

Unified Profession,  
— Unified Voice —

# Therapeutic Recreation Month Award Nominations

Voting Open  
January 27th - February 7th



# The Chameleon Award

This award celebrates adaptability and resilience. The focus is on the nominee's versatility in responding to client needs with innovative solutions, demonstrating flexibility and resilience in overcoming client-related challenges.

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## **Vallyn Sielski:**

Vallyn has passion & is amazing in all she touches! When she started working with us, I ran into a former colleague of hers. This colleague told me how lucky we are to have Vallyn because she is great! This former colleague was absolutely correct! Vallyn is indeed a huge asset in any position she graces with her presence! Good luck Vallyn!

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## **Rena Walker:**

I am proud to nominate Rena for "The Chameleon" award. As the current Education Director for ATRA, and as a respected TR Instructor, Rena exemplifies resilience, adaptability, and versatility in every aspect of her work. She approaches challenges with innovative solutions, consistently employing diverse techniques and resources to meet students evolving needs. Rena's ability to adapt and overcome challenges not only achieves positive outcomes but also inspires those around her to embrace change with confidence. Having had the privilege of working alongside Rena, I have seen firsthand her dedication to creating meaningful, individualized therapeutic experiences, making her truly deserving of this recognition.

# The Chameleon Award

This award celebrates adaptability and resilience. The focus is on the nominee's versatility in responding to client needs with innovative solutions, demonstrating flexibility and resilience in overcoming client-related challenges.

## **Tyler Rybchinski:**

Tyler has 15 years of experience in the field of TR and is always resilient in our everchanging environment with youth in mental health and addictions. He supports our youth to transition through the stages of their journey in the Day Program and we are so grateful to him on our team. We see the hard work you do every day and are so thankful for you, congrats Tyler!

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## **Kate Giles:**

Kate is a true TR Chameleon, always embracing new challenges and opportunities with enthusiasm. In a high-demand workplace, she plays a crucial role in ensuring clients' needs are met. Kate is an expert in working with adapted recreation equipment, helping to enhance the lives of children across Nova Scotia. As the only Recreation Therapy Associate in the province working in children's rehabilitation, she oversees the logistics of over 300 pieces of adapted equipment. Kate works with a diverse range of clients, from infants to 18-year-olds, each with unique needs. No two days are ever the same, but Kate is always prepared to tackle whatever comes her way. Her innovative thinking and problem-solving skills are unmatched, ensuring that children can use the equipment safely in the environment of their choice. In an ever changing workplace, both in clients and colleagues, Kate is always positive and ready for the next challenge. Kate is a dedicated volunteer in her community and in this profession. Countless lives have been positively impacted by Kate!

# The Life of the Party Award

This award highlights positivity and enthusiasm. It recognizes a professional known for uplifting energy, warmth, and a “can-do” attitude that brings joy and positivity to clients and colleagues.

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## **Sun Lee:**

Sun is a bright light within the team. She spreads positivity with her clients and co-workers

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## **Colleen Bateman:**

She is uplifting, warm and has a can-do spirit

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## **Danielle Broomfield:**

Danielle is full of energy and will never say no to any fun opportunities that come her way. She is the first one to get up for karaoke or on the dance floor and is always coming up with new and exciting ideas and activities for friends, colleagues and clients. She brings out the best in all who have the privilege of knowing her. The Recreation department she leads has some of the best people and their enthusiasm, coupled with Danielle’s passion for life, bring fun and joy to the residents they see everyday. From dressing up as NL mummers to planning skits, dancing or musical exercise programs, fun, laughter and making connections is at the heart of what Danielle demonstrates at work and also in her personal life every single day. She is the perfect nominee for the Life of the Party award!!

# The Life of the Party Award

This award highlights positivity and enthusiasm. It recognizes a professional known for uplifting energy, warmth, and a “can-do” attitude that brings joy and positivity to clients and colleagues.

