

# VASTRA TRIBUNE

VOL. 1 Issue 5 -- OCT 2022

Official Newsletter of the Virginia Therapeutic  
Recreation Association



## VASTRA Mission:

To promote the profession of Therapeutic Recreation and  
Therapeutic Recreation professionals in the Commonwealth of  
Virginia.

# Welcome!

Welcome to the fall 2022 official tribune of the Virginia Therapeutic Recreation Association! This year's issue is brought to you by the Longwood University Therapeutic Recreation Program in Farmville, Virginia. In this issue, you will find spotlights about former VASTRA president Kristen Spencer in which you will gain insights on her years in the TR field and with VASTRA. More spotlights on LU Therapeutic Recreation students and alumni. Program spotlights on the Longwood TR program including an interview with Dr. Kirsten Whitely, and Therapeutic Recreation Organization (TRO) president Anna Barrett on the study paws program. Article summaries on the benefits of service dogs for individuals with autism spectrum disorder, and another issue about the effects of COVID-19 on senior internships. Lastly, an interview with Sasha Swinnerton on memberships, contact information, VASTRA's social media networks, upcoming events, and CEU events.



Pictured from left to right:  
Claire Anderson,  
Madison Dooley, Jillian  
Burton, Angelika  
Gomez, Cali Hepner,  
Jacob Ruppert, Logan  
Machen, Tillar Bagby

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# MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

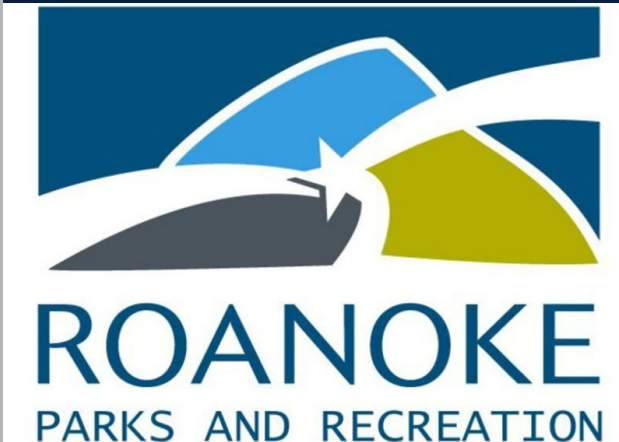
## KRISTEN SPENCER, CTRS, CIFT

BY: JILLIAN BURTON



**What are the benefits of being a member of VASTRA right out of college and throughout the years?**

"You have the opportunity to constantly network yourself by meeting others within the state of Virginia. You are able to have access to CEU opportunities, and grow as a professional throughout the years."



**How long have you been practicing as a CTRS and where at?**

"I have been practicing for almost 15 years, and I graduated from Radford University. I currently work at Roanoke Valley, which is community TR. I work with both adults and children with development disabilities, head injury related disabilities, visual impairments, and those with a mental health diagnosis that are currently working with a support agency."

**Is there anything you wish you could have done differently in your collegiate years that could have bettered your success as a beginning CTRS?**

"I wasn't as involved in Therapeutic Recreation. I wished I would have networked better with current professionals to get my face out into the field to make those valuable connections."



**What is your greatest accomplishment in TR?**

"I feel that my greatest accomplishment is becoming the supervisor of Therapeutic Recreation Services (TRS) after starting as an intern. We provide amazing opportunities for people with disabilities in the Roanoke Valley and I am very proud of the services we offer. I am also incredibly proud of the relationships that I have built both with our participants and their families during my time with TRS and love that I have been a part of their growth while helping them meet their social and leisure goals."

# Longwood Student Spotlight

By: Jacob Ruppert



**Tyler Kurtz**

Tyler is a Junior from Norfolk, Virginia. He serves as a Longwood TR Alumni Council Student Representative and was previously a TR Ambassador who advocated for people to join the major. His goal for the year is to accept an internship in a new setting and population to expand his horizons. He plans on working with post special education students, ages 22 to 45, working on the transition to adulthood and helping them prepare for the work environment. He wants to bring light to that population as there is not much existing programming for them.

Emma is a Sophomore from Louisa, Virginia. She serves on the Longwood TR Alumni Council as a Student Representative and as the Vice President of the Therapeutic Recreation Organization. This year she hopes to do more service activities for the Therapeutic Recreation Organization on campus and increase community engagement. She plans on working in physical rehabilitation with adults/veterans. She says that she likes the adaptive sports, working with service members, and watching progress and growth every day.



**Emma Cajigas**

# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Faith Moss , CTRS

By: Claire Anderson



Faith Moss  
Class of 2020

## Where Do You Work and What Population Do you Work With?

"I currently work for a contracting company which provides TR services for adults with developmental disabilities ages 17 and up."

## Have You Had Any Special Opportunities Because of TR?

"I was able to attend an ATRA conference, make connections with other RT's, and learn about new interventions."



How has Longwood's TR program helped you beyond graduation?

