

# Illinois Recreational Therapy Association (ILRTA) Annual Conference 2025

The Double Tree Hotel Chicago/Alsip  
5000 W. 127th Street, Alsip, IL 60803

**In Person** – November 10, 2025

**Virtual** – November 14 – December 31, 2025

## Featured Presentations

**Session One:** Building Better Together: Collaboration as a Catalyst in Therapeutic Recreation (.1 CEUs)

### Speaker:

Kris Johnson, Associate Professor, Chair of Therapeutic Recreation and Neurodiversity Studies, Aurora University, Aurora, IL

### Session Description:

Unlock the transformative power of collaboration in therapeutic recreation. This dynamic session explores how interdisciplinary teamwork enhances client outcomes, ignites innovation, and fosters inclusive, person-centered care. Through real-world examples and interactive discussions, participants will gain practical tools to build stronger connections with colleagues, clients, and communities. Whether you're a seasoned practitioner or just stepping into the field, discover how intentional collaboration becomes a catalyst for healing, empowerment, and lasting impact. Together, we build better.

**Session Two:** Uncommon Advocacy: Elevating TR in New Spaces (.1 CEUs)

### Speakers:

Patricia Thomas, MPA CTRS, Clinical Professor, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM)

Timothy K. Behrens, PhD, CHES, RFSA, FACSM, Professor, School of Rehabilitation Sciences and Technology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Zoom)

### Session Description:

This session will delve into innovative pathways for advocating the Therapeutic Recreation (TR) profession through less conventional routes. One presenter, a recipient of recreational therapy services, will share how his lived experience has led to advocacy efforts within TR-related opportunities through his teaching, research and especially service. The other presenter will address emerging opportunities in higher education, focusing on the development of micro-credentials for both professionals within TR and other fields. Participants will gain insights into effective strategies for

advocacy and the potential impact on the TR profession. *This session description was generated with the assistance of AI technology.*

### **Session Three: AI in Therapeutic Recreation: Applications to the APIED Process and Considerations (.1 CEUs)**

#### **Speaker:**

Patricia Thomas, MPA CTRS, Clinical Professor, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM)

#### **Session Description:**

As generative artificial intelligence (AI) evolves, its impact on Therapeutic Recreation (TR) is becoming increasingly significant. This session will explore how AI can enhance various stages of the Assessment, Planning, Implementation, Evaluation, and Documentation (APIED) process, ultimately improving client care. Participants will examine real-world applications of AI in both personal and professional contexts while also addressing ethical considerations and potential risks. *This session description was generated with the assistance of generative artificial intelligence (AI) technology.*

### **Session Four: Using Therapeutic Recreation to Help Families Maintain Connections with Individuals with Dementia (.2 CEUs)**

#### **Speaker:**

Jennie Stoner, MS, CTRS, CDP, CMDCP, Consultant, Inspire Consulting Services, LLC, St. Charles, IL

#### **Session Description:**

This session will explore characteristics of dementia that can negatively impact family relationships and ways family members can use therapeutic recreation to help maintain and rebuild those relationships. This session relates to the Foundation of Knowledge area of the NCTRC Job Analysis.

### **Session Five: Caring with Intention: Integrating Cultural Understanding into Person-Centered Therapeutic Recreation (.15 CEUs)**

#### **Speakers:**

Tracey Crawford, CTRS, CPRP, Senior Learning Strategist for Access to Growth Learning Solutions, Chicago, IL

Jennie Stoner, MS, CTRS, CDP, CMDCP, Consultant, Inspire Consulting Services, LLC, St. Charles, IL

#### **Session Description:**

In today's human services and wellness landscape, delivering person-centered care is essential to supporting overall well-being. This session explores how therapeutic recreation professionals can become champions of compassionate, culturally responsive, and individualized care by grounding their practice in empathy, service, and the unique values of each client.

Participants will examine how integrating the client's personal values, preferences, and lived experiences into every therapeutic decision leads to more meaningful engagement and improved

outcomes. Emphasis will be placed on the dual role of cultural understanding: not only recognizing and honoring the cultural background of each client but also developing the recreational therapist's own cultural competence.

### **Session Six: Mindful Moments: Mindfulness Tools for Recreation Therapists and their Clientele (.15 CEUs)**

#### **Speakers:**

Kara Schweitzer, MA, CTRS, CDP, Family Life Educator, University of Illinois Extension, Sterling, IL  
Molly Hofer, MA, Family Life Educator, University of Illinois Extension, Chicago, IL

#### **Session Description:**

Mindfulness can be an important part of your self-care routine. Practicing mindfulness techniques may help you reduce your stress and increase your awareness of the present moment. In this session, come and explore several mindfulness practices including mindful breathing, listening, and awareness. Come prepared to participate and learn some easy mindfulness techniques that you can use for yourself and in your recreational therapy practice!

### **Session Seven: Groovy, Rad, Dope, or Lit – Staying “Cool” Across the Generations in Recreational Therapy Practice (.15 CEUs)**

#### **Speakers:**

Molly Hofer, MA, Family Life Educator, University of Illinois Extension, Chicago, IL  
Kara Schweitzer, MA, CTRS, CDP, Family Life Educator, University of Illinois Extension, Sterling, IL

#### **Session Description:**

Today, it is common to have multiple generations in families, organizations, and in the workplace. Each generation comes with strengths and perspectives based on life experiences. When viewpoints and practices differ, misunderstandings may occur. These misunderstandings can happen between co-workers or when implementing recreational therapy interventions with clients of multiple generations. Generational membership is sometimes blamed for these misunderstandings. Learn about ways to build bridges across the generations, mainly through communication, collaboration, and mutual mentoring.