## **Ashley Burge:**

Ashley Burge, a Recreation Therapy Worker in Long-Term Care, radiates an infectious energy that transforms any gathering into a lively celebration. Her unwavering positivity, boundless joy, and ability to turn every moment into an opportunity for laughter and excitement make her truly deserving of this recognition. In every interaction, Ashley brings a unique blend of fun and enthusiasm, creating an atmosphere of joy that resonates with everyone around her. Her vibrant personality is not just a source of entertainment for all to enjoy but also a catalyst for building strong connections and fostering a positive community within our facility for all colleagues, friend/family members, and residents that we serve. Whether she is playing the role of Santa Claus, Pat Sajak in Wheel of Fortune, or Bob Parker hosting the Price is Right, she truly transforms herself into any role necessary to make the experience for others out of this world. I believe Ashley embodies the spirit of the "Life of the Party" award, and her contribution to spreading happiness and creating memorable experiences should be celebrated. I whole heartedly recommend her for this well-deserved honor.

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## **Kim Nicholls:**

Kim is overflowing with positive energy which draws people in like a magnet! She is brilliant (in so many ways) & incredibly talented, making her a true gem wherever she goes! It was tough to pick just one category! Good luck Kim!

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## **Alex LeGrow:**

Alex has a knack for bringing people (both clients and colleagues) out of their shell in the best way, and she can truly light up a room with her positivity and charisma. When I've seen her in action at conferences, she's buzzing like a bee around the room, and has a way of ensuring folks feel included. When she's asked to do something that may be outside of her comfort zone, she still manages to make it happen for the good of her clients and/or the profession, and you'd never guess she was weary in the first place.

# The Life of the Party Award

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## **Jon Huys:**

Jon Huys truly embodies the spirit of positivity, enthusiasm, and passion that this award seeks to celebrate. Jon consistently brings an infectious energy to the workplace, lifting the spirits of everyone around him. Whether working on a challenging project or navigating tough obstacles, Jon's determination and optimistic attitude inspires those around him, including both his colleagues and his patients. Jon's positivity is not just about being cheerful; it's about genuinely caring for the well-being and success of others. Jon consistently goes out of his way to provide support, offer encouragement, and make those around him feel valued. Jon has an incredible ability to turn any situation into an opportunity for connection and collaboration, including always being able to share a laugh or ease the tension during team huddles. Jon has a unique way of making every individual feel seen and appreciated. Jon actively listens, offers thoughtful insights, and makes people feel comfortable, fostering a positive environment where both patients and colleagues can thrive. Jon's ability to bring joy to the workplace, even during the most challenging of times, is a strength that has greatly shaped the team atmosphere. I can truly think of no one more deserving of the Life of the Party Award than Jon. His enthusiasm and positivity not only enhance the team culture, but motivate others, including both his colleagues and patients to be better, making him an invaluable member of the team.

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## **Chelsea Crockford:**

Chelsea is beyond positive and passionate for the profession. She actively runs a social media page, Connect Through Leisure, highlighting the importance of Recreation Therapy. If I could think of one word to describe her, it would be joy. You always feel more positive and uplifted around her, as a coworker or patient.

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## **Lisa Monikowski:**

I am excited to nominate Lisa for the "Life of the Party" award. As the current Treasurer for ATRA, Lisa radiates joy and positivity! She has uplifted the ATRA team with her infectious enthusiasm. Lisa has an ability to create lively, welcoming environments ensures that everyone feels included and valued. Lisa's “can-do” attitude is unwavering, inspiring those around her to embrace challenges with energy and optimism. Lisa has an ability to make even otherwise 'boring' finance meetings enjoyable. Having had the privilege of working with Lisa, and problem-solving alongside her (\*cough\* Moneris...), I can confidently say that her warmth and vibrant spirit make her an irreplaceable asset to our team and a perfect candidate for this recognition.



# The Cheerleader Award

This award focuses on team support and morale. It honors someone who consistently brings encouragement and camaraderie to the team, fostering confidence and motivation in those around them.

