



NEP NEWSLETTER VOL. XV

MARCH 2024



FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Hello to all,

As we forge ahead through Q1 of the new year with renewed energy and aspirations, I extend a heartfelt welcome to the entire Northeast Passage Nation! Whether you're a donor, sponsor, volunteer, athlete, or participant, you are a vital part of our community, and it is with great excitement that we bring you the latest updates and highlights in this newsletter.

Your support, dedication, and passion are the cornerstones of our success, and we are eager to share the incredible stories and achievements that make Northeast Passage a thriving and inclusive community. Together, let's continue to make 2024 a year filled with positive impact and shared accomplishments.

Thank you for being an integral part of Northeast Passage Nation!

Best wishes,

Jill Gravink
Northeast Passage Founder & Executive Director

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What's Up at NEP?

C-BRT™ (Community-Based Recreational Therapy)

The NEP Clinical Team recently wrapped up the Gibney Foundation grant serving 12 individuals who have mobility impairments and are half-way through a second year of collaborating with UNH IOD to provide services for an additional 7 people through their CDC grant to address health equity for adults in NH who experience disabilities. NEP continues to have a growing referral stream from area agencies to support NH residents with developmental or intellectual disabilities, or brain injury through 1915c home and community-based services waivers.



In other news, NEP received a grant from Swim with a Mission (SWAM) to rekindle our Community-Based RT services for the veteran population with a focused intention of decreasing instances of veteran suicide in NH. We look forward to adding a new team member as we ramp up our capacity to serve the veteran community.

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NEP has been actively engaged in rebuilding infrastructure that will support veteran referral to our services. We were excited to receive a commitment from Homeland Heroes Foundation at the latter part of the summer to serve 10 veterans with our Community-Based RT services. This allows us to not only do work that we love, but also allows us to begin acting on early requests for services through providers and veteran service organizations in anticipation of building our infrastructure to grow caseload capacity.

NEP remains active in conversations and meetings related to statewide efforts to meet the needs of veterans in our communities through participation in the NH Suicide Prevention Council Military and Veteran Committee. Other collaborative opportunities include participating in an Easter Seals Project to create a veteran campus in Franklin, NH, with a strong base of recreation opportunities supporting health and wellbeing, and cooperating with other veteran service organizations that have been facilitated by Swim with a Mission.



TREK™ (School-Based Recreational Therapy)

Clinical Team TREK therapists are serving 27 schools in 13 districts. The students range from kindergarten (age 5) to post-high school (age 22). Some of the more exciting activities TREK students have been involved with are sledding, learning to use the COAST bus, rain art, planning and cooking healthy snacks, shelter building, ice skating, cycling, and much more.



This year we are piloting bringing students together to work on the social skills necessary for building and maintaining relationships. Some individual students from different towns are working together in a small group where they learn how to share their ideas, listen to, and empathize with each other.



“I’m going home to sign up for every arts program available!”

VETERAN RECREATION

The Veteran Recreation program has had a busy winter season. We’ve offered many sports and activities including archery, bowling, pickleball, fly tying, skating, wheelchair sports and arts programming.

This program continues to grow with increased attendance at NEP Vet Rec events and more frequent contracted opportunities. Northeast Passage has ongoing collaborations with local VA’s and Veteran service organizations including the Manchester and White River Junction VA’s, Boulder Point Veteran Housing, and Clear Path for Veterans, giving veterans involved in these programs opportunities in a comfortable and safe space.

A participant in the NEP Veteran Arts program (sponsored by Operation Hat Trick) was quoted as saying after he completed his first arts project, “I’m going home to sign up for every arts program available!”





ADAPTIVE RECREATION

The NEP Rec Team has had a full event calendar with a variety of opportunities available to participants of all abilities seeking to remain active in the winter months. Recent opportunities include indoor cycling events at the UNH Fieldhouse indoor track, and wheelchair court sports resuming in collaboration with UNH Campus Recreation. Additional adaptive sports opportunities offered have included pickleball in collaboration with the Exeter YMCA, archery in collaboration with Coyote Creek Archery, and ice skating in collaboration with the Labrie Family Skate at Strawberry Banke.



