



Therapeutic Recreation Internship Manual

Life Enrichment, Outreach, and Adventures Programs

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Contact:

Email: ctrsintern@ascendigo.org

Phone: (970) 927-3143

Website: www.ascendigo.org



Mission, Vision, and Values

Our Mission is to elevate the spectrum by empowering people, inspiring lives, and shattering expectations.

Our Vision is a community where individuals with autism can thrive in the pursuit of a meaningful and purposeful life.

Our Values:

Heart— How we feel. We offer a safe, welcoming space, providing meaningful connection for people of all abilities and encouraging the best in all of us.

Mind— How we think. We promote expansive thinking and a culture of inclusivity, resulting in possibility, learning, and growth.

Voice — How we connect. We use honest communication, open minds, and a strength-based philosophy recognizing and encouraging the unique abilities of all.

Ascendigo's goal is to integrate people with autism into community life recreationally and socially, whether through adventure sports, development of life skills, compatible employment, and community engagement. With our proprietary Ascendigo Way curriculum, the organization educates service providers, caregivers, and community members about autism and autism supports.

History

Ascendigo was founded on the belief that individuals on the autism spectrum should have access to a full and rich life experience, including the activities and experiences that their neurotypical peers enjoy. Exposure to natural environments and recreation in the outdoors have enormous benefits for those with autism. In 2004, Sallie Bernard, our founder and mom to an autistic son began Extreme Sports Camp, later known as Ascendigo, a 501(c)3 nonprofit in Colorado's beautiful Roaring Fork Valley.



Since our start, Ascendigo has expanded to provide children and adults with holistic supports including recreational therapy, applied behavioranalysis, speech and language, at-home and in-school services, life skills, employment coaching, and more. Today, Ascendigo serves over 225 individuals with autism annually and provides resources and service to families throughout the country. By focusing on person-centered care, we recognize the unique interests, strengths and challenges of each individual.

Rooted in our mission to elevate the spectrum by empowering people, inspiring lives, and shattering expectations, is the Ascendigo Way, our unique, values-driven approach to supporting learners, grounded in evidence-based practice and a commitment to continuous learning. The Ascendigo Way envisions a community where individuals with autism and other intellectual and developmental disabilities can thrive in the pursuit of purposeful lives—where challenges are embraced as opportunities for growth, and where meaningful community integration leads to mutual enrichment.

Learn more at our website <https://www.ascendigo.org/>.

Therapeutic Recreation Internship Program Mission Statement

The mission of this internship is to provide a dynamic, experiential learning experience that supports the development of professional competencies in Therapeutic Recreation. At Ascendigo Autism Services, the intern will engage in inclusive, strength-based recreational programming designed to empower individuals on the autism spectrum through adventure, social engagement, and personal growth. By working alongside experienced professionals in a supportive, interdisciplinary environment, the intern will gain practical skills in program planning, adaptive recreation, behavior support, and person-centered care. This internship strives to foster a deep understanding of the Ascendigo Way, promote the importance of meaningful recreational experiences, and prepare the intern to become a compassionate, creative, and confident Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist.

Overview

This unpaid internship is designed for students pursuing a degree in Therapeutic Recreation who intend to meet academic fieldwork requirements as outlined by The National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification (NCTRC).



Ascendigo's internship program introduces interns to a growing population that benefits significantly from therapeutic recreation. Interns will gain hands-on experience supporting individuals with autism across a range of community-based and experiential programs. As the prevalence of autism continues to grow (1 in 31 children, according to the latest CDC estimates), so has the need for services.

Research supports the physical, psychological, and social benefits of physical fitness, recreation, and adaptive sports for individuals with autism spectrum disorder. [Studies highlight](#) that structured exercise serves as a complementary therapy for the autism population and supports improvements in ASD symptoms (Toscano et al., 2022).

Program Areas

1. Life Enrichment (Adults)

- Assist with daily life skills, extreme sports access, social integration, creative expression, and vocational exploration.
- Create Experiences/Build Competencies: Work with adults aged 18+ to support increasing their quality of life through experiences within the community (hiking, skiing, rock climbing, horseback riding, ice skating, bowling, games, clubs, etc.).
- Observe and assist in the delivery of services grounded in Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) and therapeutic recreation principles.