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## **Brittany Butler:**

I'd like to nominate Brittany Butler for The Cheerleader Award. Brittany works as a Recreation Therapist in Nova Scotia. She has experience working in a number of settings including, mental health, acute care, and paediatric rehab. She is currently working with Children's Intensive Services, which is a program that provides mental health services to children aged 5 to 12 years. Brittany is passionate about the work that she does and about motivating people to participate in recreation and leisure. She is captain of The Boiled Hot Dogs softball team, a member of Loose Ends Curling League, organizer of soup groups and camping trips, a talented artist, and an expert gardener. Brittany brings a sense of positivity into everything that she does. She is always celebrating the successes of those around her, providing encouragement, and believing in people when they might doubt themselves. This is why Brittany Butler is the perfect candidate for the Cheerleader Award!

# The Cheerleader Award

This award focuses on team support and morale. It honors someone who consistently brings encouragement and camaraderie to the team, fostering confidence and motivation in those around them.

## **Brittany MacKeen:**

Brittany is one of the most team-oriented, compassionate people I've ever worked with. She is SO skilled in seeing and acknowledging the skills of others, and absolutely fosters confidence in her colleagues as well as clients. She is always looking at how to boost team morale and a sense of camaraderie through team building and collaboration which is something that is desperately valued by those of us working in health care right now. We are so lucky to have her as our Central Zone rep!

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## **Bev Suntjens:**

"I am honored to nominate Bev for "The Cheerleader" award. As the president of ATRA, Bev exemplifies the qualities of an exceptional team player. Her unwavering positivity and encouragement consistently boost team morale, making her a cornerstone of our workplace culture.

Bev celebrates every success, creating an environment where everyone feels valued and supported. Her ability to instill confidence and inspire our team to be the best we can be, is unparalleled, motivating our team to excel. Having had the privilege of working closely with Bev, I can attest to the wonderful impact she brings to our team through her supportive actions and infectious enthusiasm."

# The Cheerleader Award

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## **Stephanie Loberg:**

Stephanie encourages her recreation staff daily to strive for excellence in providing person centered care. She is not just a manager but our biggest cheerleader. Her positivity and enthusiasm are contagious. She is always there to lend a hand, offer constructive feedback, and celebrate our team's achievements, no matter how big or small. Stephanie takes the time to listen to each of us, ensuring everyone's input is heard and appreciated. Her positivity and support motivates to us to be our best daily. For these reasons we believe Stephanie is more than deserving of this award. Her support, encouragement and commitment to our team is the foundation of our success. - From her Rec Team

# The Master of Minions Award

This award recognizes mentorship and development of future professionals. It's distinct in that it focuses on contributions to student growth through supervision and a commitment to fostering new TR practitioners.

## **Stevie Grant:**

This professional has taken on numerous student interns with eagerness. She demonstrates passion for the field and its growth.

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## **Kate Giles:**

Kate is the Recreation Therapy Associate at the Kid's Rehabilitation Service at the IWK Children's hospital. She is currently on the NSTRA Board of Directors and co-chair of the task force leading our standards of practice. Kate recognizes the unique service and role that she has within the IWK and as a TR practitioner, and over the last seven years at the IWK, has consistently supported students with their learning, nurturing through her mentorship to support the future of TR. Kate has been a preceptor and mentor to many, offering quality practicum experiences, with attention to detail, a clear understanding of learning outcomes and opportunities to experience the unique service of the Kid's Rehab Service.

# The Master of Minions Award

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## **Ashley McCune:**

"I am thrilled to nominate Ashley for the "Master of Minions" award. As the current secretary for ATRA, and as a preceptor, Ashley has exemplified unwavering dedication to mentoring the next generation of TR practitioners. Ashley consistently provides high-quality learning experiences that foster both professional and personal growth. Her commitment to nurturing future professionals is evident in her thoughtful guidance, encouragement, and ability to inspire confidence in her students. Working alongside Ashley has shown me the profound impact of her mentorship, as she equips students with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in the field of therapeutic recreation. Ashley is always bringing new ideas to the ATRA board of directors, looking at different ways we can support the students in our field!"

