VOICES OF EXPERIENCE

ADAPTIVE RECREATION IN EVERY SEASON

OPENING DOORS AFTER REHABILITATION

By Dianne Vitkus, PA-C

For many people with spinal cord injury, the journey home from rehabilitation begins with practical necessities: a ramp to enter the house, a shower chair, a lift, or other equipment needed to navigate daily life safely. These supports are critical, but they are only the beginning of recovery.



Skiing with the National Ability Center, Park City, UT

That philosophy is at the heart of the **Jack Trottier Foundation (JTF)**. While many individuals first encounter the foundation through grants that help fund essential equipment before discharge from Spaulding Rehabilitation, JTF's Adaptive Recreation Therapy (ART) program focuses on what comes next: helping people reconnect with hobbies, sports, experiences, and communities that bring meaning and enjoyment to everyday life. "We try to provide a holistic approach to recovery," says Jack Trottier, founder of the Jack Trottier Foundation. "After someone gets home and their basic needs are met, we want to help them get active again, whether that's through sport, an experience, or an activity. We want people to find something they enjoy and become part of a community."



Surfing with Adaptive Surf Project and Shepherd Center, North Myrtle Beach, SC

Since launching in 2023, the ART program has introduced participants to a wide range of opportunities including surfing, water skiing, skiing, performance driving, Red Sox games, paint nights, and other community events. The goal is not just participation. It is helping individuals discover new passions, build confidence, and connect with others who share similar injuries and experiences. The program is led by Anna Drainville, an occupational therapist and recreation therapist who serves as Program Manager for JTF. According to Jack, her clinical expertise helps bridge the gap between wanting to try an activity and figuring out how to make it happen safely and successfully.

One lesson Jack has learned is that recreation looks different for everyone. "If skiing isn't your thing, that's okay," he says. "Maybe it's gaming, maybe it's painting, maybe it's going to a baseball game. The important thing is finding something that gets you involved and engaged." The ART program is shaped by the people it serves. Rather than creating activities in isolation, the team pays close attention to conversations with participants and community members about what they would like to try next. "I really like to keep an ear to the ground and hear what people want to do," Jack says. "Anna and I hear ideas all the time, and when enough people express interest, we try to make it happen."

The program intentionally offers activities throughout the year. While many adaptive recreation opportunities in New England occur during the summer months, JTF also partners with organizations such as the Shepherd Center, where Jack did his inpatient rehabilitation, to support camps and events across the country, including adaptive skiing, surfing, and multi-sport programs.

Beyond the physical benefits, recreation can play an important role in community reintegration after rehabilitation. Jack remembers how challenging the transition home can feel after leaving the structure and support of inpatient rehabilitation. "When you're in rehab, you're surrounded by therapists, nurses, and other patients who understand what you're going through," he explains. "Then you go home and it can feel overwhelming. Recreation gives people an opportunity to reconnect with a community and realize they're not alone."



Performance driving with Just Hands, Lime Rock, CT



Jack and Anna at the Annual Cornhole Tournament, Tyngsboro, MA

The ART program was designed as an entry point for individuals who may be hesitant to try adaptive sports or recreation for the first time. Participants can experiment with new activities in a welcoming, supportive environment without committing to expensive equipment or lengthy travel. According to Jack, one of the biggest barriers is often not cost, but simply getting started. "The barriers aren't usually as big as people think they are," he says. "A lot of people are nervous about trying something new, but once they do it, they realize they're more capable than they expected. That first experience often opens the door to additional opportunities."



Sled hockey with the National Ability Center, Park City, UT

Jack recalls one participant who had recently received a ramp through a JTF grant and attended a Red Sox game just weeks after returning home from rehabilitation at Spaulding. Having Anna present, who was once an OT at Spaulding, helped ease concerns about navigating a new environment and provided the support needed to build confidence in the community. "It was her first time navigating Fenway Park using a wheelchair," Jack says. "Having Anna there helped that experience go smoothly and gave her confidence to get back out and do more."

Some participants have gone on to attend adaptive recreation camps, pursue new sports, travel independently, or connect with resources they might never have discovered otherwise. "It's amazing what can come from one event," Jack says. "Someone tries surfing, meets another participant, learns about a different program, and suddenly new opportunities start appearing."



Surfing with Adaptive Surf Project and Shepherd Center, North Myrtle Beach, SC

"Recreation gives people an opportunity to reconnect with a community and realize they're not alone."

JACK TROTTIER

For Jack, that idea aligns closely with JTF's motto: **Win the Day**. Originally adopted during his own rehabilitation, the phrase reflects the importance of focusing on small victories rather than becoming overwhelmed by the long road ahead. "When you're recovering from a spinal cord injury, progress can feel slow," he explains. "You might not see changes day to day, so it's important to focus on what's right in front of you. Just win today. Then do it again tomorrow." That same mindset applies to recreation. Whether someone is trying adaptive surfing, attending a community event, or simply showing up to watch and learn, each step forward matters.

Jack's advice for anyone wondering whether an active and fulfilling life is still possible after spinal cord injury is simple: "Just come try it. You don't even have to participate right away. Come watch. Meet people. See what's possible. We're here to meet people where they are and help them take that first step." And sometimes, that first step opens doors to possibilities that once seemed unimaginable.

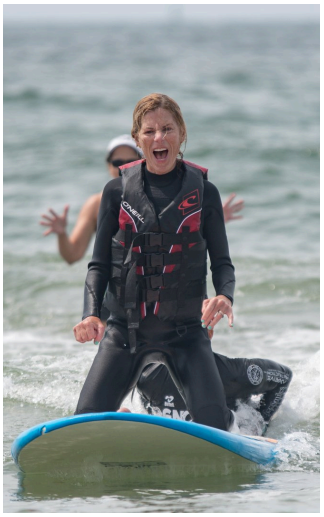
What makes the ART program unique is not simply the activities themselves, but the combination of peer support, clinical expertise, and community connection. Through the partnership between Jack's lived experience with SCI and Anna's background in occupational therapy and recreation therapy, participants are encouraged to explore new opportunities at their own pace and **discover what is possible after injury.**



Skiing with Catalyst Sports and Shepherd Center, Beech Mountain, NC



Pickleball with the National Ability Center, Park City, UT



Surfing with Gnome Surf, Horseneck Beach, MA



Archery with the National Ability Center, Park City, UT

ADAPTIVE RECREATION ALL YEAR LONG

Adaptive recreation opportunities exist in every season, offering something for nearly every interest and ability level. Through the Jack Trottier Foundation's Adaptive Recreation Therapy (ART) program and partner organizations, participants have explored activities such as:

- Surfing
- Kayaking
- Red Sox games
- Water skiing
- Catamaran sailing
- Paint nights
- Alpine skiing
- Performance driving
- Multi-sport camps and recreation weekends

Whether you're looking for an adrenaline-filled adventure, a social outing, or a new hobby, adaptive recreation can be a pathway to confidence, connection, and community.

LEARN MORE ABOUT JTF

JACK TROTTIER FOUNDATION

To learn more about upcoming events, recreation opportunities, grants and SCI education, visit the Jack Trottier Foundation website or follow the foundation on social media for announcements and ART registration information.

Website: jacktrottierfoundation.org/art
Instagram: @jacktrottierfoundation
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