Conceptual paper

Flourishing through Leisure: An Ecological Extension of the Leisure and Well-Being Model in Therapeutic Recreation Strengths-Based Practice

Lynn S. Anderson
Linda A. Heyne

Abstract

This article describes a model for strengths-based therapeutic recreation practice called Flourishing Through Leisure: An Ecological Extension of the Leisure and Well-Being Model (Anderson & Heyne, 2012), which is founded on the theories presented in the companion article in this issue, “Theories That Support Strengths-Based Practice in Therapeutic Recreation.” The new model is an extension of the Leisure and Well-Being Model developed by Carruthers and Hood (2007) and Hood and Carruthers (2007), broadened to embrace the ways in which environmental or contextual factors contribute to well-being and to include the domain of spirituality as an area of focus for therapeutic recreation. Grounded strongly in the ecological approach and the social model of disability, the Flourishing Through Leisure Model situates the person in the environment and outlines the scope of therapeutic recreation practice to include services directed not only toward helping the person but also toward changing social and physical environments.

Keywords: Well-being, leisure, strengths approach, social model of disability, ecological approach, therapeutic recreation practice models

Lynn S. Anderson is a professor and director of the Inclusive Recreation Resource Center at the State University of New York in Cortland. Linda A. Heyne is a professor at Ithaca College in Ithaca, New York.

Please send correspondence to lynn.anderson@cortland.edu

Acknowledgments: We want to recognize the enormous contribution Drs. Cynthia Carruthers and Colleen Hood have made to the profession of therapeutic recreation in their development of the Leisure and Well-Being Model. Their model provided us, as authors, a rigorous and well-conceptualized foundation to broaden and expand our ideas on strengths-based and ecological principles for therapeutic recreation practice. Drs. Hood and Carruthers have made a lasting and unique contribution to the field of therapeutic recreation, and we sincerely thank them.
In 2007, the Leisure Well-Being Model (LWM) was introduced to therapeutic recreation, providing a conceptually sound service model rooted in both the strengths approach and leisure behavior (Carruthers & Hood, 2007; Hood & Carruthers, 2007). The LWM provided a refreshing approach to therapeutic recreation, refocusing the field to its roots in recreation and building on new theories and research that solidify the critical role of quality leisure experiences in well-being. The LWM was primarily based on theories in positive psychology (Carruthers & Hood, 2007). Contextual, or environmental factors, though important in the LWM, were not explicitly addressed as a practice arena for therapeutic recreation.

Flourishing Through Leisure: An Ecological Extension of the Leisure and Well-Being Model solidifies the role of the environment or context in well-being and explicitly outlines areas of practice in therapeutic recreation that focus on environmental interventions. Environment or context is inclusive of the physical, social, and political contexts in which people live their lives. The Flourishing Through Leisure Model grounds therapeutic recreation practice more solidly in an ecological perspective by extending therapeutic recreation practice to more intentionally include environmental approaches as well as approaches that focus on the individual participant. Embedding the individual in the environment is a hallmark of the positive science movement, where “positive institutions” is one of the pillars supporting the “good life” (Seligman, 2002) and is inherent in the ecological perspective.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the Flourishing Through Leisure Model as a framework for therapeutic recreation practice that uses an ecological approach, is strengths-based, and is rooted in theories of leisure and well-being. The theories that ground the Flourishing Through Leisure Model are presented in a companion article, which also appears in this issue, “Theories That Support Strengths-Based Practice in Therapeutic Recreation.” After providing a strengths-based definition of therapeutic recreation, upon which the model is based, each focus area of the Flourishing Through Leisure Model is described.

A Strengths-Based Definition of Therapeutic Recreation as a Foundation for the Flourishing Through Leisure Model

Therapeutic recreation is the purposeful and careful facilitation of quality leisure experiences and the development of personal and environmental strengths, which lead to greater well-being for people who, due to challenges they may experience in relation to illness, disability, or other life circumstances, need individualized assistance to achieve their goals and dreams (Anderson & Heyne, 2012). In this definition, *purposeful facilitation* means that the leisure experiences and strengths that will be enhanced are chosen through the diligent application of individualized assessment and are oriented toward the goals, dreams, and aspirations of the participant. *Careful facilitation* means that the therapeutic recreation specialist uses an individualized plan, created with the participant, and well-developed facilitation skills in all aspects of service delivery, tailored to the unique
situation of each individual. Quality leisure experiences means participants find meaning, enjoyment, and growth in their leisure pursuits, often by using their strengths to exercise skill in concert with stimulating challenges and other opportunities. Personal strengths and environmental resources means that therapeutic recreation specialists focus on those things that participants do well, that have meaning for them, and that give them hope as well as participants’ contexts and the strengths and resources in environments. People who, due to challenges they may experience in relation to illness, disability, or other life circumstances, need individualized assistance to achieve their goals and dreams delineates the scope and unique body of knowledge of therapeutic recreation services. Therapeutic recreation services are needed when individuals experience a negative consequence in their lives that demands more assistance and more resources than they can marshal on their own. The trigger for needing therapeutic recreation services is not so much the disability or illness, which can be compounding, but the need for outside assistance in negotiating an exacerbating life challenge. In addition, because people with disabilities continue to experience institutional barriers to everyday living in their communities (Taylor, Krane, & Orkis, 2010), outside assistance such as that provided by a therapeutic recreation specialist becomes even more critical. The body of knowledge that differentiates what therapeutic recreation specialists do from other health and human service professionals includes expertise in leisure, strengths, aspirations, and environmental context. Other health and human service professionals tend to pay attention to deficits in isolated settings and have little focus on or expertise about leisure, one of the “three great realms of life” (Seligman, 1998, p. 1). The body of knowledge also includes expertise in disability, use of an individualized approach using a systematic process, and skills and knowledge in forming a helping relationship. This approach differentiates therapeutic recreation from general recreation specialists, who do not have a depth of preparation in these helping areas. The unique blend of knowledge and skills about leisure, disability, and the helping relationship is important for participants with all types of differences that may need individualized assistance to achieve well-being through leisure (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The Fit of Therapeutic Recreation in Health, Human, and Recreation Services
The Social Model of Disability and the Ecological Approach