### **Session Eight: Houston We Have a Problem: Is Practitioner Complacency Holding Back the Profession of Recreation Therapy? (.15 CEUs)**

#### **Speaker:**

Sue Myllykankas, PhD, CTRS, Professor, Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, MO

#### **Session Description:**

Everyone learns the Therapeutic Recreation Process as part of their readiness to practice. What happens when practitioners skip steps or don't use the process as it was designed? Are we really providing quality services if we don't follow the APIED process? Could we be putting our participants at risk? This session will review why each of the steps in the APIED process are important, offer a

new method of setting goals and objectives that may be easier for some practitioners, and provide clarification on how to better document and evaluate participant outcomes.

### **Session Nine: The Shocking Truth about ECT through the Eyes of a CTRS (.1 CEUs)**

#### **Speaker:**

Dixie McGary, MS, CDP, CTRS, Therapeutic Recreation Specialist, Mosaic Life Care, Maryville, MO

#### **Session Description:**

Come...satisfy your curiosity regarding ECT (Electroconvulsive Therapy). Learn more about the stigma, fears, what it looks and feels like, the emotional/physical/mental/cognitive effects, the opportunities, benefits, and risks. Compare the current use and experiences against what we've all watched on "One Flew Over a Cuckoo's Nest. That was then, this is now. Experience and contribute to the breadth of knowledge regarding the importance the role of a CTRS can play in a growing therapeutic setting.

### **Session Ten: NCTRC and CTRS Credential - The Future of Advocacy (.1 CEUs)**

#### **Speaker:**

Robin McNeal, CTRS, FDRT, ICE-CCP, Director of Credentialing, NCTRC, New City, NY

#### **Session Description:**

This session will focus on how the practitioner who holds the CTRS credential can use their certification to advocate for themselves and the profession. An overview of the various services and programs offered by NCTRC, as well as tips for using the credential for advocacy purposes will be discussed.

### **Session Eleven: NCTRC Recertification and Specialization Area Designation: Continuing Professional Competence (.1 CEUs)**

#### **Speaker:**

Robin McNeal, CTRS, FDRT, ICE-CCP, Director of Credentialing, NCTRC, New City, NY

#### **Session Description:**

This session provides an in-depth coverage of recertification standards and requirements for the areas of specialization. Continuing education, professional experience, and re-examination will be described in detail. Utilization of the 2021 NCTRC National Job Analysis Study in relation to recertification requirements will be discussed.

**Session Twelve: We Know It Works: Sharing Successful Outcomes of TR Interventions (.15 CEUs) LIVE ONLY**

**Speaker:**

Sue Myllykankas, PhD, CTRS, Professor, Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, MO

**Session Description:**

We all have those WOW moments when working with participants in TR settings. Why don't we share them amongst ourselves? With others? Interdisciplinary Teams? NCTRC Job Task #1-01 asks us to educate internal and external stakeholders about Recreation Therapy. This session is focused on doing just that. Through interviews with practicing CTRS's, this session will share WOW moments as a way to encourage us to adhere to Job Task #1-01 and educate others on the benefits of what we are doing.

**Session Thirteen: TR/RT Practice Applications in the Hospice/End-of-Life Settings with Patients of Any Age and their Families (.15 CEUs) VIRTUAL ONLY**

**Speaker:**

Cathy O'Keefe, M.Ed.

**Session Description:**

There is a niche population underserved by RT/TR professionals: the dying. This session invites participants into the paradox of living fully (see the Flourishing Through Leisure Model by Anderson and Heyne) when it is clear that time is short. This session explores how the developmental task of dying is served by our foundational recreation principles of personal growth, meaningful social interactions, joy, transformation, and inner peace. The APIE process must be adapted for end-of-life, and the "transition plan" is redefined, but the essence of re-creation as an agent of transformation is especially applicable. In fact, TR offers the hospice team, the family, and the dying person autonomy, creativity, and therapeutic activities in preparation for death and in the grieving process that follows.

**Session Fourteen: From Access to Belonging: Transforming Inclusive Recreation Through Community-Centered Practice (.15 CEUs) VIRTUAL ONLY**

**Speaker:**

Jason Page CTRS, Inclusive Recreation Resource Center, SUNY Cortland, New York

**Session Description:**

This session explores the transformative evolution of the Inclusive Recreation Resource Center (IRRC) at SUNY Cortland as it expands beyond traditional accessibility assessments to foster belonging and community participation. Participants will learn about innovative redevelopment initiatives including website enhancements, expanded training catalogs, and the establishment of a community advisory board. The session emphasizes how therapeutic recreation professionals can leverage these evolving resources to create more inclusive programming that addresses the current loneliness epidemic while promoting genuine belonging in recreational settings. Attendees will

discover practical applications for enhancing their own inclusive recreation practices and community engagement strategies.

**Session Fifteen: Spirituality in Recreation Therapy Practice: Helping People Create Meaning, Joy, and Awareness (.15 CEUs) VIRTUAL ONLY**

**Speaker:**

Lynn Anderson, PhD, CTRS, CPRP, FDRT, FALS, Professor Emeritus, Recreation, Parks and Leisure Studies Department, State University of New York at Cortland

Cathy O'Keefe, M.Ed.

**Session Description:**

The spiritual domain of human functioning is critical to overall well-being and an important area of focus for recreation therapists. In this session, we will define spirituality, understand its role in health and well-being, and examine ways that recreation therapists can facilitate spiritual well-being in the people we serve. Lastly, we will explore specific interventions and environmental modifications that can help build spiritual well-being.