



2025 Hybrid Fall Conference

Monday, November 17th In-Person, 11/18-12/17 On-Demand

<https://www.pathlms.com/atra/courses/104602>

In-person at the New Jersey Hospital Association
760 Alexander Rd, Princeton, NJ 08540



We hope you'll join us!

Registration is open until November 10th.
Registration is by conference website only.

Register here:

<https://www.pathlms.com/atra/courses/104602>

In-Person Sessions November 17, 2025 at
New Jersey Hospital Association in Princeton
On Demand Sessions November 18- December 17th



IN-PERSON 11/17/2025

PRINCETON, NJ

(6 HOURS)

*****PRE-APPROVED BY NCTRC**



MORNING SESSIONS:

**8:30-9:30 Keynote : Your Profession, Your Future:
ATRA's Impact on Advocacy, Education, and
Engagement**

9:45-10:45:

**Choice 1: Laugh Out Loud: Incorporating Laughter
into the RT Practice for Improved Outcomes**

**Choice 2: Stories of Possibilities: Sharing Stories of
Lived Experience**

**Choice 3: Recreational Therapy Grant Writing &
Collaboration for Research Success**

**11:00-12:00 Laughter Yoga Session (all): Stress Relief,
Resilience & Well-Being Through Laughter**



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(6 HOURS)

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AFTERNOON SESSIONS:

12:00-1:00 Friendsgiving-style lunch social/vendor visits

1-1:30 Membership Meeting

**1:45-2:45: Shaping the Future of Long-Term Care:
Perspectives from State Officials and Advocates**

3:00-4:00:

**Choice 1: Well for Life: Promoting Multi-Dimensional
Wellness in Your Clients and Yourself**

**Choice 2: Recreational Therapy and Prevention: Our Role in
Public Health**

**4:15-5:15: AI Literacy in Recreation Therapy: Empowering
Practice with Emerging Technology**

Keynote in-person Speaker Session:
**Your Profession, Your Future: ATRA's Impact on Advocacy,
Education, and Engagement**

Brent Wolfe, PhD, LRT, CTRS, FDRT



ATRA's mission is to empower recreational therapists, and this commitment drives everything we do. In this session, we'll explore how ATRA enhances member empowerment and engagement through advocacy, educational resources, and networking opportunities. You'll gain insight into our latest initiatives and ongoing efforts to support recreational therapists, along with actionable ways to get involved and help shape the profession's future. Join us to discover how ATRA can strengthen your professional journey—leaving you inspired, connected, and ready to make a meaningful impact!



Brent Wolfe, PhD, LRT, CTRS, FDRT

Brent D. Wolfe is an Associate Professor in the Department of Community and Therapeutic Recreation at the University of North Carolina Greensboro and the Executive Director of the American Therapeutic Recreation Association (ATRA). He has more than 25 years of experience in recreational therapy as both a practitioner and educator. Dr. Wolfe began his career in adolescent psychiatric care, working in a locked residential treatment center before moving into academia. He earned his undergraduate degree from Houghton College and his master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Georgia. His leadership roles have included serving as President of the National Therapeutic Recreation Society and multiple terms on ATRA's Board of Directors. His scholarship has appeared in the *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, and *Journal of Experiential Education*, along with contributions to numerous textbooks in recreational therapy and leadership. His research interests include team building, volunteering, adults with developmental disabilities, experiential education, and the factors influencing professional association membership. A frequent presenter at local, national, and international conferences, Dr. Wolfe is committed to advancing recreational therapy through leadership, advocacy, and research. He believes listening and empathy are the essential qualities of effective practice and leadership. Outside of work, he enjoys spending time with his wife, Becky, their two daughters, and the family pets.

In-person Session:

Laugh Out Loud: Incorporating Laughter into the RT Practice for Improved Outcomes

Tina Watson, CTRS



Laughter Is Contagious!! This session will show the proven physical, emotional and spiritual benefits that can be incorporated into Recreation Therapy sessions for improved health outcomes. The chemistry of the brain during laughter as compared to the chemistry of the brain under stress will also be explored. Evidence based laughter exercises that can improve desired outcomes will be demonstrated and practiced. By the end of the session participants will understand the importance of laughter for overall health and wellness and how to begin incorporating it into their RT practice as an effective intervention.

***This session was presented at the SMART CEUs Hub Retreat at Bradford Woods IN on May 19th, 2023. It has been updated with new information and resources.**



Tina Watson, CTRS

Tina is an experienced Recreation Therapist with over 28 years serving in the field, working in Nursing Homes, Dementia Care Facilities, Assisted Living communities and in a community residence for youth with mental health diagnosis. Tina currently works in a NY state psychiatric hospital treating adults. In addition to her full-time job, Tina began working for SMART CEU's Hub in 2017 as a subcontracted employee. She edits online continuing education courses from RT's from across the US and Canada. Tina lives in Horseheads, NY with her husband, two dogs and a cat. She enjoys being creative and having fun.