The Flourishing Through Leisure Model is grounded on a social or ecological model of disability, as recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) in its International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) (WHO, 2003). The ICF clearly lays the groundwork for professionals, including therapeutic recreation specialists, to focus on environmental change equally with changes within an individual with a health condition. To build upon the theoretical underpinnings of the Flourishing Through Leisure Model presented in the companion article in this issue, Figure 2 provides a comparison of the medical model versus the social model of disability and how the focus of services shifts in a strengths approach.

The social model of disability is embedded in an ecological approach. First introduced to health and human services by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and to therapeutic recreation by Howe-Murphy and Charboneau (1987), the ecological approach is based on the concept of an interdependent system, where human beings are interrelent with each other and with their environments. In this system, the whole is greater than the sum of the individual elements or people, due to the interaction and energy of relationships. Environment includes the micro, meso, and macro levels, from home and family to the neighborhood and community to the nation and world. The whole includes not only people and their physical environments but also their policies, cultures, and norms. The ecological perspective, using a strengths approach, asks therapeutic recreation specialists and other helping professionals to focus not only on helping individuals build strengths, but to help communities and systems build strengths as well. This approach extends therapeutic recreation’s scope of practice and situates the profession firmly in the intersection of recreation, health, and human services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEFICITS APPROACH</th>
<th>STRENGTHS APPROACH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical Model of Disability</td>
<td>Social Model of Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus is on the person’s disability</td>
<td>Focus is on the person’s goals, aspirations, strengths, and experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A person’s life is defined by a label or diagnosis</td>
<td>A person’s life is defined by his or her experiences, strengths, and abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability is a problem</td>
<td>Disability is a natural variation in the human condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person, not society, has a problem that needs to be repaired</td>
<td>Society must change to be more accessible, inclusive, and respectful of the person with a disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The disability belongs to the person</td>
<td>The disability is a function of interaction between the person and the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The professional is the expert about the person and his or her disability</td>
<td>The person is the expert in his or her own life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ultimate solution is to find a cure for the person or help the person with a disability be “normal”</td>
<td>The ultimate solution is to help the person reduce the social and physical barriers he or she must negotiate each day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treat the individual</td>
<td>Restructure society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Medical Model Versus Social Model of Disability
The Flourishing Through Leisure Model, as depicted in Figure 3, situates the person in the environment and explicitly makes environmental interventions a part of therapeutic recreation practice. The model expands both the components of therapeutic recreation practice and the outcomes of services, based on an ecological approach and a social model of disability. The Flourishing Through Leisure Model is based on several principles that guide practice (see Table 1). These themes reflect the strengths approach and form the heart of therapeutic recreation practice. The remainder of this article describes each area of the Flourishing Through Leisure Model in more detail.

### Table 1

*The Heart of the Flourishing Through Leisure Model*

Several principles flow through the Flourishing Through Leisure Model, which represent the heart and soul of the model:

- The participant is at the center of therapeutic recreation services.
- The participant’s goals, dreams, and aspirations drive the therapeutic recreation process.
- The participant is seen within the rich contexts of the environments in which she or he participates.
- The therapeutic recreation specialist considers all aspects of the participant holistically: psychological, emotional, social, cognitive, physical, spiritual, as well as leisure, which permeates all domains.
- Both the participant’s individual strengths and the environmental strengths and resources are taken into account during the therapeutic recreation process.
- The participant’s strengths and the environmental strengths and resources nourish a flourishing life.
- Therapeutic recreation services are outcomes based and reflect the multidimensionality of human well-being and quality of life.
Figure 3. Flourishing Through Leisure: An Ecological Extension of the Leisure and Well-Being Model
goals, much like the LMW does, with attention on the individual (Hood & Carruthers, 2007). On the right half of “What the Therapeutic Recreation Specialist Does,” therapeutic recreation specialists help to make changes to the environment that will support participants in achieving their dreams, goals, and aspirations.

On the far right side of the Flourishing Through Leisure Model, the outcomes experienced by participants are pictured. The outcomes of therapeutic recreation services are well-being in leisure and in the psychological and emotional, cognitive, social, physical, and spiritual aspects of participants’ lives. These two areas of outcomes, leisure well-being and well-being in other domains of one’s life, are reciprocating and reinforcing. Elevation in one area will likely enrich other areas. Because leisure is such an important aspect of overall well-being, it has the power to influence other areas of one’s life. As well, when one becomes more fit physically or more socially aware, this will have a positive effect on one’s capacity for leisure. Thus, leisure well-being and other areas of well-being are inextricably related. Well-being, where one experiences productive, satisfying, and successful engagement with one’s life in a resource-rich environment, leads to a flourishing life. As depicted by the black double-headed arrow, participants’ goals, dreams, and aspirations drive both process and outcomes. Below, each component of the Flourishing Through Leisure Model is described in detail.