"Longwood's TR program has allowed me to understand the value of recreational therapy while also giving me fieldwork opportunities. With Longwood's good reputation, I was able to network and get the position I have currently."



How do you plan to contribute to the field of TR in the future?

"I plan to advocate for therapeutic recreation by educating caregivers and the general public about TR. My biggest goal is to help improve Virginia's Medicaid disability waivers to expand the TR services and create a better standard."

Name a success you've had since graduation?

"I am self-employed, I have my own company, and I didn't know it was possible. Having this job got me thinking how I could improve contracted services in VA for TR."

# LONGWOOD TR SPOTLIGHT

By: Logan Machen

## CLASP COLLAB



*CLASP, Collaborating with Lancers for Academic Success Program, is a program that assists students from diverse backgrounds by helping students learn success strategies in academics and adjusting to college life. CLASP targets development in career services, cultural engagement and academic success. The program is geared toward addressing the needs of first-generation students, minority students, and transfer students. TRO has provided CLASP leisure breaks during their study hall. This semester, they have played kickball, gone on a nature walk around campus, meditation, and more sessions are on the way!*

## PAUSE FOR PAWS

*Study paws is a time-honored finals week tradition wherein students are encouraged to come take a break from studying and enjoy dogs that have signed up to participate in getting love from students! "This is one of the biggest events on campus nearing the end of Spring semester that is put on by the Therapeutic Recreation Organization at Longwood." Anna Barrett (TRO president) says. Students and faculty alike are invited to bring their furry family member to share with hardworking students as long as they provide required health documentation.*



## A NEW MINOR THAT'S MAJOR

*The Therapeutic Recreation Program is now offering a Therapeutic Activities Minor to all LU non-TR majors. This minor allows for students to learn about foundations of leisure, leadership skills, recreation facilitation techniques, and disability groups. Additionally, the electives overlap with many kindred majors such as psychology and health promotion making it easy to add to student's degree schedule.*

# Canine-Assisted THERAPIES

## Autism Spectrum Disorder

By: Angelika Gomez



### What is Canine-Assisted Therapy?

According to the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organization, an animal-assisted intervention is a goal oriented intervention that includes animals in health, education, and human service in order to achieve therapeutic gains in humans (Hallyburton & Hinton, 2017).

### Results

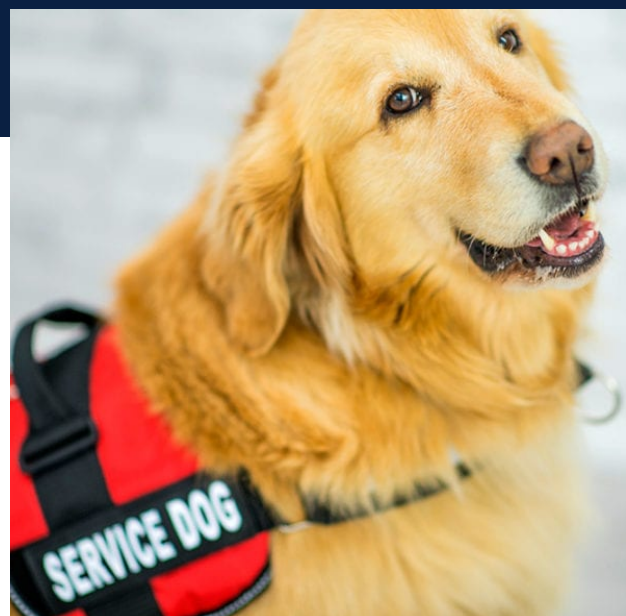
It was found that there was increased positive social behaviors, decrease in stress-related behaviors, decreased cortisol awakening, and decreased anxiety and total stress. This intervention also provided an increase in family functioning (Hallyburton & Hinton, 2017).

### Limitations

Limitations included obtaining information from just the researcher or caregiver did not give accurate observations relating to actual thoughts and feelings of an individual with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Other limitations were that most studies had small sample sizes, individuals were not directly observed or interviewed, and selection bias occurred (Hallyburton & Hinton, 2017).

### Canine-Assisted Therapy and Autism Spectrum Disorder

It is found that most studies provide positive results regarding using canine assisted therapy with individuals who have ASD but there is still a need for more studies regarding this intervention, particularly ones that collect data directly from the individuals with ASD (Hallyburton & Hinton, 2017).