In-person Session: Stories of Possibilities: Sharing Stories of Lived Experience

Ann E. Dolloff, CTRS, M. Ed.

Gretchen Snethen, PhD, CTRS

Storytelling is inherently human. We connect through stories, we learn through stories, and we grow through stories. Connecting individuals with and without disabilities to share stories on a similar topic provides opportunity to find commonalities in shared human experiences. Storytelling has the capacity to bring people to the same level. Providers, family members, and individuals with disabilities can all share their experiences- not about disability- but about vacations, sports, family dinners, and other common topics. In this session, we will share how we used storytelling as a learning activity. We will also provide guidance on how you can facilitate storytelling in your own setting.

****This session has been presented before at ATRA 2024;
Temple EBP Conference 2025**

Ann E. Dolloff, CTRS, M. Ed.

Ann is full-time faculty in the Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, RT Program since 2012. Prior to 2012, she taught as adjunct faculty in the RT program since 1988, as well as teaching at West Chester University and the University of New Hampshire. She has been a CTRS since 1985 and has worked in a variety of settings: 8+ years with TechOWL/PA's Initiative on Assistive Technology; 5 years as a Youth Development Specialist with UNH Cooperative Extension, and 10 years as Executive Director of Variety Club Camp and 3 years with Easter Seals of Connecticut. Her passion is in community-based recreation, adapted aquatics and sports, and summer camp. She enjoys serving children, youth and their families, promoting independence and inclusion through recreation. She continues to be an adapted ski instructor, teaching skiing every weekend at the PA Center for Adapted Sports at Camelback Mountain.

Gretchen Snethen, PhD, CTRS

Gretchen Snethen is an associate professor in the recreational therapy program within the Department of Rehabilitation Sciences and the assistant director for the NIDILRR-funded Temple University Collaborative on Community Inclusion. Her professional experience consists of direct and managerial work with youth and adults with mental illness. Her research focuses on understanding the relationship between environmental factors and community participation; using the community to promote physical activity engagement; and developing interventions that use recreation and leisure as a means to promote independence in the community. In addition to her research, Gretchen remains connected to the recreational therapy profession through her leadership with the American Therapeutic Recreation Association Evidence-Based Practice Taskforce.

In-person Session: Recreational Therapy Grant Writing & Collaboration for Research Success

Chad Romoser, Ph.D., MS., CTRS

Aurora Verlin, MS, CTRS

This presentation is designed to strengthen participants' skills in evidence-based programming and grant research. Attendees will learn practical strategies for finding research funding and developing grant proposals. The session will cover key tools and resources for identifying collaborators, along with insights into primary funding sources. Presenters will share expert guidance on securing the right funding to support research and advance evidence-based practice. Additionally, various grant opportunities relevant to RT practitioners, students, and educators will be explored.

****Versions of this conference are given annually at ATRA conferences, and a virtual version has been given for the RT EBP conference at Temple University**

Chad Romoser, Ph.D., MS., CTRS

Chad Romoser, Ph.D., MS., CTRS, is an Assistant Professor of Recreational Therapy in the Department of Health and Human Performance at Kean University. He earned his Ph.D. in the Interdisciplinary Rehabilitation Science Program at the University of Utah. Dr. Romoser currently serves on the Recreational Therapy Foundation Board as the Member-at-Large ATRA Liaison. His research focuses on the usability of virtual reality applications and their impact on well-being. He has practiced recreational therapy in a variety of settings for nearly 10 years.

Aurora Verlin, MS, CTRS

Aurora Verlin is an Instructor and Undergraduate Program Director at Temple University. She is also currently the Past President of the Recreational Therapy Foundation and previously served as President and Member at Large for Research Grants, for which she reviewed all grant applications that came into the Foundation. Prior to working in academia, Aurora worked with older adults with dementia in a Life Care Community in the Philadelphia area, where she was the Director of Recreational Therapy Services and Personal Care Home Administrator. She used evidence-based practice to build her program. This included developing the department's budget, staffing numbers, and to educate staff, residents and the local community on the benefits of recreational therapy. At Temple University, Aurora has served on the conference committee for the Evidence-Based Practice Conference for many years.