2. Outreach (Youth)

- Create Experiences/Build Competencies: Collaborate on community-based recreation programming for youth with autism which includes integrating such as hiking, skiing, after school programs and clubs, horseback riding, rock climbing, etc.
- Observe and assist in the delivery of services grounded in ABA and therapeutic recreation principles.

3. Adventures (All Ages)

- Support therapeutic recreation in outdoor adaptive activities: rock climbing, horseback riding, kayaking, rafting, etc.
- Learn adaptive instruction, safety protocols, and inclusive activity planning.



Eligibility

- Perspective interns must be enrolled in a Therapeutic Recreation degree program from an accredited university.
- Must be eligible to complete the internship for academic credit as required by the NCTRC (minimum 560-hour, 14-week internship under a CTRS), if completing the full internship requirement.
- Must be 18 years of age or older.
- Background check required.
- Must obtain or possess a current, valid CPR/First Aid certificate prior to start date.

Supervision and Mentorship

- Supervised by a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS).
- Weekly supervision meetings and progress evaluations.
- Opportunities to shadow professionals in behavior therapy, outdoor recreation, and life coaching.

Intern Responsibilities

- Plan and implement therapeutic recreation interventions and activities.
- Maintain documentation (activity reports, progress notes, incident reports).
- Communicate with participants and interdisciplinary staff.
- Attend staff meetings, training, and reflection sessions.
- Participate in data collection and program evaluation where applicable.
- Complete all academic assignments and requirements.

High Magnitude Behaviors and Activities of Daily Living

At times, you may work with clients who display behaviors that are considered high magnitude. These behaviors may include aggression, property destruction, self-injury, or other actions that could be unsafe for the client or others. Interns will be trained in preventive strategies and safety care techniques.

Toileting is an important life skill that directly impacts independence and quality of life. Some clients may need support ranging from reminders and prompts to hands-on assistance.



Ascendigo Policies

Interns are held to the same high standards as Ascendigo employees. Please refer to the Employee Handbook for policies on dress code, code of conduct, and other workplace policies.

Schedule and Duration

- Unpaid, full-time internship schedules are available.
- 14 weeks for full NCTRC internship.
- Hours: Interns may be expected to work weekends and nights regularly. It is not recommended that interns hold a job during their internship.

Sessions

Specific dates will vary depending on school semester calendars.

Location

Interns may work in:

- Carbondale, Colorado, and the surrounding Roaring Fork Valley (Life Enrichment)
- Camp and field locations (Adventures – summer only)

Housing

We provide our interns with rent-free housing in Carbondale, Colorado, that is within walking distance of Ascendigo.

Depending on the size of the room, interns may be paired with a roommate.

How to Apply

Go to: <https://www.ascendigo.org/internships/>

Please submit the following:

- Internship application
- Resume
- Cover letter
- One letter of recommendation/email from your school internship supervisor
- School internship coordinator's contact information
- Internship academic requirements (internship syllabus from your school)

Email any questions to:

ctrintern@ascendigo.org



Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need to be an expert in the activities I lead or am involved in?

No, while some experience is helpful, you do not need to be an expert. For Outdoor Adventure Activities, you will be working alongside coaches and professionals who are trained in autism support strategies using evidence-based methods from the Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA), developmental, and coaching worlds. To participate in the Ski

Buddy Program, however, you must be able to ski and/or snowboard.

Do I need experience with autism?

No. We will provide online and in-person training, and our highly experienced staff will introduce you to an amazing and diverse group of individuals across the spectrum.



Do I need ABA experience?

Applied Behavioral Analysis, or ABA, is a therapeutic practice that uses the principles of learning and behavior to build social, communication, and learning skills for individuals with autism. You do not need to have any understanding of ABA. You will learn about some of its commonly used techniques during your internship.

Will I receive any training through Ascendigo?