# Evidence-Based Article Review

## Covid-19 & TR Internships

This was a cross-sectional study done for the purpose of finding out the experiences of students doing their internships during the spring of 2020 and to “assess the impact of internship changes due to COVID-19 on the interns’ perceived competency in the NCTRC job task domains” (Bright et al., 2022, p. 232); “These domains include professional relationships and responsibilities, assessment, plan interventions and/or programs, implement interventions and/or programs, evaluate outcomes of the interventions/programs, document intervention services, treatment teams and/or service providers, develop and maintain programs, manage TR/RT services, and awareness and advocacy” (Bright et al., 2022, p. 229)

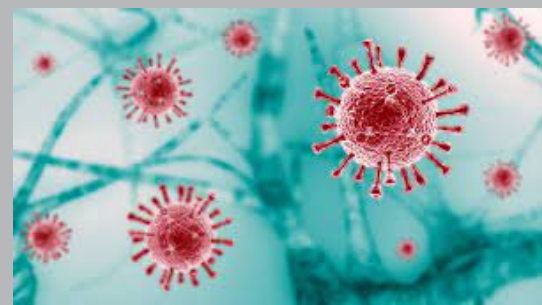
A total of 250 TR interns participated in this study. The “Therapeutic Recreation COVID-19 Internship Experience Questionnaire” was used in this study. This collected data in 5 areas: demographics, type of internship experience, changes of experience due to COVID-19, perception of meeting the NCTRC domains, and concerns/impacts on the intern (Bright et al., 2022). After the interns completed this questionnaire, they were given five questions on the importance, confidence levels, and improvement that happened during their internships. These five questions were based on a scale from 1-5.

The results showed that Covid-19 had a significant effect on internships. In 2020, 83.8% of interns reported that their internship switched from in person to remote (Bright et al., 2022). While some interns were fully remote and others split their time between remote and in-person, the results showed that the NCTRC task domains were still met. However, some domains were harder to achieve due to lack of online resources. The participants had the highest confidence levels in implementing programs and establishing/maintaining professional relationships. They had the lowest confidence levels in assessing clients (Bright et al., 2022).

Covid-19 became a global pandemic in March of 2020. While everyone was affected, TR students in the midst of their internships preparing to graduate were impacted greatly. Although the pandemic made their internships look a little different, the TR interns that year were able to obtain the knowledge and skills of the NCTRC task domains, the only difference was they had to adapt and learn via remote. These interns had immense support from their institutions and agencies, and today they are well-equipped knowledgeable CTRS'S who can say they know how to successfully do TR during a pandemic.

### Reference

Bright, H., Cripps, L., Hawkins, B. L., Moore, S. A., McLachlin, L., Sullivan, A.-M., & Purrington, S. (2022). Perceived competence in NCTRC job domains among therapeutic recreation interns during COVID-19. *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, 56(3), 227–250. <https://doi.org/10.18666/trj-2022-v56-i3-11348>



# VASTRA Membership and Media

## Membership Numbers:

- There are a total of 34 members:
- 30 professionals
- 4 students

## Cost:

- The membership is annual
- Associate membership: \$40
- Professional membership: \$50
- Student membership: \$20

## Becoming a member and renewing:

- Go to [www.trvirginia.com](http://www.trvirginia.com) and click on the link that says, "Not a Member? Click here to join!"
- To renew your membership:
- VASTRA will send you an email 2 months before it expires.

## Value of VASTRA:

- Become apart of the growing therapeutic recreation community in Virginia. As a member you will receive support from other members, job opportunities, and other events happening. You also have the opportunity to inexpensive CEU's as a member.

## VASTRA Goals:

- Increase membership.
- Provide professionals with educational and research opportunities.
- Gain licensure in VA.

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### Dr. Ann Bailey

"I have been a member of VASTRA for over 15 years. It has provided me with numerous opportunities to network with my fellow recreational therapists around the state, attend workshops/conferences and to give back to a profession that I love so much!"



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### Sara Jarrett

"It's always great to be a part of something, especially when it comes to something you're passionate about! Recreation Therapy is something I'm passionate about and lead me to joining VASTRA back in the fall of 2014. I've met so many wonderful working professionals since then who have helped shape the CTRS I am today!"



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### Jennifer Cava

"I have been a VASTRA member since I was a student and I continue to be a member with the goal of continuous education and avocation for the Therapeutic Recreation profession. Not only has VASTRA provided educational opportunities, but it has created a forum that CTRSs from all over Virginia can keep in touch and form relationships. I look forward to what the future holds for VASTRA and its members."



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## February: TR Month!

**What: CTRS Spotlight**

**When: Weekly**

**Where: Posted on VASTRA's website and social media**

### Spotlight:

**Want to spotlight someone throughout the year?**

**Contact Sarah Sprague for more information.**

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### Dr. Takeyra Coats

"I have truly enjoyed my experiences as a VASTRA Board Member and Past Co-President. As a member you get many opportunities to share your experience with others through networking, advocating for the TR Profession, and learning new skills and information that help me continue to learn and grow as a CTRS. It's important for us to collaborate and be active within our profession and VASTRA provides us with the opportunity to continue to raise the bar!"



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## Social Media:

VASTRA is active on Facebook and Instagram.

The benefits of the Facebook page is there are member postings about events at their facility, job openings, and they are asking questions. These questions can pertain to a patient's needs and different treatment ideas.



Facebook: VASTRA



Instagram: va\_state\_tr

## Contact VASTRA

**Sarah Sprague (Co-President)**

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**Sasha Swinnerton (Membership Chair)**

[stswinn13@gmail.com](mailto:stswinn13@gmail.com)



Sarah Sprague