In-person Session:

Stress Relief, Resilience & Well-Being Through Laughter

Alexa Fong Drubay/Laughter Yoga With Alexa

Laughter Yoga offers substantial benefits for recreational therapists by enhancing both personal well-being and professional effectiveness. As a self-care practice, it helps therapists reduce stress, anxiety, and burnout through the release of endorphins and reduction of cortisol. This emotional boost increases resilience, allowing therapists to better manage overwhelming workloads and high-pressure environments. Learning and integrating Laughter Yoga techniques equips recreational therapists with a versatile tool to support clients' mental and physical health. The practice improves mood, stimulates social bonding, and encourages relaxation, which enhances clients' engagement and overall therapy outcomes. It also promotes cardiovascular health and boosts the immune system, benefiting clients with diverse health challenges. By incorporating Laughter Yoga into therapy sessions, recreational therapists can foster creativity and emotional regulation for clients, including those facing cognitive decline, chronic illness, or mental health issues. This holistic approach helps clients develop coping skills and strengthens their sense of community and belonging. Furthermore, Laughter Yoga's accessible and enjoyable nature makes it appealing to a broad range of populations, increasing participation and positive client experiences. For therapists, regularly practicing Laughter Yoga not only revitalizes their mental and physical health but also decreases turnover rates by mitigating job-related stress and fatigue.

The Ancients learned that “laughter is the best medicine,” and today physicians from places like the Mayo Clinic, the University of Maryland Hospital and nurses from Mainline Health Integrative Therapies, recommend laughter to relieve stress, strengthen the immune system and stimulate your circulation. Laughter Yoga is a powerful way to energize any event, from annual meetings and corporate conferences to hospital workshops. It offers medical professionals, social workers, and therapists an uplifting method to connect authentically with clients and patients, fostering trust and empathy. Educators and students alike benefit from this engaging approach—bringing joy and enthusiasm into classroom learning environments. Focusing on self-care through laughter not only boosts mood and resilience, but also teaches valuable skills for connecting with others and creating a positive, collaborative culture.



Alexa Fong Drubay

Alexa Fong Drubay is a Laughter Yoga Master Trainer from the Philadelphia area, who trained in India with the founder of Laughter Yoga, Dr. Madan Kataria. She is also a certified Breathwork for Emotional Release Coach. Alexa is a graduate of Notre Dame of Maryland University and has lived and worked in NYC, Switzerland, France and China. As the Executive Director of the non profit www.LaughterYogaUSA.org, and the Director of www.laughteryogawithalexa.com, Alexa has conducted laughter programs for a broad spectrum of organizations including frontline healthcare workers, insurance companies, cancer groups, the US Institute for Peace, National Institutes of Health, Dell Technologies, the United Nations (UNCAC) & The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. She offers Leader & Teacher Certification Courses to those seeking to use these laughter methods for self care and in their professions. Her students include: nurses, doctors, teachers, recreational therapists, social workers, activity directors, healthcoaches and others to become certified Laughter Yoga leaders and teachers.

In-person Plenary Session: Shaping the Future of Long-Term Care: Perspectives from State Officials and Advocates

Kaylee McGuire, Deputy Commissioner of NJ Department of Human Services

Laurie Facciarossa Brewer, NJ State Long Term Care Ombudsman

Katie Squires, AARP-NJ Associate State Director



Kaylee McGuire



Laurie Facciarossa Brewer



Katie Squires

This plenary session will feature state officials and advocates discussing the policy landscape for long-term care. Attendees will gain an overview of how the industry is regulated and funded, with insights into policy trends and changes at both state and federal levels. The session will highlight significant reforms and investments in long-term care, particularly in New Jersey, and review initiatives aimed at improving quality and care. Recreational therapists and other attendees will learn how to leverage these opportunities to expand their roles as advocates and providers of quality care. The session will also highlight new trends in community-based care, offering strategies for recreational therapists to join the age-friendly movement, support independent living and reduce isolation, and demonstrate the value of recreational therapy in both nursing homes and the community.



Kaylee McGuire

Kaylee McGuire is the Deputy Commissioner for Aging and Disability Services at the New Jersey Department of Human Services. Before joining the Department, Kaylee worked as a Senior Policy Advisor to Governor Phil Murphy, where she led on the Administration's health and human services policy agenda and COVID-19 response. Before joining the Murphy Administration, she served as a health policy analyst in the Assembly Majority Office under Speaker Craig Coughlin, and formerly held a management role at one of the largest pediatric rehabilitation systems in the nation.

Kaylee has more than ten years of experience in leading disability services, community programs, and providing recreational therapy and child life services in a variety of settings including medical day care, long-term care, and inpatient rehabilitation.

Kaylee received her Master's in Business Administration from Rutgers University and a Bachelor of Arts in Therapeutic Recreation from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. She was raised in Ocean County, is a loving aunt of seven, and is committed to making New Jersey more inclusive and age-friendly.