Yes. Ascendigo will provide you with several online and in-person training and learning opportunities throughout your internship. We will provide you with compliance training that is typical for organizations like Ascendigo and others you will encounter throughout your career. You will also receive foundational training in autism and common therapeutic practices, and you will receive training in the Ascendigo Way. The Ascendigo Way is our unique, values-driven approach to supporting learners, grounded in evidence-based practice and a commitment to continuous learning. It informs the design and delivery of personalized programs through eight clear, actionable principles that foster joy, growth, and a meaningful quality of life.

Is compensation provided?

Ascendigo does not provide compensation for TR internships. All travel is the responsibility of the intern.

Is housing provided?

We do provide housing during your internship. Rent-free housing is provided through Ascendigo. Interns will live with Ascendigo staff and interns. Depending on room size, some interns may have a roommate. Housing is located in the town of Carbondale.

Will I need to have a vehicle during my internship with Ascendigo?

A vehicle is not required. The housing facilities are within walking distance of the main offices, downtown Carbondale, and public transportation. Public transportation can easily be accessed to move up and down the valley, as well as within Carbondale. Check out WeCycle, RFTA transportation, and the Carbondale Downtowner for transportation options.

**Can I work a job while interning at Ascendigo?**

It is strongly recommended that you do not plan to work while you are participating in the Ascendigo TR Internship Program. This is an intensive program that reflects the flexible, 24-hour nature of the work and care that we provide. Your internship experience may include weekends and evening work.

Can I take a vacation during my internship or schedule time off?

Interns will follow Ascendigo's time off policy. Interns are responsible for managing their hours and vacation.

Does Ascendigo hire TR interns who have completed their schooling and testing?

Employment opportunities with Ascendigo are not guaranteed. Ascendigo may hire individuals who have interned with the organization when positions are available, and individuals meet employment standards and hiring criteria.

Does this internship count toward my school credit requirements?

While Ascendigo's TR internship program is designed to align with NCTR internship requirements, it is your responsibility to confirm with your school's internship administrator to ensure your internship meets academic requirements.



Therapeutic Recreation Internship Program

Assignments

In addition to meeting all school academic requirements, participants in Ascendigo's therapeutic recreation internship program will complete the following assignments. The purpose of these assignments is to provide interns with a strong framework of knowledge and guidance for meaningful application and analysis of experiences.

Evidence-Based Practice Journal Article Report (Appendix A)

Interns will complete one research report on an evidence-based therapy and how it can be applied to enhance Ascendigo's programs.

Weekly Journal Reports (Appendix B)

Each week, interns will submit a journal summarizing the week's daily activities, reflecting on their experiences, and tracking their hours. Your Ascendigo CTRS supervisor will sign off on this report weekly. (This may be in addition to your school's required time logs and NCTRC official time logs.)

Online and In-person Training and Courses

Therapeutic recreational interns will be provided access to Ascendigo's learning management system, The Academy, to complete a series of required online training courses. These training courses exemplify common compliance and safety requirements for organizations providing healthcare services for children and adults with disabilities. Additionally, interns will complete a series of foundation courses to gain an understanding of autism spectrum disorder and common associated therapies. In addition to completing online trainings and courses, interns will attend an in-person training on the Ascendigo Way, highlighting the principles that drive Ascendigo's programming and practice.



NCTRC Job Analysis Task Domains

National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification standards require that applicants gain exposure to the components of the [NCTRC Job Analysis Study](#). The following tasks and activities represent some of the opportunities from each NCTRC domain that participating interns may expect to experience at Ascendigo; however, not every opportunity may be available or represented here. Assessment measures may also vary.

Professionalism: (1.01-Develop professional relationships, 1.02-Maintain professional competency)

- Attend biweekly team meetings for each participant on caseload
- Discuss the importance of therapeutic recreation with participant families
- o Attend In-Service (Fall/Spring) or Summer Camp Orientation
- o Complete a report on an evidence-based therapeutic recreation article (Appendix A)
- o Complete a training on cultural competency during orientation
- o Comply with the American Therapeutic Recreation Association's Code of Ethics and standards for the practice of recreational therapy.
- o
- Meet with CTRS site supervisor to discuss acquiring and maintaining professional
- o certifications.