**What the Therapeutic Recreation Specialist Does in the Flourishing Through Leisure Model**

The Flourishing Through Leisure Model provides areas on which a wide variety of therapeutic recreation interventions and approaches can be used to facilitate desired change. Attention is on the individual in his or her environment. The model also aims to enhance participants’ leisure experience and strengths and resources, both within the participant and in the environment. The four focal areas of the Flourishing Through Leisure Model are depicted in a simplified way in Figure 4. Driving services are the goals,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leisure Experiences</td>
<td>Enhancing leisure experiences with a focus on the participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths and Resources</td>
<td>Developing strengths and resources with a focus on the participant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4. A Simplified Look at the Flourishing Through Leisure Model**

Anderson and Heyne
dreams, and aspirations of participants and their circles of support. Helping to design services is the interactive therapeutic recreation process.

**Enhancing the Leisure Experience**

Therapeutic recreation specialists help participants enhance their leisure experiences in two main ways: facilitating participants’ leisure skills and knowledge and enhancing environments that facilitate the leisure experience. It is important to note that when leisure experiences are enhanced, other strengths and resources are enhanced as well (Carruthers & Hood, 2007; Hood & Carruthers, 2007; Hutchinson & Kleiber, 2005; Hutchinson, LeBlanc, & Booth, 2006; Iwasaki, Coyle, & Shank, 2010; Lyubomirsky, King, & Deiner, 2005; Ponde & Santana, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006; Sylvester, 2005; Sylvester, Voelkl, & Ellis, 2001), as shown by the interactive arrow in the model.

**Facilitation of Leisure Skills and Knowledge in the Participant**

Therapeutic recreation has traditionally helped participants build their knowledge and skills in leisure to experience increased leisure and life satisfaction (Stumbo, 2002a; Stumbo, 2002b; Stumbo & Peterson, 2009). In the Flourishing Through Leisure Model, leisure is enhanced by the important skills and knowledge delineated by Hood and Carruthers (2007) in the LWM: savoring, authentic leisure, leisure gratification, mindful leisure, and virtuous leisure.

**Savoring leisure** is deliberately paying attention to the positive aspects of leisure involvement, including positive emotions, and purposefully seeking leisure activities that create positive emotions (Carruthers & Hood, 2007). Therapeutic recreation specialists can use many approaches to help participants more consciously savor their experiences in leisure. For example, one strategy is to give participants a homework assignment to make savoring a habit (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006). In one recent study, researchers asked participants to take a few minutes each day to savor and relish a moment they would usually rush through and to target the pleasure they experienced in those moments. They then wrote down what they experienced in comparison to times they usually rushed through things; they reported feeling significant increases in happiness and a reduction in depression (Bryant & Veroff, 2007).

**Authentic leisure** is the purposive selection of leisure involvement that reflects essential aspects of the self (Hood & Carruthers, 2007). Authentic leisure can be facilitated by helping participants clarify or discover their strengths, and then the participant can use those strengths to pursue interests and preferences. For example, the therapeutic recreation specialist may help a participant discover that his or her character strengths are kindness and generosity and then help that participant explore leisure interests where those strengths are fundamental to participation, such as volunteering (Anderson & Heyne, 2012).

**Leisure gratifications** are leisure experiences that are optimally engaging and challenging, require sustained effort and commitment, and lead to the development of strengths and personal attributes that are meaningful and rewarding for the individual (Hood...
Therapeutic recreation specialists can facilitate flow-like experiences by helping participants manage challenges and build skills, thus enhancing leisure (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Ellis, Witt, & Aguilar, 1983; Lyubomirsky, 2008).

Mindful leisure is being fully immersed in the moment of the current leisure experience and using one’s full attention and awareness to enhance the present moment (Carruthers & Hood, 2007). It is akin to meditation and is a purposeful way of thinking during activity. It is different from savoring in that there is no attempt to relish the moment or look for pleasure. Instead, mindfulness is directing one’s full attention to the moment and being fully immersed by every sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste associated with that experience (Anderson & Heyne, 2012; Cruz, 2011; Langer, 2009). Mindful leisure allows for full attention to the here and now, with no rumination about the past or the future (Carruthers & Hood, 2007).

Virtuous leisure is using one’s strengths and leisure interests in the service of something larger than one’s self (Hood & Carruthers, 2007). Virtuous leisure, as defined by the LWM, is sharing of oneself with others through leisure experiences, whether it is volunteering, helping a neighbor, or sharing skills and talents with family members. Virtuous leisure provides a sense of meaning and contribution (Phoenix, Miller, & Schleien, 2002). Therapeutic recreation specialists can help participants discover opportunities to share their strengths and talents, through leisure education or as part of the therapeutic milieu, where participants help other participants learn new leisure skills. These areas, savoring leisure, authentic leisure, leisure gratifications, mindful leisure, and virtuous leisure, were developed and carefully delineated by Hood and Carruthers (2007) and Carruthers and Hood (2007) in the Leisure and Well-Being Model, with substantial empirical support for each area. In addition to these areas, the Flourishing Through Leisure Model also delineates more traditional areas of leisure enhancement as areas of therapeutic recreation practice: development of interests, preferences, talents, abilities, skills and competencies; increased leisure knowledge and awareness; and clarification or discovery of aspirations for leisure.