Laurie Facciarossa Brewer

laurie.brewer@ltco.nj.gov

Laurie Facciarossa Brewer was named the New Jersey Long-Term Care Ombudsman by Governor Phil Murphy in March 2019. In this capacity, she heads the NJ Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman, which advocates for residents of long-term care facilities by investigating allegations of abuse, neglect and exploitation.

As Ombudsman, she has helped advance policy and legislation to reform the state's long-term care system in the wake of the COVID-19, successfully lobbied for an LGBTQI+ Senior Bill of Rights and created a federally funded Social Isolation Project designed to address the needs of residents of long-term care facilities hardest hit by the COVID-19 crisis. Prior to being appointed Ombudsman, Ms. Facciarossa Brewer served as the LTCO Chief of Staff for nine years. In this position, she oversaw a dramatic increase in the LTCO Volunteer Advocate program, obtained federal funding to help transition people out of nursing homes, and streamlined the intake and investigations process to improve LTCO response times.

A former newspaper reporter who has more than 25 years of experience in the government and non-profit sectors, Ms. Facciarossa Brewer is a graduate of Rowan University and has served in several senior management positions in New Jersey state government including: Director of Communications for the New Jersey Department of the Public Advocate; Director of Public Affairs for the New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS), and Deputy Project Manager for Health Care Reform in the DHS Division of Medical and Health Services (Medicaid). In 2020, Ms. Facciarossa Brewer was listed in the [insidernj.com](https://www.insidernj.com) "2020 Insider New Jersey Top100 Policymakers."



Katie Squires

Katie Squires, Ph.D. (Gerontology), University of Kentucky and MBA, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, serves as Associate State Director of Advocacy for AARP NJ. In this role, she leads campaigns on various issues, including long-term care reform and livable communities. Katie has more than 20 years of experience in the field of aging, ranging from direct care to academia. She previously served as the Director of Senior Services/Lifelong Montclair for the Township of Montclair. In this role, she worked to make the community more age-friendly, fulfilling Montclair's designation as New Jersey's second member of the World Health Organization's/AARP's Global Network of Age-Friendly Communities.

In-Person Session: Well for Life: Promoting Multi-Dimensional Wellness in Your Clients and Yourself

Mary Catherine Lundquist, MDiv



This session encourages recreational therapists to consider a holistic approach to providing therapeutic interventions across the lifespan.

Special emphasis on older adults and optimizing wellness from a strength based, person centered lens. Participants will examine current research on wellness and be given opportunities to apply knowledge to their role and responsibilities in recreational therapy. Supporting wellness for professional staff will also be reviewed.

Multi-dimensional wellness is a framework that has not been widely adopted into learner practice and aging services despite a large body of evidence-based guidelines. Wellness frameworks identified from SAMHSA and peer reviewed literature introduce new skills that can be applied to client care which will change practice. Clients and recreational therapists may be unaware of the intersection of all dimensions of wellness which contribute to health and support realistic change.



Mary Catherine Lundquist, MDiv

Mary Catherine Lundquist has over 30 years of clinical and administrative experience in geriatrics specializing in dementia care, supporting family caregivers, training professionals and providing community health education. She is the Program Coordinator of the COPSA (Comprehensive Services on Aging) Institute for Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders at Rutgers Health, University Behavioral Health Care. COPSA includes The Memory Disorders Clinic, The Care2Caregivers Helpline and COPSA Consultation and Education Services. Her expertise is in designing and implementing programs which enhance the quality of life for individuals with memory loss and their caregivers.

In-person Session:
Recreational Therapy and Prevention: Our Role in Public Health

Gena Bell Vargas, PhD, CTRS

The Temple Recreational Therapy program exists within the College of Public Health, which is not the most common place to find an RT program. This has allowed us the opportunity to explore the many ways recreational therapy can contribute to public health initiatives.

Join us to learn how integrating awareness of the social determinants of health can allow us to create programs and treatment plans which contribute to multiple levels of prevention. We believe that maximizing our involvement in these areas will help RT to have a strong presence in the future landscape of public health.

Gena Bell Vargas, PhD, CTRS

Gena Bell Vargas, PhD, CTRS, is the MSRT Program Director and an Associate Professor of Instruction in the RT program at Temple University. Her clinical background includes an urban acute psychiatric inpatient setting working with people experiencing symptoms of depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia, as well as an inpatient physical rehabilitation with persons that have experienced strokes, TBIs, SCIs, and amputations. Recently, Gena has been getting back into the world of adventure programming, while also pursuing the scholarship of teaching and learning.