Assessment: (2.01-Conduct the assessment process, 2.02-Apply assessment data to plan care)

- Establish a therapeutic relationship with participants
 - o CTRS explains boundaries of therapeutic relationships to interns
- o Apply knowledge of diagnostic and developmental characteristics. specifically
- o Interview participants and their families to help assess participant strengths and
- o interests using L. Anderson and L. Heyne's strengths-based approach to recreational therapy
- o Complete participant TR assessments—Adult Functional Skills Quick Assessment (Appendix B), Physical Fitness Abilities Questionnaire (Appendix C)
- o Gather secondary data from the participants records



- o Use findings from data gathered to determine strengths and limitations, including barriers to leisure participation- intern will complete participant leisure participation note sheet (Appendix D)

Planning: (3.01-Develop individualized care plan, 3.02-Design program services)

- o Utilize recreational therapy service models (The Health Protection/ Health Being Model, etc.), interns will work together to create a PowerPoint of what service delivery models Ascendigo currently uses, and how we can incorporate other service models
- o Apply theories of practice from multiple disciplines
- o Write goals and objectives to support service delivery
- o Design a 9–12-week course
- o Meet with personnel to discuss logistical planning
- o Select intervention techniques, approaches, and modalities (social skills training, behavior management, community reintegration)
- o Create an activity/task analysis for an activity in the course they design
- o Create a participant survey to give each participant following the end of the 9–12-week course

Implementation: (4.01-Deliver program services, 4.02-Adhere to risk management protocols)

- o Explain the purpose of the course to participants and their caregivers
- o Develop a comprehensive course plan
- o Lead a 4- week course
- o Monitor the effectiveness of the course throughout the duration
- o Ensure participants fill out consent forms
- o Be aware of participants' allergies and dietary restrictions
- o Educate themselves on participants' seizure protocols
- o Review Ascendigo Safety Kits and Risk Management procedures
 - o In cars
 - o Throughout the office building
 - o Learn how to use GPS satellite phones



Evaluation and Documentation: (5.01-Document client progress, Document program and client incident)

- o Complete progress notes following each session
- o Assist with developing discharge/transition plans for participants in their course
- o Communicate with DSPs, BCBAs, and program directors regarding participant progress

- o Conduct summative evaluation of program effectiveness during week five of the course

- o Learn how to fill out incident reports and when to call 911

Administration: (6.01-Maintain department documentation, 6.02-Assign and monitor personnel)

- o Adhere to all Ascendigo policies
- o Follow the program schedule for 9–12-week course
- o Complete all notes and incident reports in a timely manner
- o Learn about non-profit agency fiscal management (budgeting requirements, external/internal funding sources, etc.)

- o Attend a staff performance review meeting
- o Provide a training about therapeutic recreation for direct service providers and/or parents

Schedule and Training Requirements

Week 1

1. Complete Week 1 Online Training in the Academy
2. Complete HR/Ascendigo/School Paperwork
3. Meet and greets with Ascendigo Leadership and Staff
4. Shadow afternoons Adult Adventure/Women's House



ELEVATING THE SPECTRUM
FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM

Course	Due Date	Time on Task
CPR*	Prior to the internship	
Defensive Driving (if age 21 or over)	Day 1	10 min
Ascendigo Driving policies and Procedures (in-person driving test) (if age 21 or over)	Day 1	45 min
Standard Precautions Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases and Immunizations PDIS	Day 1	1.5 hours
Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect Training PDIS	Day 1	2 hours
Mandatory Reporting of Mistreatment of At-risk Elders and At-risk Adults with IDD	Day 2	20 min
HIPAA Privacy Rule	Day 2	30 min
HIPAA Security Rule	Day 2	30 min
HIPAA and Social Media	Day 2	30 min
Foundations of the Ascendigo Way (autism-specific understanding)		
Course 1: Autism Spectrum Disorder 101	Day 3	1 hour
Course 2: Person-Centered and Holistic Teaching	Day 4	1 hour
Course 3: Introduction to Therapeutic Strategies	Day 5	1.5 hours
Course 4: Applying Therapeutic Strategies	Day 5	1.5 hours
Weekly Journal and Hours Log with Supervisor Signature	End of Week 1	

*As a prerequisite to your internship with Ascendigo, you must obtain a current, valid CPR/First Aid certificate **before you arrive**. You must obtain your CPR/First Aid certification from a reputable provider. We recommend the American Heart Association, the American Red Cross, or another nationally recognized vendor. You may take an online course, but the course **MUST** include an in-person observation verifying that you can perform CPR correctly.