Development of interests, preferences, talents, abilities, skills, and competencies is an addition to the Flourishing Through Leisure Model. These aspects are more traditional leisure education areas, and well-defined interventions and approaches are available to therapeutic recreation specialists to help participants develop in these areas (Dattilo, 2008; Stumbo, 1997, 1998, 2002a, 2002b). Therapeutic recreation specialists can assist participants in clarifying interests, passions, and talents and can help them build skills and competencies in leisure (Anderson & Heyne, 2012; Pedlar, Haworth, Hutchinson, Taylor, & Dunn, 1999).

Increased leisure knowledge and awareness for participants is another area that can be facilitated by therapeutic recreation. Knowing more about leisure and about one's attitudes and values toward leisure can help participants make better choices and decisions for enjoyable experiences (Bullock, Mahon, & Killingsworth, 2010; Caldwell, 2004; Dattilo, 2008; Stumbo & Peterson, 2009).
Clarification or discovery of aspirations for leisure is another area that can be facilitated for participants through therapeutic recreation. Most people, when asked what they most want in life, will have leisure experiences as a part of their response (Lyubomirsky, 2008; O’Keefe, 2007; Rapp & Goscha, 2006; Saleebey, 2006). Doing fun things with family and friends, experiencing enjoyment and health, traveling, having a stimulating and enjoyable hobby, contributing to the community through clubs and groups, and doing other leisure activities are typical responses when people are asked about their goals or dreams. Therapeutic recreation specialists can help participants clarify their goals for leisure, which will directly impact their well-being (Lyubomirsky, 2008). Helping participants clarify their interests, preferences, talents, and aspirations is at the heart of strengths-based therapeutic recreation practice. Helping participants develop awareness of leisure and build knowledge, skills, and competencies supports the development of their interests and talents and helps them reach their aspirations.

**Strengthening Environmental Resources to Enhance Leisure Experiences**

In the ecological approach, change may need to occur in the environment for a participant to experience enhanced leisure. One specific area to build is the facilitation of real choices for leisure, where the therapeutic recreation specialist advocates for home and community recreation resources and opportunities that are accessible to participants, regardless of their life situation (Collopy, 1988; Sylvester, 2005). Often, especially when participants live in institutional settings, imposed versus real choices for leisure exist (MacNeil & Teague, 1993). Only narrow choices that are convenient for service providers are offered. In the Flourishing Through Leisure Model, the therapeutic recreation specialist would ensure real leisure choices. For example, participants with developmental disabilities living in a group home setting would have several choices for their leisure that day, based on their interests and talents, instead of only two choices such as going to the grocery store or the shopping mall, neither of which may interest them nor develop their talents. Facilitation of real choices for leisure puts the therapeutic recreation specialist in the role of advocate, networker, and resource/community developer.

Facilitation of typical lifestyle rhythms is another area of ecologically based therapeutic recreation practice. Often, institutional rhythms are followed in health and human service settings (Nirje, 1999). In the Flourishing Through Leisure Model, the therapeutic recreation specialist would ensure typical lifestyle rhythms. For example, in a long-term care facility, residents would sleep until they want to get up, eat when they are hungry, recreate when they choose, and follow other rhythms that allow continuity from their life before institutionalization, instead of abiding by regimented routines. Therapeutic recreation services, tailored to the self-determined rhythms of participants’ lives, often take the form of supports, accommodations, and environmental enhancements to home and community leisure.

Facilitation of social supports is another specific area of environmental enhancement for leisure in the Flourishing Through Leisure Model. Thera-
Therapeutic recreation specialists take an active role in exploring social networks in preferred leisure settings, helping participants make connections with others, building bridges to relationships, and fading assistance as natural friendships form or group membership is solidified. Often this entails educating others about disabilities and the supports needed by participants to be included (Anderson & Heyne, 2012; Anderson & Kress, 2003). For example, a therapeutic recreation specialist may assist a participant with a chronic mental illness in joining an art club, provide transportation to initial club events, and observe the kinds of social networks in place at the events. Through observation, the therapeutic recreation specialist identifies other participants who appear interested and friendly and helps nurture those relationships with the participant. The therapeutic recreation specialist, with the permission of the participant, shares information with other club members so they know how to assist the participant with the disability in participating fully, whether it is through understanding what behavioral supports are needed or offering assistance with transportation.

Finally, in order to enhance leisure environments for participants, therapeutic recreation specialists can facilitate inclusive environments—physically, administratively, and programmatically. Therapeutic recreation specialists facilitate positive change at leisure and recreation agencies and settings by helping those settings become more physically or architecturally accessible through technical assistance and advocacy (Anderson & Kress, 2003). Therapeutic recreation specialists also assist agencies in being more socially inclusive, whether through programming or administrative policies and practices, staff or peer training, or, again, through advocacy and technical assistance.

**Developing Strengths and Resources Across Life Domains**

Therapeutic recreation specialists help participants build their own strengths and resources both through enhancing their leisure experiences and through other approaches when needed. As can be seen in the left side of the model in Figure 3, the Flourishing Through Leisure Model addresses services to build strengths in the participant and resources in the environment across five life domains: (a) psychological and emotional, (b) cognitive, (c) social, (d) physical, and (e) spiritual. In the following explanations of these domains, examples of common approaches in therapeutic recreation are provided with the understanding that many other individualized supports and accommodations may be used in therapeutic recreation intervention to promote well-being.