# The Practice What You Preach Award

This award is about self-care and modeling wellness. It acknowledges professionals who prioritize their own leisure and recreation to support their well-being and serve as an example to others in maintaining personal wellness.

## **Chelsea Crockford:**

This person is always looking for new experiences, she is always encouraging others to engage and she is never afraid to say no to something new. She has been a great leader here in New Brunswick with her innovative ways to get people engaged.

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## **Justine Laporte:**

"Justine embodies the spirit of this award by practicing what she preaches about the power of recreation and leisure. Over the past two years, she's navigated the loss of her brother with incredible strength, honoring his memory through fundraisers, merchandise, and sharing her journey with others.

Through activities like her book club, time with family, and beach days, she's shown how leisure can be a powerful tool for healing and connection. She's also good at setting boundaries, saying "no" to what drains her and "yes" to what fills her cup.

Justine inspires everyone around her by living proof that recreation isn't just something we talk about—it's something we lean on to support our well-being."

# The Practice What You Preach Award

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## **Chantelle Erdmann:**

Chantelle takes TR values and awareness into every program she designs and delivers. The residents are at the core of all of Chantelle's work and the principles of TR inform her ever striving to be just a little bit better each time she does anything.

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## **Alex LeGrow:**

Alex encompasses all aspects of 'Practice what you Preach' as she values her own recreation and leisure as much as she does with the patients she works with. Alex has built strong connections in her community, and is always learning a new skill, trying a new hobby or exploring a new corner of her community with her friends. Working in Mental Health and Addictions, Alex works hard to motivate others to find healthy recreation and leisure interests, while also promoting the importance of self care, encouraging everyone around her to focus on their wellness.

# The Practice What You Preach Award

This award is about self-care and modeling wellness. It acknowledges professionals who prioritize their own leisure and recreation to support their well-being and serve as an example to others in maintaining personal wellness.

## **Gary Leung:**

Gary is the perfect embodiment of the "Practicing What You Preach" award for recreation therapy. He fully immerses himself in a lifestyle that reflects the values he promotes. His personal social media is a masterclass that models leisure and recreation for mental, physical, and emotional well-being. Gary is a passionate traveler, exploring new places and cultures, which keeps his perspective fresh and vibrant. His dedication to pole dancing demonstrates his commitment to physical fitness, creativity, and self-expression. In his downtime, Gary nurtures his mind and soul through reading and painting, channeling his imagination and curiosity. He regularly attends concerts, indulges in the joy of music, and takes time to unwind at restaurants, spas, and yoga classes, showing how recreation can balance body and mind. Whether hiking in nature, catching a movie, or simply appreciating life's small joys, Gary truly walks the walk. His enthusiasm for leisure and well-being is not only inspiring but also a testament to the power of recreation therapy in action. Gary is a true friend, and is the reason people around him smile, laugh and forget about the day's challenges. He is a bright light that shines into the lives of the patients he supports and his team mates around him. Those of us who know him personally are truly lucky to witness his advocacy for recreation therapy not just with his words, but through his actions - he truly embodies the core values of recreation therapy.



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## **Megan Ciesielski:**

I am honored to nominate Maegan for the "Practice What You Preach" award. As the current Competence Director for ATRA, Maegan exemplifies the essence of healthy living and self-care. She consistently engages in leisure and recreation activities that promote her well-being across multiple domains, serving as an inspiring role model for colleagues and clients alike. Whether it's through her active lifestyle (running marathons!) or dedication to personal growth, Maegan demonstrates how prioritizing wellness enhances both personal and professional success. Having worked closely with Maegan, I have witnessed her unwavering commitment to embodying the principles of therapeutic recreation, making her a deserving candidate for this recognition.

# The Practice What You Preach Award

This award is about self-care and modeling wellness. It acknowledges professionals who prioritize their own leisure and recreation to support their well-being and serve as an example to others in maintaining personal wellness.