In-person Session: AI Literacy in Recreation Therapy: Empowering Practice with Emerging Technology

Susan Gordon, MEd, CTRS



This session is designed to be both informative and interactive. As Artificial intelligence rapidly transforms healthcare and human services, recreation therapists are uniquely positioned to integrate these tools into client-centered care. AI literacy-the understanding of how AI works, its benefits, limitations, and ethical implications-within the context of recreation therapy. This session emphasizes how AI can enhance, not replace, the human connection at the core of therapeutic recreation. Through interactive discussion and real-world scenarios attendees will gain confidence in evaluating AI tools, identifying opportunities for use in treatment planning and program design, with an understanding necessary to maintain client safety, privacy, and dignity.



Susan Gordon, MEd, CTRS

Faculty professor for Penn State University in the RPTM (Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Management) Department and Community College of Philadelphia School of Business. I inspire and support higher education teachings to promote higher educational standards for credentialing through ATRA.

Currently, as a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist of over 30 years, I have worked most of my career as a therapist and healthcare professional in acute and sub-acute clinical settings.

It is from my life experiences and understanding that I apply the concepts of therapeutic activities to broaden my perspective on leisure engagement in recreation services and in tourism.

My pedagogy of learning is guided through integrative knowledge of the social, environmental, and economic impacts on culture diversity with awareness of lifestyle objectives with attainable outcome goals.



ON-DEMAND SESSIONS

(7.5 HOURS)

*****PRE-APPROVED BY NCTRC**



**"But I'm having fun...": 'Sober' leisure and how it
can be addressed across the lifespan**

**Recreational Therapy Standards of Practice:
Merging Ethical Practice with AI Innovation**

**Chair Chi: Seated Tai Chi for the movement
impaired populations**

**Optimizing Dementia Engagement Through Cutting-
Edge Technology**

**The New Community Toolkit: Guiding Clients Through
AI Resources**

**How to Overcome Burnout and Stress Working in the
Psychiatric Field**

**Combating the Isolation and Loneliness Epidemic
Among Aging Adults Through Recreational Therapy**

**The Importance of Including Aging Competencies in
Recreation Therapy Curriculum**

On-Demand Speaker Session: "But I'm having fun...": 'Sober' leisure and how it can be addressed across the lifespan

Abigail Bernard BA, CTRS

Valerie Lazzara Mould, MA, CTRS-BH



Abigail Bernard



Valerie Lazzara Mould

In this session, attendees will be introduced to the "12 Steps to Sober Leisure" curriculum and how it can be utilized with a wide variety of ages and diagnostic groups. Speakers will provide background information including statistics related to substance use across the lifespan as well as other addictive behaviors such as excessive use of screen-time, including social media. Speakers will provide discussion of the APIE process, including strategies for discussing unhealthy choices, goal setting, interventions related to reintegration to healthy leisure and the community, and discharge resources to support clients/patients after treatment.



Valerie Lazzara Mould, MA, CTRS-BH

Valerie Lazzara Mould, MA, CTRS is a graduate of the University of Toledo with both a Bachelor of Science in Recreational Therapy (2007) and a Master's of Art in Recreation Administration (2008), and has been a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist since January 2018. She received her specialization in Behavioral Health in June 2023. She began her career working in both inpatient physical rehabilitation and geriatric psychiatry and has worked with pediatric psychiatry since 2012. She is currently employed full-time at the Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. There, she serves as a therapist on the Youth Crisis Stabilization Unit and as the Evidence-Based Practice Coordinator for the behavioral health team (OT, SLP, TR) and inpatient acute TR teams. Additionally, Valerie is an instructor for SMART CEUs Hub and serves as the SMART CEUs Hub marketing manager. Valerie was a contributor to the 12 Steps to Sober Leisure Revised Edition workbook. She is a member of the Ohio Recreational Therapy Association where she served on the board from 2017-2022 and is currently on two committees. Valerie received the Outstanding Professional award in 2021. She has given many presentations over the years on topics such as mindfulness, family leisure participation, behavioral health programming at NCH, marketing TR, behavioral activation, and Dialectic Behavioral Therapy. In her personal time, Valerie serves as a member of the American Heart Association Young Professionals Board and enjoys reading, photography, and spending time outdoors with family and friends.



Abigail Bernard BA, CTRS

Abigail Bernarthed, CTRS, is the author of the "12 Steps to Sober Leisure", a recovery workbook that addresses leisure as a crucial part of recovery. Abigail has worked in Substance Use Disorder Treatment/Recovery at Confider Park in Glenville, New York for 33 years. Abigail's goal is to help people in recovery to rediscover themselves through sober leisure activities. Through her workbook, and the accompanying therapist edition, Abigail has created a tool for therapists and individuals to maintain sobriety from substance use, and other addictive behaviors. Over the years, Abigail has created and implemented many programs to help achieve this goal. She is also the co-author of "12 Steps to Habitual Thriving". Throughout her career, Abigail has presented at a variety of conferences on her work in the field. In her personal time, Abigail is passionate about photography and her role as a wife and mother.