**Psychological and Emotional Domain**

*Facilitation of psychological and emotional strengths in the person.* Psychological and emotional strengths are those that help participants perceive the world around them and feel a range of emotions. Figure 3 shows some of the psychological and emotional strengths of the participant that can be facilitated by a therapeutic recreation specialist through leisure experiences and many other approaches. These strengths include capacity for happiness, emotion regulation, self-awareness, self-acceptance and self-congruence, a sense of autonomy and...
goal-directedness, competence, and optimism. Hood and Carruthers (2007) identified these particular strengths in the LWM as those that are especially amenable to therapeutic recreation intervention and are keys to well-being. Several interventions are available to facilitate, for example, optimism, autonomy, self-determination, and increased happiness (Bullock et al., 2010; Fredrickson, 2009; Lyubomirsky, 2008; Seligman, 1991, 2011). Interventions can also include leisure education and psychoeducational interventions such as relaxation training, guided imagery, pet therapy, therapeutic use of creative arts, anger management, therapeutic adventure activities, medical play, therapeutic use of play, and more.

**Facilitation of resources in the environment to build psychological and emotional strengths.** In order to enhance resources in the environment to help participants build their psychological and emotional strengths, therapeutic recreation interventions can include the following approaches.

**Facilitation of positive behavioral supports** is an approach that is helpful to participants who need assistance in communicating effectively or regulating emotions (Crimmins, Farrell, Smith, & Bailey, 2007; McConnell, 2001). Positive behavioral supports assist participants in being fully included in spite of challenges they may be experiencing at a certain point in time. Positive behavioral support is based on the premise that all behavior is a form of communication, and we must learn to “listen” more carefully to participants who are communicating an important need to us through their behavior (Crimmins et al., 2007; Kaplan & Carter, 1995; McConnell, 2001; Sigafoos, Arthur, & O’Reilly, 2003).

Natural cues and consequences can help participants learn effectively, adapt more flexibly, and generalize learning across many functional environments. When participating in leisure experiences in typical settings, therapeutic recreation specialists can enhance cues and consequences to heighten learning and growth through activity analysis and adaptation, through careful activity leadership, through hierarchical prompts, and through debriefing and other reflection exercises (Anderson & Heyne, 2012).

Quiet spaces in public areas allow participants a place to regroup, reduce anxiety, or relax temporarily during activities and programs. Therapeutic recreation specialists can ensure these spaces are available through environmental assessment, can educate community service agencies about the need for such spaces, can provide technical assistance to create spaces, and can advocate for spaces when needed.

Communication of high expectations and positive attitudes on the part of others toward the participant with a disability is an area that therapeutic recreation specialists can make a significant difference. First, therapeutic recreation specialists can model high expectations. They can structure activities to promote the development of positive attitudes, using best practices in inclusion and cooperative activities (Anderson & Kress, 2003). Therapeutic recreation specialists can do many differing activities to help change negative attitudes, from disability awareness training, to peer orientations, to creating leadership positions for people with disabilities (Abery, 2003; Ander-
son, 1994; Anderson & Kress, 2003; Duncan, Miller, & Sparks, 2003; Heyne, Schleien, & McAvoy, 1993).

**Cognitive Domain**

**Facilitation of cognitive strengths in the person.** Cognitive strengths are those that help one think and learn. Cognitive strengths include the abilities to attend, concentrate, follow directions, and remember as well as abilities such as problem solving, goal setting, and aspiration discovery (Bryant, Smart, & King, 2005; Lyubomirsky, 2008; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003; Saleebey, 2006). As seen in Figure 3, the Flourishing Through Leisure Model centers on cognitive strengths of the participant that can be facilitated by the therapeutic recreation specialist through leisure experiences and many other approaches. The LWM (Carruthers & Hood, 2007; Hood & Carruthers, 2007) provides empirical support for the role of leisure experiences in building cognitive resources. In addition, therapeutic recreation specialists can use approaches such as reminiscing, remotivation, sensory stimulation, problem-solving groups, cognitive retraining, and adapted activities (Bell & Troxel, 2003; Medved & Brockmeier, 2010).

**Facilitation of resources in the environment to build cognitive strengths.** In order to enhance resources in the environment to help participants build their cognitive strengths, therapeutic recreation interventions range from creating a relevant context in an institutional setting to adapting equipment. Some common approaches are provided below.

*Facilitation of environmental cues and prompts,* such as activity calendars and holiday decorations in residential environments or picture-cue books in activity programs, is an effective environmental approach to help participants build cognitive strengths. Even the color schemes of rooms and buildings can make a difference in cognitive response and should be chosen carefully (e.g., blues are cooler and more relaxing; reds are warmer and more stimulating). In addition, having numerous resources available for cognitive stimulation in residential or institutional settings is imperative. Books, music, puzzles, word games, and the like will help participants easily access leisure experiences that promote stimulating and novel involvement that supports cognitive development (Cui et al., 2007; Redolat & Mesa-Gresa, 2011).

*Environmental modifications* can be made by the therapeutic recreation specialist to assist participants in thinking and learning more easily. Some examples of environmental modifications include providing clear, contrasting paint schemes in facilities, with pictorial and large print room numbers to help participants navigate a facility. De-cluttering hallways and paths of travel can reduce distraction. Reducing noise level and background noise can help participants focus better. Providing numerous pictorial prompts in the environment can help strengthen memory. These are just some examples of the numerous ways environments can be modified to support cognitive abilities.