Week 2

- 1.Shadow in each program: LE, OR, ADV, VOC
- 2.Continue training online and in-person. Days 1-5 (coordinate around shadow experience)

Course	Due Date	Time on Task	Delivery Mode
Critical Incident Reporting	Week 2	30 minutes	online
Ascendigo Way Training	Week 2	2 hours	in person and online
Risk Management	Week 2	2 hours	in person
QBS Overview Basics	Week 2	1 hour	In person
How to Write Session Notes	Week 2	1 hour	online
Weekly Journal and Hours Log with Supervisor Signature	End of week 2		

Weeks 3-14 will follow a general schedule that supports client and participant needs and services.

1.Morning: Indirect Time

- a. Course and lesson planning, preparation, setup, accommodations
- b. Research
- c. Community, parent, participant communications
- d. Meetings and training

2. Afternoon: Assist and Support the Adventure Afternoon Program

3. Evening: Assist and Support the Adult Afterhours Program



Appendix A

Evidence-Based Practice Journal Article Report Sheet

Your Name: _____

Date: _____

1. Article Citation (APA Style)

(Include full APA citation of the journal article.)

2. Summary of the Article

- **Research Question or Purpose:**
(What did the researchers want to find out?)
- **Study Design/Methodology:**
(How was the study conducted?)
- **Participants:**
(Who was involved in the study? Sample size, demographics?)
- **Key Findings/Results:**
(What did the study find?)
- **Conclusions/Recommendations:**
(What did the authors conclude or recommend?)



3. Relevance to Evidence-Based Practice

- How does this article support or challenge current practices?

4. Application to Ascendigo

- Which Ascendigo program(s) could this apply to?
 - ☐ Life Enrichment
 - ☐ Adult Afternoon Adventures
 - ☐ Outreach
 - ☐ Adventure
 - ☐ Residential
 - ☐ Other: _____
- How could the findings be integrated into Ascendigo?
(Provide specific ideas for strategies, curriculum, staff training, etc.)
- Barriers to implementation (if any):
(What challenges might we face applying this?)



Appendix B

Internship in Therapeutic Recreation — Weekly Journal Report

Internship in Therapeutic Recreation - Weekly Journal Report		
Name	Date	Week Number
Organization: Ascendigo Autism Services	Hours	Cumulative Hours
Date	Briefly summarize each day's activities.	Hours

What experiences were particularly rewarding and/or disappointing or frustrating this week?



Internships are about achieving “integration between theory and practice.” What did you see or do this week that you learned about in your classes?

Internships are about acquiring “skills and competencies needed for practice.” What did you see or do this week to help you identify these necessary skills and competencies?

Internships are about “discovering one’s strengths and limitations” and about “developing an awareness of the total range of the field of practice.” What did you learn about yourself this week? What did you learn about the profession this week?

Is there anything you want to discuss with your supervisor or otherwise follow-up on?

Ascendigo Supervisor Comments

Intern Signature	Date
Ascendigo Supervisor Signature	Date



The 8 Guiding Principles of the Ascendigo Way

1. **Know. Understand. Appreciate.** – Take the time to learn about each individual, their story, strengths, and challenges.
2. **Achieve Success Through Behavior Basics.** – Use foundational behavioral supports and strategies to foster success.
3. **Make Relationships Real.** – Build genuine, respectful, and reciprocal relationships with participants.
4. **Center People In The Practice.** – Ensure participant voice, choice, and autonomy guide program decisions.
5. **Find The Joy.** – Create experiences that are meaningful, fun, and uplifting.
6. **Work On What Matters.** – Focus efforts on what will have the greatest positive impact on the participant's quality of life.
7. **Create Experiences. Build Competencies.** – Provide opportunities to practice and strengthen skills in real-world contexts.
8. **Consider The Environment.** – Adapt and leverage environments to promote success, comfort, and safety.

