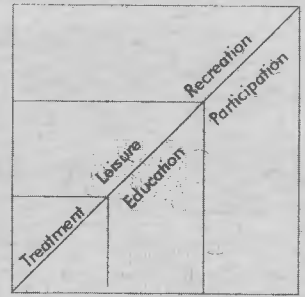


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Alberta Therapeutic Recreation Association

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Therapeutic Recreation In Canada: Where Are We Now and Where Are We Going?

by Beth P. Velde and Darlene Murphy

In Canada there are no existing national organizations who have a mandate to address the specific needs of therapeutic recreators. While there are national organizations which exist in the area of recreation such as the Canadian Parks/Recreation Association; Boys and Girls Club of Canada; the Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation; the YMCA; and the YWCA, there has not been a movement to formalize, at the national level, an association which focuses on therapeutic recreation or therapeutic recreation professionals. Most of the above organizations has as part of their mandate, the service of individuals with disabilities. Some of the organizations have either ad hoc or established committees which reflect their concern for meeting the needs of consumers with disabilities.

At the 1993 International Therapeutic Recreation Symposium (ITRS) held in Richmond Hill, Ontario, the Alberta Therapeutic Recreation Association facilitated a session. Its purpose was to establish the current stage of development of professional organizations of therapeutic recreation in Canada and to address the question of the need for a national organization for therapeutic recreators.

A key area of concern for Ca-

nadians wishing to become employed in the area of therapeutic recreation is the availability of college and university programmes which offer therapeutic recreation courses. According to Gagnon, Ostiguy, and Swedburg (1993), there are 22 universities offering a programme in recreation or a related area such as physical education, leisure studies, physical activity studies, outdoor recreation, or tourism. Of these, 5 offer a concentration in therapeutic recreation or special groups. Concordia University is the only university offering a degree titled Therapeutic Recreation.

Forty-four colleges offer recreation programmes - 3 focusing on therapeutic recreation. At the graduate level, 7 Canadian universities offer the opportunity for studies beyond the bachelors degree. Currently there are no Canadian universities offering a PhD.

The relationship of the provinces to the national development of therapeutic recreation services (TRS) has existed through organizations such as NIARP, Fitness and Amateur Sport, Ministries of Health and Welfare, and the interaction of professionals at conferences and meetings. A portion of the session held at ITRS was devoted to representatives from each province / territory sharing the current environment for therapeutic

continued on page 2

Contents . . .

Tr in Canada

Creativity - ATRA Symposium 93

Summary of Issues Session

Introduction of 93/94 Board

Board Notes

Happiness is ... Laughing while
you work

Personal Empowerment through
Understanding Change

Recreation Therapy Club at LCC

New Look for the ATRAbute

T.R. in Canada

(continued from Page 1)

recreation. The growth and development of TRS and the support for professionals is varied. However, there appears to be a growing grassroots call for a more organized national system of support.

Service providers in the area of TRS are living in a world where jobs require more knowledge of how to treat people and not conditions. Total quality management and total quality assurance supports cross training and interdependence as the future for organizations. The economy dictates merged departments and supervisors trained and educated in areas other than TRS. The Canadian view and definition on TRS has been formed in countries outside Canada by people who work in a health care system unlike Canada's system. Many Canadians spend more time in professional development activities in the United States because of the lack of national opportunities here. A national professional association often emerges when there is an expressed need for communication and professional development at the national level. Canadian representatives at ITRS were asked to comment on their hopes and fears for the future of TRS development in Canada.

The most prevalent hope was that a national association would be created which could provide credibility for the discipline of therapeutic recreation. The fears expressed were varied. Some were generic, some involved concerns of continuing without a national association, some were concerned specifically with a national therapeutic recreation association affiliated with CP/RA.

In recognition of the hopes and fears expressed, and understanding the uniqueness of the Canadian context, a national coordination commit-

tee was established with representation from each province/territory. With the session presenters, Beth Velde and Darlene Murphy, serving as facilitators, the committee was charged with investigating the alternatives for the development of a national association representing TRS personnel. The following action plan was accepted:

- the completion of a paper summarizing the session
- the distribution of the paper to all who were in attendance at the session
- the submission of the paper to the editorial committee of Global Therapeutic Recreation
- the exploration of options for national development
- the preparation of position papers on options for consideration by the coordinating committee (eg: affiliation with CP/RA, CAHPER, American Therapeutic Recreation Association, National Therapeutic Recreation Society, stand-alone group)

- securement of funding for a meeting of the committee
- discussion of position papers at a national meeting of the committee
- prioritising of alternatives by committee
- presentation of alternatives to all those present at the ITRS session for "voting"
- development of an action plan based on the "vote"

The geographical, political, and cultural context of Canada presents challenges to any group trying to meet the needs of a diverse group of people working in TRS. Consideration of the options available will stimulate debate not only among those on the national coordinating committee, but those in the field of TRS. The important thing to remember is represented well by Robert Fulghum in his book *All I Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*: When you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together.



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