When the Rec Team isn't busy facilitating NEP and contracted adaptive sports and recreation events, they are teaching kids in schools Similarity Awareness (SA) through wheelchair sports and discussion. The Similarity Awareness program teaches young students about disability awareness, inclusion, and how we are all more similar than we are different. So far in the new year, NEP has conducted Similarity Awareness programming in over 10 Schools and has another 20 SA events lined upon the calendar.



The Rec Team continues to forge strong relationships with community partners and organizations to provide contracted adaptive sports and recreation facilitation. This winter, NEP partnered with the Krepfels Center, RiverWoods and Partners In Health providing snowshoeing, indoor archery and ice skating to their communities.





TUCKER CENTER FOR ALL ATHLETES (NEP Competitive Sports)

Power Soccer

NEP Power Soccer hosted the annual NEP Power Soccer Tournament on Saturday January 27th at Hamel Recreation Center with an amazing turnout from communities both on campus and beyond. This all-day event consisted of nine power soccer teams from across New England, 13 fast paced matches, and over 35 volunteers to keep the day moving! We are proud to say that we had volunteers from across our Durham community including UNH RMP Students, the UNH Men’s Soccer Team, Northeast Passage Sled Hockey student-athletes, fraternities, NEP Staff, and even Wildcats who saw needs and jumped into the action! The tournament went off without a hitch, and throughout the transfers, clashes, and penalties of the day, the Wildcats ended the day with a 2-1 record and the Thundercats closed out the day with a 3-0 win streak.

This tournament was especially meaningful to all involved as we had the chance to connect both on and off the court to honor Northeast Passage Wildcats teammate, Anthony Jennings, who unexpectedly passed a week prior to the tournament. Both of Northeast Passage’s Power Soccer teams, the Wildcats and Thundercats, have dedicated their seasons to honoring Anthony and his passion for the Power Soccer community.

NEP power soccer athletes look forward to upcoming tournaments at the University of Vermont on April 6, Montreal on May 3-5, and finish out the season with the USPSA Conference Cup Series in Fort Wayne, IN in June.



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"NEP Sled Hockey has become one of the premiere sled hockey programs in the country, providing opportunities for athletes from the youth to elite levels of the sport"

Sled Hockey

The NEP Sled Hockey program is more robust than ever this season with four active teams supporting 30+ adult athletes and 10+ youth athletes. Additionally, 7 NEP athletes are current UNH student athletes, and 6 NEP athletes compete on the men's and women's US National Sled Hockey teams. NEP Sled Hockey has become one of the premiere sled hockey programs in the country, providing opportunities for athletes from the youth to elite levels of the sport and has built a reputation for developing some of the top sled hockey players in the world.



The NEP NESHl Atlantic team currently has a 5 – 5 – 2 record and has remained undefeated in the final 4 games of the season to regain a .500 record heading into playoffs. The NESHl Atlantic Wildcats compete throughout New England vs the Boston ICE Storm (Andover, MA), Spaulding Shamrocks (Everett, MA), New England Warriors (Auburn, ME) and Central Vermont Pioneers (Montpelier, VT.)



The NEP NESHL Metro team captured the #1 overall seed with a 10-1-1 record heading into the Playoffs next month. The NEP NESHL Metro team travels throughout the Northeast to play the following teams: Gaylord Wolfpack (CT), Philadelphia Hammerheads (PA), USA Warriors (Washington DC), New York Rangers (NY), Columbus Blue Jackets (OH), Johnstown Sitting Bulls (PA.)

