Therapy and Community Based Services

Recreational Therapists often work with individuals of all ages and abilities living in the community to improve and/or maintain functional independence, assist in pursuing recreational opportunities, promote community engagement, and encourage social interaction. Recreational Therapists provide opportunities to participate in life activities including leisure, recreation, and play, as well as activities that promote or maintain functional abilities, health, and wellness. The primary purpose of Recreational Therapy, when working with those in the community, is to establish and maintain maximum independence within the community and home environment, as well as to improve abilities to increase independence.

Recreational Therapy, also known as therapeutic recreation, is a systematic process that utilizes recreation and other activity-based interventions to address the assessed needs of individuals with illnesses and/or disabling conditions, as a means to psychological and physical health, recovery and well-being. Further, Recreational Therapy means a treatment service designed to restore, remediate, and rehabilitate a person's level of functioning and independence in life activities, to promote health and wellness as well as reduce or eliminate the activity limitations and restrictions to participation in life situations caused by an illness or disabling condition (ATRA, 2015).

In the community, adults and children living with disabilities or chronic conditions often lack the skills needed and/or the opportunities to actively participate



in life activities. Recreational Therapists work with the individual and others to assist those with disabilities (physical, behavioral, and/or psychological) to gain the independence needed to participate in all types of activities. Recreational Therapists also assist in community integration and community skills, as well as teaching new leisure and recreation skills, and providing opportunities for adaptive recreation customized to an individual's needs and abilities.

Recreational Therapists are trained in psychology, abnormal psychology, human growth and development, coping strategies and mechanisms, and understanding of group dynamics and structures, social interaction, activity analysis, and strategies to assist the individual to function as independently as possible in the most appropriate environment.

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Empowering Recreational Therapists to Empower Those They Serve

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Recreational Therapy and Community Based Services *(continued)*

Areas of focus during Recreational Therapy services include, but are not limited to:

- Improving physical functioning (such as balance, strength and endurance) through activity participation, exercise and aquatics programs
- Identifying resources within the community so the individual can actively participate in life activities including accessible facilities and adaptive sports
- Teaching new or adaptive leisure skills and the use of adaptive equipment
- Participating in community based programs for socialization, support, physical fitness, and adaptive sports
- Integrating back into the community and community activities following a disability or chronic illness
- Promoting active aging, wellness, and health living

Community-Based Settings utilizing Recreational Therapy:

- Federal, state, and local agencies
- Municipal parks and recreation organizations
- Home healthcare companies
- Senior centers
- Group and residential homes
- After-school programs

- Advocacy groups and specific disability organizations

In the parks and recreation systems, Recreational Therapists provide assistance in complying with the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, creating adaptive recreation opportunities, providing accessible environments (such as wheelchair accessible fishing docks) and promoting inclusion within community activities. Recreational Therapists have a long history of providing and working with municipal parks and recreation departments and other entities to ensure access to and availability of adaptive recreation opportunities for individuals residing in the community.



A growing number of Recreational Therapists are working in home healthcare type companies, providing in-home services to individuals with disabilities, those recovering from an illness or disability, and older adults. As healthcare shifts more of a public health focus, it is anticipated that more Recreational Therapists will work in community-based settings serving those living in the community.

Austin, D. (2009). *Therapeutic recreation: Processes and techniques*. Champaign, IL: Sagamore Publishing, LLC.

Carter, M., & Van Andel, G. (2011). *Therapeutic recreation: A practical approach* (4th ed.). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Stumbo, N., & Peterson, C. (2004). *Therapeutic recreation program design: Principles and procedures*. San Francisco, CA: Pearson, Benjamin Cummings.



Recreational Therapists are professionally credentialed by the National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification (NCTRC). The Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) “exemplifies the profession’s dedication to quality standards and excellence.” The CTRS is recognized as the qualified provider of recreational therapy services.

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