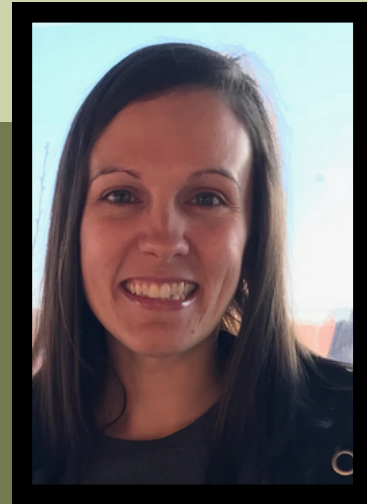
On-Demand Speaker Session:
**Recreational Therapy Standards of Practice: Merging Ethical
Practice with AI Innovation**

MaryJo Archambault CTRS, EdD

Heather Bright CTRS, PhD



Mary Jo Archambaultt



Heather Bright

**Transform your understanding and application of the ATRA
Standards of Practice in this cutting-edge session!**

**Participants will explore each of the 12 standards through an
ethical lens, focusing on their practical application in today's
healthcare and human service settings. This interactive session
bridges traditional standards with modern implementation
strategies.**



MaryJo Archambault CTRS, EdD

MaryJo Archambault is a full professor at Southern Connecticut State University. She is the undergraduate coordinator for the recreational therapy program. She has been an active member of the ATRA Standards of Practice Committee for over four years and is currently the co-chair of the committee. MaryJo has practiced recreation therapy in the field for over 25 years. Her experiences ranges from Skilled Nursing, Psychiatric/Behavioral Health, Physical Rehabilitations Hospitals, and Community Programming



Heather Bright CTRS, PhD

Heather Bright is an Associate Professor at Slippery Rock University (SRU) in the Recreational Therapy department. Heather has an undergraduate degree from SRU in Therapeutic Recreation, a Masters from East Carolina University in Recreational Therapy Administration, and a doctorate from Clemson University.

Her work experience includes, physical rehabilitation (brain injury, spinal cord injury, stroke, chronic pain, etc.), long-term care, PACE programs (programs for all-inclusive care for the elderly), and an accessible camp for children and adults with disability and chronic illness. Heather became chair of the ATRA Standards of Practice committee in 2018, after joining the committee in 2014.

Virtual Session: Chair Chi: Seated Tai Chi for the movement impaired populations

Pat Griffith, Founder and President of Chair Chi



Chair Chi is a gentle exercise program developed by Pat Griffith to help people receive the benefits of traditional Tai Chi Chuan in the comfort and safety of their chair. This allows people who cannot stand or do not feel confident with their balance, to participate

Pat Griffith is a certified Tai Chi Chuan instructor and founder and President of Chair Chi. He has been teaching at health clubs, senior and wellness centers and senior facilities since 1997. He has taught locally, state, national and international seminars and demonstrations since 2010.

***This has been presented at numerous conferences over the last 15 years nationwide**

Chair Chi is currently in over 30 states and Canada with approximately 5,200 instructors including Activity Directors, Physical, Occupational, Recreational and Massage Therapists, Doctors, Nurses, Personal Trainers and Managers of Senior Living Facilities.

On-Demand Session: Optimizing Dementia Engagement Through Cutting-Edge Technology

Sharon Johnson



For over 25 years, Hopeful Aging has been conducting National Institute on Aging (NIA)-funded research to develop psychosocial interventions for individuals living with dementia. The organization has dedicated its efforts to improving the quality of life for this population by developing a wide variety of activity materials designed to engage persons living with any stage of cognitive challenge. Over the years, they have created hundreds of evidence-based materials that have been shown to have many positive clinical outcomes, including increased engagement, quality of life, and the reduction of responsive behaviors. This effort has culminated in the creation of The CONNECT Engagement Platform, a cutting-edge digital solution now being disseminated in senior living communities and services across the nation.



Sharon Johnson
Inspirational Leader , Dementia Engagement
Specialist & Marketing Strategist

Sharon Johnson is a seasoned leader and innovator in the fields of dementia engagement, nonprofit leadership, and strategic marketing. With over two decades of experience, she has dedicated her career to improving the quality of life for individuals living with dementia and advancing evidence-based approaches across care settings.

Always There, LLC As Co-Founder of *Always There, LLC*, Sharon has developed and delivered curated, operationally sustainable engagement programs for organizations throughout the United States. *Always There's* mission reflects Sharon's deep belief that individuals with dementia remain present and capable of meaningful connection. Through her leadership, the organization has supported more than 10,000 professionals and 50 communities, bringing person-centered engagement strategies to a wide range of clients, including adult day programs, home-based care, adult day programs, assisted living, memory care, and independent living settings.