*Quiet spaces in public areas* is an approach described earlier under psychological and emotional strengths development. Participants may also need quiet spaces to provide support for needs in the cognitive domain. A quiet space allows participants to reduce the amount of stimuli and integrate sensory input more coherently. This is especially true for participants with au-
tism who may have a heightened sensory input system and will need a quiet space during activities or programs to reduce the amount of stimulus to the senses and allow reintegration before rejoining an activity (Dunn, 2007).

Activity and equipment adaptations encourage participants of varying levels of cognitive functioning to fully participate in leisure experiences. Slowing down an activity, breaking it into smaller steps, reducing the amount of complicated rules, and the like will facilitate fuller participation.

Social Domain

Facilitation of social strengths in the person. Social strengths are those that help us relate to others and belong to valued social groups. Social strengths that can be facilitated by therapeutic recreation through the leisure experience and other approaches include communication skills, interpersonal skills, friendship skills, leadership and citizenship skills, and social confidence (Abery, 2003; Amado, 1993; Fredrickson, 2009; Heyne et al., 1993; Lyubomirsky, 2008; Phoenix et al., 2002). Friendship, leadership, and citizenship skills are important to help participants develop meaningful and socially valued connections with others and acknowledge that people of all abilities can contribute to our communities and society.

Social strengths can be facilitated exceptionally well through leisure experiences (Howard & Young, 2002; Carruthers & Hood, 2007). In addition, therapeutic recreation specialists can use approaches such as leisure education, social skills training, assertiveness training, leadership development, activity-based self-esteem groups, animal-facilitated therapy, horticulture therapy, therapeutic use of humor, and other psychoeducational interventions to strengthen internal social well-being.

Facilitation of resources in the environment to build social strengths. In order to enhance resources in the environment to help participants build their social strengths, therapeutic recreation interventions can include a variety of strategies for education, advocacy, and community building.

Fostering inclusivity and diversity is a continual approach that helps agencies, community groups, and programs become more welcoming of all people. Therapeutic recreation specialists can help communities become more physically, administratively, and programmatically inclusive, regardless of differences (Anderson & Kress, 2003).

Opportunities to engage in meaningful social roles can be facilitated through networking, community-building, and program development. People with disabilities have much to offer in terms of skills, knowledge, and competency. Helping participants find their niche in their communities and helping that niche become inclusive and welcoming is an important therapeutic approach.

Training agency and program staff in inclusive or community settings so that they understand disability and inclusion is an important strategy for building social resources. Therapeutic recreation specialists have a unique body of knowledge in disability and the leisure experience, which makes them especially capable in providing staff training to a wide variety of groups and agencies. Training staff in community settings enhances the environment for
social development (Anderson & Kress, 2003).

*Development of peer and natural supports* is another important strategy that can build social resources in the environment. Helping a participant connect, be welcomed, and then belong for the long term takes effort. Therapeutic recreation specialists can help build social networks, peer support, and other naturally occurring social supports through a variety of strategies including cooperative learning techniques, disability awareness orientations, and strategically connecting participants to community groups, to name a few (Amado, 1993; Heyne & Schleien, 1997).

**Physical Domain**

*Facilitation of physical strengths in the person.* Physical strengths are those that help us *act* and *do* with no barriers. Physical strengths help us experience functional physical abilities and health. Physical strengths that can be facilitated by therapeutic recreation through leisure and other approaches include physical health; mobility; fitness, including endurance, strength, flexibility, energy, and vitality; and physical activity skills in the context of leisure. Physical activity is one of the more effective strategies to build happiness and well-being (Lyubomirsky, 2008; Ratey, 2008), and leisure is a natural medium through which to build physical strengths. Many leisure activities involve physical effort and movement, which contribute to physical fitness. In addition, participants are typically more motivated to consistently engage in physical activity if it aligns with their interests and preferences and if it is enjoyable (Iwasaki et al., 2010; Sattelmair & Ratey, 2009). Other typical approaches used in therapeutic recreation to build physical strength include exercise groups, tai chi, yoga, equine-assisted therapy, aquatic therapy, wellness education groups, adapted sports and games, and the like (National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification, 2011).

*Facilitation of resources in the environment to build physical strengths.* In order to enhance resources in the environment to help participants build their physical strengths, therapeutic recreation interventions can include many differing approaches. Some of the more common approaches are provided here.

*Facilitation of safe environments* for physical activity is an important intervention for therapeutic recreation. Safe environments encompass not only indoor facilities, but outdoor spaces as well. Safe places to walk, bike, play, and run, such as trails, playgrounds, and parks that are easily accessible to where participants reside, are important. Therapeutic recreation specialists are involved in community planning, park planning, and other initiatives to ensure safe recreational environments.

*Universal design* is a planning concept that suggests recreation amenities in all environments, both built and natural, are designed for access by all people, regardless of size, shape, or ability. Therapeutic recreation specialists have expertise in accessibility and universal design and provide advocacy, technical assistance, and staff training to ensure participants can enter and use environments for leisure experiences (The Center for an Accessible Society, 2010; The Center for Universal Design, 1997, 2010).
Adapted equipment and activities is a strategy that allows participants to pursue the leisure experiences of their choice, regardless of ability. A wealth of adaptive equipment exists or can be created from scratch to bridge the gap between what the participant can do and what the activity or environment demands. Equipment can range from all-terrain wheelchairs, to grasping cuffs, to large print playing cards. Often therapeutic recreation specialists develop adaptive equipment or provide technical assistance for other recreation providers so that participants can fully participate in programs and services (Anderson, Wilkins, & Penney McGee, 2009).

