

Recreational Program for People with Disabilities Becomes Part of UNH

By [Sharon Keeler](#)
UNH News Bureau

DURHAM, N.H. -- Northeast Passage, a non-profit, community-based organization that provides recreational instruction and opportunities for people with disabilities, has officially become a part of the University of New Hampshire's School of Health and Human Services.

Founded by UNH graduate Jill Gravink, Northeast Passage has worked in partnership with the university for 10 years to promote barrier-free recreation. The merger with UNH will provide students who major in recreation management and policy with a clinical service branch, as well as provide Northeast Passage staff with an opportunity to become more involved in classroom instruction.

Gravink says merging with UNH also provides Northeast Passage with a larger, more stable financial base, while enhancing the delivery of services by offering a variety of supports for programming.

"We're moving from adolescence into adulthood," says Gravink, of the 11-year old program. "We grew in program services, consumers and staff. We received national recognition through awards, publications and even an invitation to a White House round table discussion. Growth of the program and reputation naturally led to questions about the best way to secure our future. Merging with UNH is a win-win situation in which both programs emerge stronger."

Gravink developed the idea for Northeast Passage while pursuing a degree in therapeutic recreation at UNH. The paper she wrote promoting the concept has evolved into an organization that now serves more than 1,500 people each year.

A staff of five employees and numerous volunteers provide instructional clinics on everything from ice hockey and rugby, to sailing and snow skiing. The organization also plans vacations for disabled individuals, their families and friends, and has an equipment rental program that allows consumers to lease the gear they need to participate in a particular sport or activity.

Two programs that will receive emphasis in the upcoming year include a research initiative addressing the care of people with spinal cord injuries, and the inclusion of kids with disabilities into field trips and extra-curricular school activities.

"This will be a new era in this productive partnership," says Raymond Coward, dean of UNH's School of Health and Human Services. "Our students will have greater opportunities to learn from the clinical experience afforded by Northeast Passage. As a land-grant institution, we expand services to the citizens of the state and region. And, we all benefit from the ongoing research in this area."

For more information on Northeast Passage, visit the program website at <http://www.nepassage.org> or call 603-862-0070.

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