The NEP NESHL Premier team hosted a 4 game weekend in Rochester, NH in October with 2 NEP teams, Montreal, and the Space Coast Blast (Florida.) These teams featured many Canadian and US National and Development men’s and women’s team athletes. NEP White had a record of 3 – 1 and NEP Blue finished at 0 – 4. The NEP NESHL Premier team travelled to Montreal for a 4-game weekend in February and finished 1-2-1.

The NEP MWSHL team traveled to compete in Colorado twice this season going 2 - 1 in October and 2 2-2 in January. The MWSHL Wildcats captured their first “Wirtz Cup” MWSHL Championship during the MWSHL playoffs in Chicago on March 9-10.



The NEP Youth Sled Hockey program hosted the Annual Homer Cup tournament on December 3 at the Whittemore Center Arena. The Homer Cup, sponsored by the Homer Family Foundation, is a unique opportunity for young Sled Hockey athletes from all over New England and their families to enjoy a day of competition and fun. This year’s Homer Cup included a 3 on 3 youth tournament, a skills competition, and a full ice game in conjunction with adult Wildcat athletes.

The NEP Wildcats youth team looks forward to two upcoming tournaments including the New England Sled Invitational and the USA Hockey Sled Nationals in April.

- Upcoming Sled Hockey events:
- NESHL Playoffs – March 15-17 – Voorhees, NJ
(2 teams – Atlantic & Metro)
 - New England Sled Invitational – April 5-7 – Westfield, MA
(2 teams – Adult and Youth)
 - USA Hockey Sled National Championships – April 18 – 21 – Westchester, PA
(3 teams, 2 Adult and 1 Youth)



Wheelchair Rugby

The NEP Wildcats Wheelchair Rugby team has had a strong season of competition under the tutelage of new head coach Sarah Leonard, in her first season coaching the Wildcats. The Wildcats started off the season placing first in their home tournament, the annual Rugby Rampage, in October. The team followed up with strong appearances on the road in Tampa, at the end of October, competed in Philly in November, Quebec in December, and in Louisville, KY in January. To wrap up the regular season, the Wildcats head the Challenge Hivernal tournament in Quebec City on March 15.

As of February, the NEP Wildcats were ranked 11 in the USWRA, securing a spot in the USWRA National Semifinals in Las Vegas on April 5. The Wildcats will compete against Las Vegas, University of Michigan, WWAR Warriors, Portland Oregon, Oscar Mike Militia, Seattle, and Grand Rapids for a chance to advance to USWRA National Championships in Tampa on May 3. Let's Go Cats!!!

"The Wildcats started off the season placing first in their home tournament, the annual Rugby Rampage, in October."





SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT: ProAmpac

[ProAmpac](#), a leading global flexible packaging manufacturer, stands at the forefront of the industry. With a strong foundation in material science and strategic partnerships with leading universities worldwide, ProAmpac is committed to driving innovation and sustainability. Let's delve into the key aspects of this remarkable company:

Sustainable Technologies: ProAmpac's patented sustainable technologies empower the flexible packaging industry. These innovations aim to reduce the packaging footprint while maintaining performance excellence.

ProActive Sustainability® Portfolio: ProAmpac's commitment to sustainability extends to its ProActive Sustainability® portfolio. Through this initiative, the company delivers flexible packaging products that align with brands' sustainable goals.

Global Reach: Operating across 46 sites worldwide, ProAmpac caters to diverse industries, including food, pet care, healthcare, e-commerce, retail, and industrial goods. Its fiber and film-based materials science expertise ensures greener packaging solutions.

Employee Support: Establishing the ProAmpac Employee Assistance Fund (PEAF) in 2017 underscores the company's dedication to its employees and the communities it serves. PEAFF has provided over 240 grants and nearly \$1 million in direct assistance to ProAmpac employees and their families during challenging times.

Community Engagement: Beyond internal initiatives, ProAmpac actively supports various organizations and causes. Its focus areas include sustainability, community engagement, and industry advancement. By doing so, ProAmpac contributes to positive societal and environmental impact.