In addition to her consulting work, Sharon serves as Executive Director of the *I'm Still Here Foundation*, a nationally recognized nonprofit dedicated to changing the cultural narrative around dementia. In this role, she provides strategic, operational, and financial oversight; leads Board partnerships and strategic planning; fosters organizational culture; oversees development and programmatic activities; and serves as the organization's primary spokesperson. She plays a key role in advancing innovative grantmaking and programs that support meaningful engagement for people living with cognitive challenges.

Hopeful Aging Sharon also holds the role of Director of Marketing with the *Hopeful Aging Research Team*, where she leads the development and execution of comprehensive marketing strategies to expand the organization's visibility and impact in the elder care field. She directs campaigns and develops long-term strategic initiatives to grow audiences for research-backed products and services, with a focus on their digital engagement system called **CONNECT**.

Throughout her career, Sharon has collaborated with leading researchers, care providers, and nonprofit partners to bridge operational expertise with compassionate, person-centered engagement. Her work is grounded in the research of the internationally renowned *Hopeful Aging* team and is distinguished by its combination of strategic vision, operational excellence, and heart.

On-Demand Session: The New Community Toolkit: Guiding Clients Through AI Resources

Susan Purrington, PhD, CTRS



This 60-minute training directly supports multiple NCTRC knowledge domains and job tasks identified in the 2021 Job Analysis Study. Under Knowledge Domain 1: Professionalism, the session advances Job Task 1.02 "Maintain Professional Competency" by helping RTs understand trends in practice and develop new competencies in digital accessibility. It also supports Job Task 1.01 "Develop Professional Relationships" through building partnerships with community technology resources and advocating for clients' digital inclusion rights. The training strongly connects to Knowledge Domain 3: Planning by teaching RTs to design programs based on client needs, interests, and abilities while incorporating AI tools as adaptive interventions. Under Knowledge Domain 4: Implementation, RTs learn to determine environmental and programming accessibility, identify barriers to participation, and implement program plans using adaptive technology - specifically positioning AI as assistive technology for creative expression and functional skill development. Finally, the session addresses Knowledge Domain 6: Administration by preparing RTs to identify regulations pertaining to RT services in the digital age and contribute to staff education on emerging community resources. This training ensures RTs maintain their essential role as qualified providers while expanding their competency to include digital inclusion advocacy and AI accessibility expertise.



Susan Purrington, PhD, CTRS

Susan Purrington obtained her PhD in Leisure Behavior from Indiana University and is currently the Harold F. Wiley Generative AI Teaching and Learning Fellow at Connecticut College. She is a recognized pioneer in AI integration within higher education, having developed the nation's first AI literacy course focused on leisure and recreation ("AI and the Future of Fun") and created several academic support and professional bots, such as the "RT Buddy," a specialized GPT chatbot for recreational therapy professionals. As an AI Ethics & Integration Consultant and former Associate Teaching Professor at Northern Arizona University, she has delivered presentations on AI in education and therapeutic recreation across multiple countries. She is a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) and holds multiple AI and teaching certifications.

Dr. Purrington facilitates the Connecticut College AI Communities of Practice, conducts AI literacy workshops for entrepreneurs and educators, and chairs the American Therapeutic Recreation Association AI Task Force. Her work bridges the gap between cutting-edge AI technology and practical applications in education, therapeutic recreation, and inclusive learning environments. When she is not teaching or consulting, Susan directs the nonprofit "welcomed here, Inc.," she founded in 2022 to meet the needs of small businesses' professional development in inclusive practices. They offer low to no-cost workshops and trainings on topics related to inclusion multiple times a year.

On-Demand Session: How to Overcome Burnout and Stress

Working in the Psychiatric Field

Samantha Black, CTRS

Danny W. Pettry, II, M.Ed., LPC,

NCC, CTRS-BHS

The content of this session will include how to manage stress and burnout when working in the Psychiatric Field; using coping skills and the TR domains. While using the TR domains such as emotionality, spirituality, physicality, cognitively and socially. With reviewing self care; and what kind of self care I do with my patients such as emotion resilience and a ball game, breathing exercises; and what do us Rec Therapists do for selfcare. CBT and DBT are used appropriately and strategically in psych for our patients in a strategic and appropriate way.

This session introduces innovative ideas such as using assessment tools in a way that are different such as asking the patients what type of leisure they enjoy and the patients rate this on a scale of 1-5, 5 being the highest and one being the lowest, where I get the most 5's I do the activity more frequently and keep all other activities the same on our calendar. Using cognitive behavioral therapy and dialectical behavioral therapy with TR is very similar in terms of working in mental health when both therapies are used for anxiety and depression. Through group therapy and self care which is what CBT and DBT means; it correlates to recreational therapy.