## **Rachelle Forster:**

Rachelle is a powerhouse in the field of therapeutic recreation, embodying the essence of the Practice What You Preach award. As a dedicated CTRS at her Long-Term Care Centre, Rachelle brings her vibrant energy and unwavering commitment to her work every day. But her impact extends far beyond her workplace. With her sharp wit and infectious sense of humor, she connects with a broad audience through her blog, *The Wreck in Recreation*. Her stories and reflections not only inspire joy and laughter but also provoke thoughtful conversations about life, leisure, and the heart of therapeutic recreation. On social media, Rachelle champions positive leisure pursuits, community involvement, and TR education, modeling the very principles she promotes. Her passion for the field is matched by her dedication to service: she's been a tireless volunteer for many years, including representing Canada on an NCTRC committee. Rachelle's ability to turn her love of writing into a platform for advocacy and connection exemplifies the power of leisure as a transformative force. She doesn't just talk about the values of therapeutic recreation—she lives them, making her an exceptional and inspiring candidate for this award.

# The Above and Beyond Award

This award celebrates exceptional dedication and impact. It recognizes a professional who goes beyond expectations, using creativity, perseverance, and teamwork to advance the TR field and create positive impacts for clients and/or colleagues.

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## **Michaella Siourounis:**

Mish constantly goes above and beyond for her patients, co-workers, program, and friends and family. She is constantly pushing the boundaries of being “just” a Recreation Therapist, showing everyone what we really do. Completing numerous assessments and intakes to help her team. Her tenacity is the reason her new program runs at all.

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## **Candice Morse:**

Stepping up into a leadership role, when needed. rebuilding up the reputation of Recreation Therapy. Putting the patients first and advocating for more appropriate prioritization. doing the job of two people

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## **Austin Oswald:**

Their continued dedication to progress the field through research. They also teach and motivate students in TR to continue to reach for the stars. They make everyone in their reach to be passionate for the field and promote the growth of TR

# The Above and Beyond Award

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## **Jessie Warren:**

Jessie always goes “Above and Beyond” for her patients and colleagues. Although Jessie is fairly new to the profession, she took a leap and dived right into working in an unfamiliar and challenging workplace as a new professional. She is the go-to person for not only all things recreation but as well as a variety of other duties not typical of a Recreation Specialist. Co-workers value her insight and opinion. She is always willing to lend an extra hand wherever she is needed. Jessie is constantly looking for ways to provide new and exciting opportunities to her patients despite challenges that may be faced. She is an advocate for both the profession and for the mental health field and deserves to be recognized. There is no doubt that she puts her best foot forward in her practice each and every day.

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## **Kyle Smook:**

I feel kyle puts in 100% of his effort in his job takes great pride in helping people. gets along with co workers always willing to give a helping hand.

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## **Kristen Freistadt:**

Kristen exemplifies creativity, resourcefulness, and an unwavering commitment to advancing the field of recreation therapy.

Through her tireless advocacy, she has been instrumental in the ongoing development of recreation therapy at Royal University Hospital, ensuring the profession's growth and sustainability. Her dedication to educating allied health professionals about the profound benefits of recreation therapy has elevated its profile, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and highlighting its essential role in patient care.

Kristen consistently transforms challenges into opportunities. She has championed seamless continuation of care for patients transitioning between facilities, ensuring that recreation therapy remains an integral part of their recovery journey. Her efforts have not only improved patient outcomes but have also reinforced the value of recreation therapy in holistic healthcare.

Beyond her work at the hospital, Kristen has made significant contributions at both the local and provincial levels. Her leadership, vision, and advocacy inspire those around her, advancing recreation therapy as a respected and vital healthcare profession.

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## **Jessica Reid:**

Jess has been engaged and involved with the advancement of the TR field through collaborative initiatives and opportunities in Nova Scotia for many years. She has recently completed her term on the NSTRA's board of directors and continues to co-chair NSTRA's EDIA subcommittee and be an active member of NSTRA's Standards of Practice task force. Through her work and volunteer pursuits, she has been creative with her approaches, resourceful in a community-based setting and always willing to explore and think critically.

