

## Introduction

Northeast Passage (NEP) would like to propose that some portion of the SOR grant funding be allocated to increase access to Recreational Therapy (RT) services as a complimentary integrative approach to supporting recovery and transition support services for NH residents with substance use disorders, specifically opioid use disorders. Founded in 1990, NEP is a privately funded program of the University of New Hampshire (UNH) and a nationally recognized leader in the field for Recreational Therapy. Over the last 19 years, NEP has developed a unique model of community based RT services that has proven to be an effective part of the health and wellness of veteran populations who experience a variety of disabilities including co-occurring substance use disorders, mental health disorders and physical disability. In addition, NEP has a robust schools based program using recreational therapy interventions to build skills that support social connection, community engagement and individual resiliency. This proposal will overview RT as a whole, provide greater information about the NEP models of community based RT services as applied to transition and support services, and highlight alignment with the purpose for SOR grant funding and current needs within New Hampshire related to creating a robust network of treatment options for NH residents with substance use disorders.

## Recreation Therapy Overview

RT is an allied health profession that uses recreation as part of a systemic process to address the holistic needs of individuals with illness and/or disabling conditions. Within the rich context of recreation engagement recreational therapists (RTs) facilitate the development of functional skills that support health and wellness. RTs complete a 4 year degree, 15 week internship and national certification exam. Within the state of New Hampshire, national certification is a prerequisite for licensure under the allied health board, which provides additional standards and oversight for practitioners.

Nationally certified recreational therapists can be found in rehabilitation hospitals, school systems, VA hospitals, behavioral health settings, corrections, long-term care facilities, community-based programs, municipal recreation departments, substance misuse programs, and more.

The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) and the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) both list Recreational Therapy as a rehabilitation therapy, and designate recreational therapists as treatment team members that serve needs of individuals with disabilities in hospital and rehab settings.

Recreational Therapy is included in the mix of treatment and rehabilitation services used by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to determine federal compliance in skilled nursing, rehabilitation (physical and psychiatric) and long-term care facilities. Medicaid currently recognizes RT as an allowable service, and a recent joint CMS and SAMSHA bulletin recommended

coverage of RT services for behavioral health interventions and treatment of substance use disorders (January 2015. Subject: Coverage of Behavioral Health Services for Youth with Substance Use Disorders). Additionally, The National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) recommend that recreational therapy be included as part of the core team for pain management in a letter to Orrin Hatch and Ron Wyden of the Senate Finance Committee in February 2018.

**SOR funding for RT services would be Funding of Last Resort.** Recreation therapy services are included as part of treatment teams in settings such as hospitals, schools, psychiatric facilities, forensic facilities, physical rehabilitation centers, in-patient rehabilitation centers, and community-based treatment. Currently there is limited funding available for RT services in the state of New Hampshire. Recent changes to Veterans Choice legislation have created opportunity for RT services to be provided through VA Community Care. Northeast Passage has become the first provider in the nation to establish a Community Care provider agreement and provide reimbursed RT services for veterans in the state of New Hampshire.

### **Northeast Passage Community Based Recreation Therapy Models**

Northeast Passage has a long history of providing goal-based, clinical RT services to both adult and youth populations through its PATH™ (Promoting Access, Transition and Health) and TREK™ (Therapeutic Recreation Empowering Kids) models of service. Current clients include the Manchester VA, NH Vocational Rehab, and 19 schools across 13 districts in the state of New Hampshire. Participants experience a variety of disabilities and health conditions, including physical and intellectual disabilities, mental health disorders and co-occurring substance use disorders.

**PATH™:** The PATH model of community based RT was developed by Northeast Passage, and is a unique RT model of service delivery that combines recreation and community engagement, symptom management, wellness education, and psychosocial support. PATH therapists work with participants within the context of their own community to define the changes and growth they desire in their lives and to develop the knowledge, functional skills, and individual confidence to engage in the activities and their community in a meaningful and sustainable manner. Physicians, mental health providers, social workers and case managers refer participants to the program. Each participant is an active member in their treatment, and works with a PATH therapist to develop a treatment plan. Interventions are goal-directed, and progress notes are maintained in a HIPAA compliant electronic records system.

**Treatment for transition and community reentry.** PATH program therapists work with individuals in their home communities to facilitate community integration and smooth transitions in care. PATH therapists travel throughout the state of New Hampshire to meet individuals in their home communities to promote real-world, real-time utilization of learned skills. This helps individuals identify and access resources in their local communities, and supports the creation of sustainable patterns of healthy behavior as they transition from in-patient settings, partial hospitalization, or



intensive outpatient programs. PATH therapists support individuals in the process of integrating coping and other recovery skills learned and identified in office settings into their daily routines within the community. Successful experiences continue to inform the ongoing story of “self” in ways that support positive identity and recovery. Some examples of functional skill development include:

- Integrating and regulating internal experiences and emotions
- Knowing and defining “self” as an autonomous individual
- Forming and maintaining meaningful relationships
- Rebuilding a sense of control and empowerment in daily life (as central tenants to Trauma Informed Care)

**Addresses barriers to receiving treatment.** For many individuals, transportation is an environmental barrier that impacts access to and engagement in treatment. PATH therapists travel to meet clients in their home community and the program is aligned with best practices of developing community care options. The PATH model addresses social determinants of health by looking at environmental access, and building healthy social connections within the individual’s home community. PATH therapists and program participants work together to develop a plan for sustainable access and utilization of identified resources. Stigma related to receiving services is an ongoing barrier to care. PATH therapists leverage individual interests to create both motivation and context for skill development. While the work we do utilizes recreation as the context, it is evidence based therapeutic modality. The PATH model is grounded in the World Health Organization’s international classification of functioning (ICF) and is at the forefront of healthcare trends that emphasize prevention strategies and individual involvement in personal health management. Evidence suggests that increasing self-efficacy related to maintaining sobriety, cultivating identity other than that of a “user” and increasing healthy social connections are important to success in recovery. The PATH model addresses these needs in a collaborative, strengths-based approach.

**TREK™ (Therapeutic Recreation Empowering Kids)** is a school-based RT program working with youth in their communities or schools. TREK therapists use purposeful recreational interventions to accomplish functional outcomes across all domains for students with disabilities and those demonstrating various social challenges. Therapists work with students in small group settings to promote healthy behaviors, social connections and individual resiliency. This model can be expanded to provide recovery support services specifically for youth populations in New Hampshire.

**In conclusion,** New Hampshire is fortunate to be in a position to envision and create an expanded network of services to support recovery for residents with substance use disorders, specifically opioid use disorders. Recreational Therapy services are a strengths based approach to care that



addresses the whole person, development of functional skills that support health and wellness, and engagement in activities that support positive identity as a non user. Additionally, the skill set available within recreational therapists can help to address the void and work force shortage in New Hampshire as related to recovery support systems.

Northeast Passage is uniquely suited to support the health needs of individuals experiencing opioid use disorder in the state of New Hampshire. We recommend that some portion of the SOR grant funds be allocated to fund RT services. Northeast Passage would welcome a discussion around an initial sole source contract to provide services within our catchment area starting immediately, and providing training for organizations who wish to adopt the model in coming years.

Thank you for your consideration.

For more information contact:

Cathy Thompson, MS, CTRS, RT/L  
[Cathy.thompson@UNH.edu](mailto:Cathy.thompson@UNH.edu)  
603-862-0070  
121 Technology Drive, Suite 161  
Durham, NH 03824