***This session has been presented at the August 28th 2025 Rec Therapy
Today August Teleconference**

Samantha Black, CTRS

Samantha Black is a CTRS for 2 1/2 years. She has had multiple experiences working with many different populations and clientele such as geriatrics, children and adults with developmental disabilities. She currently works in an acute psychiatric unit at Montefiore Nyack Hospital. Her personal statement “My love for recreational therapy has continued to grow; and has continued to lengthen as I continue supplying needs for my clients emotional, socially, physically, and as well as cognitively. I look forward to sharing my presentation on how to Overcome Stress and Burnout Working in the Psychiatric Field”

Danny W. Pettry, II, M.Ed., LPC, NCC, CTRS-BHS

Danny Pettry is the Director of Continuing Education at Rec Therapy Today. He organizes virtual conferences three times a year for the fall, winter and summer. He also is known for having his daily bundles of CEU packages. Danny Pettry graduated from Indiana University with an MS in Recreational Therapy. Danny Pettry currently works in a psychiatric residential treatment facility.

On-Demand Session: Combating the Isolation and Loneliness Epidemic Among Aging Adults Through Recreational Therapy

Lauren Grattopp, CTRS

Rachel Hirschfeld, RT Intern

Loneliness and isolation among older adults are growing public health concerns. Recreational Therapy offers powerful tools to address these challenges, and the APIED process provides a framework for creating effective, evidence-based programs. It also allows for positive growth through the use of societal trends such as AI and social media. This session will examine how each step of the APIED Process can be applied to increase quality of life, socialization, and overall engagement among seniors. Attendees will learn practical strategies for assessment, intervention planning, implementation techniques, evaluation methods, and documentation practices. Discussion will also explore the influence of AI and social media as it relates to program development and advocacy of the field of Recreational Therapy. Participants will leave with actionable insights into developing programs that not only reduce isolation and loneliness but also strengthen the role of Recreational Therapy in aging services.

Lauren Grattopp, CTRS

Lauren Grattopp is a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist and Program Director at the Vintage Silver Center, a Recreational Therapy based day program for seniors in Phoenix, Arizona. She received her Bachelors of Science in Therapeutic Recreation from Arizona State University and became a CTRS soon after. Lauren believes Recreational Therapy puts the "fun" in "functional" and that people of all ages and stages can benefit. She has gained invaluable experience through working with kids to adults on the autism spectrum, equine therapy, behavioral health day programs, and senior day programs. She enjoys training her dog Penny to be a certified therapy dog, spending time with family and friends, reading good books and riding horses.

Rachel Hirschfeld, RT Intern

Rachel Hirschfeld was born and raised in Tucson, Arizona. She is currently fulfilling her last year at Arizona State University as a Recreational Therapy student. She discovered this degree path as it is her goal to provide holistic and sustainable healing therapy's to any and all communities. ASU's TR program has nurtured that goal as well as extended it by providing knowledge on tools in leisure education and exposure to multiple communities including those experiencing disabilities. She is excited to continue her journey in Recreational Therapy at Vintage Silver Center as she has the opportunity to be exposed to the nuances and specifics in program design along with therapist and patient/member relationship. Rachel enjoys spending her leisure time moving her body, usually through yoga or running and crocheting!

On-Demand Session: The Importance of Including Aging Competencies in Recreation Therapy Curriculum

Tarah Loy-Ashe, PhD, CTRS

MaryJo Archambault, EdD, CTRS

Although the number of aging adults is increasing, negative attitudes toward older adults persist across professional disciplines, including recreational therapy. This session will explore results of a recent national study which assessed expectations regarding aging among recreation therapists and compare those results to participant engagement in aging curriculum in RT programs.

Tarah Loy-Ashe, PhD, CTRS

Dr. Tarah Loy-Ashe (she/her) is a tenured Associate Professor and Recreation Therapy Graduate Program Coordinator at Southern Connecticut State University in the Department of Recreation, Tourism, and Sport Management. Tarah created the interdisciplinary minor in aging studies at Southern and co-founded the first Memory Cafe in New Haven, CT. She is a nationally certified therapeutic recreation specialist (CTRS) and has over fifteen years of clinical experience in long-term care.

MaryJo Archambault, EdD, CTRS

Dr. MaryJo Archambault, EdD, CTRS is a Professor and the Undergraduate Recreational Therapy Program Director at Southern Connecticut State University. She has been working in the field of Therapeutic Recreation for the past 20 years in a variety of capacities.