## **Hailey Kanak:**

As the current Grant Programs Director for ATRA, and as a very skilled Therapy Assistant, Hailey consistently demonstrates creativity, resourcefulness, and a tireless commitment to advancing the field of therapeutic recreation. She takes independent initiative while fostering collaborative teamwork, inspiring those around her. Hailey's innovative approach to transforming challenges into opportunities has had a profound impact on both her clients and the ATRA team. Her dedication to the profession is evident in the time and effort she invests in developing programs and advocating for the value of therapeutic recreation. Having worked closely with Hailey, I have seen firsthand the passion and drive that make her truly deserving of this recognition.

# The Jack/Jill of All Trades Award

This award emphasizes versatility in skills. It honors a professional who has developed skills across various areas, showing dedication to learning and adapting to meet a wide range of client and team needs.

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## **Tiffany Morin:**

"Tiffany exemplifies what it means to be a true "Jack/Jill of All Trades." As an engaged educator within the Bachelor of Therapeutic Recreation program at the University of Lethbridge, her ability to juggle multiple responsibilities is inspiring. Her "can-do" attitude sets the tone for every challenge, making her an invaluable role model for students and a fantastic colleague. If you've had the privilege to work with Tiffany, you know the deep level of engagement she brings to every pursuit.

Beyond her teaching duties, Tiffany mentors students through independent studies, offering her research and clinical expertise, and pursues her own research projects—an endeavor not required by her role but driven by her passion for advancing knowledge across Canada. Outside the university, she facilitates meaningful community initiatives, such as beading programs and public speaking events. After the Vecova Recreation Centre announced its water therapy pool closure—a critical resource for recreation therapists in Calgary, Alberta—Tiffany recently organized a Disability Action Hall to advocate for it to remain open.

With her dedication, humour, versatility, and unwavering commitment to excellence, Tiffany balances an extraordinary range of responsibilities that benefit students, colleagues, and the broader community. She is a truly deserving nominee for the Jack/Jill of All Trades Award."

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## **Kimberley Woodford:**

Their dedication to mental health and addictions, geriatric care and teaching crosses so many domains. Their knowledge reaches from EDIA, inclusion, mental health and addiction and leadership. Truly excels at everything she does.

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## **Laura Oldford:**

"Laura is the definition of a "Jack of all trades." She's constantly expanding her skill set to better serve patients and support the team. Whether mentoring students or contributing to research studies, she's committed to advancing evidence-based practices in our field.

Her adaptability shines in areas like adapted gaming and innovative interventions, including using VR to support botox treatments and adaptive swimming. Laura is always looking for creative ways to enhance patient care and meet diverse needs.

Her dedication to learning, growing, and trying new approaches makes her a great asset!"



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## **Mikaylee Dreger:**

Mik is the definition of "Jill of all trades". Every time I speak to her, she is always embarking on a new project, learning a new skill or organizing the most amazing events. Whether that be crocheting, picking up a skill of making bath bombs for her friends, or organizing horse and carriage rides for her residents - she is creative, inspiring, and full of life! This award was meant for her in every way :)

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## **Mackenzie Lefebvre:**

Mackenzie is working on a pilot program with Northwood, bringing Recreation to a whole new community! He is presenting at the NSTRA- Recreation Therapists in Non Traditional Roles, bringing his skills and dedication to a new population.

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## **Jodie Van Spronsen:**

I am delighted to nominate Jodie for the " "Jack or Jill of All Trades" " award. As the current Communication Director for ATRA, Jodie embodies versatility and adaptability in her role. She is highly skilled across a range of portfolios and support roles, seamlessly meeting the diverse needs of our ATRA team and ATRA members. Jodie's eagerness to learn and grow is evident in her commitment to ongoing professional development, continually expanding her skill set to provide the highest level of service, and in her adaptability across numerous roles on the board of directors! Having worked closely with Jodie, I have witnessed her ability to excel in multiple areas, making her an invaluable asset to our team and a true embodiment of this award's criteria."