Affordability and equitable resource distribution is an area of focus for therapeutic recreation specialists in helping participants pursue leisure experiences. Therapeutic recreation specialists can assist in securing scholarships or reduced fees, if needed, or in advocating for sliding fee scales or increased service provision in neighborhoods. Networking and advocacy are key skills used by therapeutic recreation specialists to help participants pursue their goals for leisure and well-being.

Home and community recreation resource development is an important task for therapeutic recreation specialists to help participants sustain quality leisure experiences in their lives. Resource development can range from serving on advisory boards of community agencies, to advocacy, to leisure education.

Spiritual Domain

Facilitation of spiritual strengths in the person. Spirituality is defined as having strong and coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life (Seligman, 2002). It is the search for meaning in life through something that is larger than the individual self (Lyubomirsky, 2008). Saleebey (2006) identifies three core assertions about spirituality: (a) it incorporates yet transcends the biological, social, psychological, political, and cultural aspects of a person; (b) it reflects our struggle to find meaning and purpose beyond our own concerns; and (c) it is the essence that joins us with greater complexities in life and inspires reverence. Spirituality is an important aspect of the person and the environment and an area where therapeutic recreation specialists can facilitate greater strengths. In this area, the Flourishing Through Leisure Model delineates the specific strengths of having hope and inspiration, a sense of meaning and purpose (moved from psychological resources in the original LWM by Hood and Carruthers), peace of mind, a sense of connectedness (where one feels a part of something larger than oneself and a kinship to the other people, plants, and animals on earth), reflection and wisdom, self-actualization, and other character strengths and virtues (as discussed in the companion article in this issue). Spiritual strengths can be fostered through authentic and virtuous leisure. In addition, therapeutic recreation specialists use interventions such as values clarification, meditation, reminiscence, life review, journaling, yoga, tai chi, and religious traditions and rituals.

Facilitation of resources in the environment to build spiritual strengths. In order to enhance resources in the environment to help participants build their spiritual strengths, therapeutic recreation interventions
can include many activities that provide a place and space for spiritual growth.

Facilitation of proximity to nature is a very important focus area for therapeutic recreation intervention. Increasingly research shows how important being in nature is to our mental and physical health as well as our spirit (Children & Nature Network, 2010; Louv, 2008; Taylor & Kuo, 2009; Ulrich et al., 1991).

Communities of worship/meditation are often facilitated by therapeutic recreation specialists in collaboration with other team members. Frequently, and especially in some cultures, participants’ leisure experiences revolve around a valued social group related to religion or spirituality (Ellison & Levin, 1998; Pollner, 1989). Facilitating access and social inclusion in those communities is an important role for therapeutic recreation.

Beauty and aesthetics in the environment is another area of focus for therapeutic recreation. In institutional settings, assisting participants in creating a milieu that is aesthetically pleasing and inviting is particularly important in sending a message of respect and hope (Bilchik, 2002; Ulrich, 1990). Leisure activities that are creative and expressive can often enrich environments, whether through participants’ artwork, music, plants, or animals. Therapeutic recreation is in a unique position to facilitate a beautiful and aesthetically pleasing environment that helps build a stronger sense of peace and spirituality.

Cultures of hope, support, and encouragement can be facilitated by all team members, but therapeutic recreation specialists have more opportunities to provide this important environmental resource. Assisting people in pursuing their leisure goals provides the kind of hope and support needed to begin to see that there is meaning and joy in their lives. It is often said that after other team members have helped the participant walk that therapeutic recreation specialists give them somewhere they want to walk to and someone with whom they want to walk (Deegan, 2001; Pedlar et al., 1999; Rapp & Goscha, 2006; Richter & Kaschalt, 1996). The existential outcomes that therapeutic recreation specialists help to facilitate are perhaps more important than any functional improvement derived from more traditional therapy (O’Keefe, 2007; Sylvester, 2005).

Quiet places in public spaces is again an important resource to advocate for and to facilitate the development of spiritual strengths. Reflection, contemplation, and other activities that help sustain spirituality need a quiet, non-distracting, and soothing place to happen (Dunn, 2007; Pheasant, Horoshenkov, Watts, & Barrett, 2008).

In sum, in the Flourishing Through Leisure Model, the areas of strengths development for the participant and resource development in the environment have been conceptualized as follows:

- perceiving and feeling (psychological and emotional strengths),
- thinking and learning (cognitive strengths),
- relating and belonging (social strengths),
- acting and doing (physical strengths), and
- believing and valuing (spiritual strengths).
For each of these areas of strength, both attributes of the person and the environment can be enhanced and developed. Enhancing leisure experiences and developing strengths and resources—the hallmarks of therapeutic recreation intervention in this model—are reciprocally reinforcing and, when optimally facilitated in the person and his or her environment, contribute to well-being.