Northeast Passage Sponsorship: As a Northeast Passage sponsor for nearly a decade, ProAmpac collaborates with NEP programs, emphasizing creative solutions and community well-being.

ProAmpac's unwavering commitment to sustainability, innovation, and community welfare makes it a vital player in shaping the future of the packaging industry.





IN MEMORY OF CHANDLER BULLARD (1977-2024)

Chandler Bullard had a quick wit, a boisterous personality, a fun energetic spirit, and lived life passionately with an infectious confidence that he lovingly shared with everyone around him. He was a beloved team member at NEP for over a decade and in his time at NEP he created countless memories and helped shape the culture and personality of the organization.

At the age of 16, Chandler became a paraplegic as the result of a spinal cord injury sustained in a car accident. This traumatic life event became the positive driving force behind his passion for helping others with disabilities and inspired his career working as a mentor to children with disabilities, as a disability advocate and educator, and as a wheelchair rugby coach.

After working as a camp director for Easterseals in Virginia and San Diego, where he mentored children with physical and cognitive disabilities, Chandler joined Northeast Passage as a Program Specialist in 2006 to spearhead the NEP Similarity Awareness program. Chandler's approachability, sense of humor, love of sports, and lived experience as an individual with a disability made him uniquely suited and successful at bringing the Similarity Awareness program into schools in the Seacoast region and beyond. During his tenure at NEP, Chandler helped to develop the NEP Similarity Awareness program into the tour de force that it is today, by creating a unique model of experiential wheelchair sports and games combined with discussion that keeps students fully engaged in the lesson.



In his time facilitating Similarity Awareness, Chandler reached thousands of school children with lessons of inclusion, disability awareness, and the message that we are all more similar than we are different, despite our individual challenges.

In 2007, Chandler took the reins as head coach of the fledgling NEP Wheelchair Rugby program. As a lifelong lover of sports, Chandler quickly developed a deep love for the game of wheelchair rugby and immersed himself in the sport as a coach and referee. Over the next nine years, Chandler built the program and laid the foundation for NEP Wildcats Wheelchair Rugby that continues to develop high-caliber wheelchair rugby athletes today. Throughout his time traveling with the team, coaching, training and developing athletes, as well as mentoring UNH student support staff, Chandler created countless bonds and lifelong friendships in the world of wheelchair rugby.

From popped collars and spray tans, to dance floor shenanigans and epic rugby road trips, memories of Chandler will live on like he lived, not lost in a crowd, but uniquely and unforgettably present. Thank you for the memories Chandler.



SAVE THE DATE

(603) Challenge (April 8-12)

The (603) Challenge is approaching quickly. It is NEP’s largest fundraising campaign of the year and helps to ensure that we can continue to provide high-quality adaptive sports programs and recreational therapy services to those who benefit the most.

We are so excited to be celebrating our 10th (603) Challenge and hope you will help make it a record-breaking success by making a gift between April 8 and 12 and spreading the word! Your gift to NEP will help us reach our goal and unlock bonus funds provided by our generous underwriters. Mark your calendars today!

You will hear a lot from us during the 5-day Challenge but it only happens once a year and will be over before you know it, so stay tuned to our social media and email, so you can take part in the (603) Challenge!



Dec-Feb Impact

683 Events

829 Individuals Served*

(*not including contracted events or rentals)

Competitive Sports:

- **50 Practices 90 Athletes**
- **14 Tournaments**
- **4 Outreach Events**

Rec Sports

- **82 Events with 361 People**
- **13 Contracted Events with 78 People**
- **6 Outreach Events**
- **15 Similarity Awareness Events with 1,270 Students**

C-BRT (PATH)

- **59 Visits 35 People**

TREK:

- **403 Group Visits with 536 People**

Equipment & Rentals

- **5 Equipment Consults**
- **5 Equipment Tuneups**
- **20 Rentals**