Recreational Therapy and Autism Spectrum Disorders

Autism Spectrum disorders include a number of closely related pervasive developmental disorders – not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders fourth edition Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR). Diagnoses within the Autism Spectrum include Autism, Rett's Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, and Asperger's Disorder. Individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum disorders experience disabilities such as expressive language disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, learning disabilities, and many other compounding limitations.

“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.

Recreational therapists address development in physical, cognitive, social and behavioral domains, with the objective of enhancing age-appropriate and autonomous community functioning, as appropriate to the individual’s potential. Interventions may include structured skills education; age-appropriate play and social opportunities; community functioning education; integrated experiences with same-age peers without developmental disabilities; and individualized coaching toward progressive integration into normal community settings.

Autism Spectrum disorder, once considered a rare disability, occurs today in 1 in 150 children ages one month to thirty-six months. Recreational therapists use a multifaceted approach to treatment and provision of assistance to individuals and their families in addressing individual needs.

Recreational Therapy can aide in assisting families and individuals learn to live with and adjust to life with an Autism Spectrum disorder. Early intervention and continued support and treatment is paramount to aiding individuals in living a full and productive life.
Expected outcomes for individuals receiving Recreational Therapy services might include:

- **Improvement in Physical Functioning:** Participants in physical recreation activities demonstrated improvements in perceptual-motor skill, balance, agility, and athletic skill.

- **Improvement in Cognitive Functioning:** Participants in activity and recreational skills training demonstrated increased attention span, problem solving, and decision making skills.

- **Improvement in Communication and Social Skills:** Participants in social skills training activities demonstrated increased skills in conversation, assertion, cooperation, and competition.

- **Reduction in Non-Adaptive or Inappropriate Behavior:** Participants in structured physical and social activities, especially those encouraging choice and control, demonstrated significant decreases in self-stimulating, stereotypic, self-abusive, or other non-adaptive or inappropriate behavior.

- **Increase in Age-Appropriate Behavior in Community:** Participants in social and activity skill training interventions demonstrated increased age-appropriate choices and activity participation in integrated community settings.

- **Enhancement of Friendship and Social Support Networks:** Participants in integrated camping experiences demonstrated increased social interaction skills and friendships with both developmentally disabled and non-developmentally disabled peers.

Recreational Therapy designed interventions and programs to assist individuals and families’ with individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum disorder in a variety of settings including:

- Service centers specific to Autism Spectrum disorders
- Public schools as part of the individual’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP)
- Early intervention programs
- Preschool programs
- Home and community based settings
- Other settings which proved resources for individuals and families dealing with Autism Spectrum disorders

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.