**Outcomes the Participant Experiences in the Flourishing Through Leisure Model**

In the Flourishing Through Leisure Model, the outcome of therapeutic recreation services is enhanced well-being in asset-rich environments, where participants’ goals, dreams, and aspirations have been furthered. Enhanced leisure and development of strengths across any of the five domains are the components that contribute to well-being and are also important outcomes of therapeutic recreation practice. These six areas, as shown on the right side of the model in Figure 3, all interrelate and form the basis of overall well-being and a flourishing life:

- **Leisure well-being**: Participants find enjoyment and pleasure in their leisure experiences (which also impact positively on other aspects of their lives). Participants savor leisure experiences and feel that they use their strengths in leisure.
- **Psychological and emotional well-being**: Participants feel happy and perceive control in their lives.
- **Cognitive well-being**: Participants think in a focused way and learn eagerly.
- **Social well-being**: Participants relate well to others and belong to valued social groups.
- **Physical well-being**: Participants do and act in their daily lives with vitality and no barriers.
- **Spiritual well-being**: Participants live their lives in a hopeful manner, in harmony with their values and beliefs.

It is not necessary for participants to be “strong” or high functioning in every aspect of well-being. For example, a participant can experience overall well-being even if he or she physically cannot do certain activities due to a functional impairment or difference, such as a spinal cord injury. Humans have variability in their form in nature. They can have functional differences in any life area and still be “whole.” Someone may be lacking in an area of well-being, but still have a good life and still enjoy the fruits of leisure to sustain them in a high quality of life. In fact, “wholeness” may be an ideal that few ever completely obtain.

The Flourishing Through Leisure Model assumes strengths are everywhere, in people and environments. The left side of the model, “What the Therapeutic Recreation Specialist Does,” provides approaches that draw out and amplify those strengths and resources. Using the metaphor of the flower and a flourishing life, the left side of the model would be akin to a bag of fertilizer or plant food. It boosts those naturally occurring strengths and helps them grow strongly!

**Summary and Conclusions**

In this article, a strengths-based definition of therapeutic recreation was provided. The Flourishing Through Lei-
sure Model was then presented, based on the Leisure and Well-Being Model developed by Hood and Carruthers (2007) and Carruthers and Hood (2007). The Flourishing Through Leisure Model provides a structure for therapeutic recreation practice to use an ecological approach and defines the scope of practice not just with individuals but with environments or contexts as well. The Flourishing Through Leisure Model, like the Leisure and Well-Being Model on which it is based, identifies two main areas for therapeutic recreation practice: enhancing the leisure experience and developing strengths and resources. In both areas, therapeutic recreation specialists focus on the individual and the environment. Strengths are further defined as psychological and emotional, cognitive, social, physical, and spiritual and can be developed in the individual and the environment. The outcome of therapeutic recreation practice is a flourishing life and well-being across several domains in enriched environments. The entire process is driven by the goals, dreams, and aspirations of the participant.

The Flourishing Through Leisure Model provides a holistic and integrating framework for the many facets of therapeutic recreation practice, from those in the profession who practice in medical settings to those who practice in community parks and recreation departments. The model embraces the varied interventions used by therapeutic recreation specialists to effect change, from therapy to inclusion practices. The underlying assumptions of the model, focused on building strengths through the leisure experience using an ecological approach, apply whether one is helping a patient restore functional ability or a program participant build recreation skills.

The Flourishing Through Leisure Model has implications for education, credentialing, research, and practice. The professional preparation of future therapeutic recreation specialists must focus as much on concepts of recreation and leisure, including delivery systems, as it does on therapeutic practices. The curriculum must provide the knowledge and skills to effect change in recreation and leisure environments as well, including universal design, administrative, and program practices in a variety of settings where recreation, health, and human services are provided. Advocacy is a critical area, as is negotiating sociopolitical environments to effect systems change on behalf of participants so they can achieve their valued outcomes. Educational programs will need to choose among accreditation options to assure that curricula provide graduates with the needed knowledge, skills, and abilities to practice therapeutic recreation from a strengths-based, ecological perspective, and not just from the narrow medical model that is diminishing in its applications in health and human service settings.

Credentialing of professionals in therapeutic recreation must continue to reflect the necessary job knowledge and skills needed to practice in broader contexts than medical settings. The National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification (NCTRC), in its job analysis studies, must continue to carefully sample the entire breadth of the profession, from medical settings...
to adaptive recreation and sports settings to accurately capture the body of knowledge and tasks of entry-level professionals. Given that the NCTRC credentialing program is based on routine assessment of therapeutic recreation practice (NCTRC, 2011), the trends occurring in health and human services, to an ecological strengths-based approach, should be reflected in the evolution of credentialing in the field.

In the area of research, the Flourishing Through Leisure Model provides a framework for outcomes that can be measured in relation to strengths-based interventions. Much research already exists in other disciplines and in the area of environmental interventions in therapeutic recreation (especially the research on the outcomes of inclusion). Research questions could be framed around both existential and functional outcomes, given the growth of measurement tools in other disciplines in these areas (for example, see the University of Pennsylvania’s “Authentic Happiness” website, which offers valid and reliable assessment tools to measure many varied constructs of well-being). Growth in strengths-based practice has perhaps outpaced research of its effectiveness in therapeutic recreation, but in other fields, such as positive psychology, a large and substantial body of research continues to grow rapidly. Therapeutic recreation can capitalize on this wealth of theory and research and apply it specifically to studying what works best for participants receiving strengths-based, ecological services.

In closing, Flourishing Through Leisure: An Ecological Extension of the Leisure and Well-Being Model is offered as a framework to move therapeutic recreation practice along the sea change toward strengths-based ecological practice. It embraces a social model of disability with leisure at the heart of therapeutic recreation practice. In the Flourishing Through Leisure Model, the outcome of therapeutic recreation practice is a flourishing life and well-being across several domains in enriched environments. The entire process is driven by the goals, dreams, and aspirations of the participant.

References


