

**Nor-West Regional Special Services
Providing Quality Therapeutic Recreation
Since 1973**

Special Recreation for
Special People

INFORMATION & POLICY



INFORMATION & POLICY BOOKLET

NOR-WEST REGIONAL SPECIAL SERVICES

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INTRODUCTION:

This booklet explains the policies and procedures of Nor-West Regional Special Services and clarifies the scope of its programs and services for our participants and their families. Please note that this document is subject to change any time the need arises. The most current version can be found on the Nor-West website at all times.

NOR-WEST DESCRIPTION:

Nor-West Regional Special Services, established in 1973, is a collaboration amongst communities in northwestern Westchester County providing community-based therapeutic recreation programs and transportation services to persons with differing abilities, ages eight through adult, residing in the northwestern portion of Westchester County. Our mission statement follows:

“Nor-West empowers individuals with differing abilities through Therapeutic Recreation programming – fostering emotional security, social skills, physical coordination, and self-confidence, thereby creating a lifelong foundation for personal growth.”

PROGRAMS & SERVICES:

At Nor-West, we understand the importance of providing engaging and meaningful activities that contribute to the overall well-being of our participants. We firmly believe that recreation is crucial in achieving happiness and fulfillment in life. Therefore, we have thoughtfully designed our programs to be both enjoyable and beneficial, offering opportunities for socialization, skill-building, and self-confidence.

- Community-based day/evening programs
- Special Olympics Training & Competitions
- Weekly social programs
- Special events
- Skill development programs
- Round-trip transportation services
- Self-Advocacy & Volunteerism

Most Nor-West programs are designed by the full-time staff and implemented by a talented group of part-time staff. Participant intake and medical information are reviewed by the staff and used as a guide in placing the participant in an appropriate program based on age, ability level, and interests.

GEOGRAPHIC SERVICE AREA & FUNDING:

Nor-West collaborates primarily with four communities: Cortlandt, Ossining, Peekskill, and Yorktown. Funding from these municipal governments helps support our programs. Residents of these communities are considered our “catchment area”, and they **receive first priority for program registration.**

Nor-West receives funding from the NYS Office for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) through Medicaid and state funding streams. This funding is specifically intended to support individuals living at home with their families as a respite service approved by Hudson Valley DDSO. Individuals living at home outside of Westchester County and who are eligible for respite may attend Nor-West programs *if space permits*. Registrations from out-of-catchment areas will be processed after the program registration deadline.

REGISTRATION PROCESS:

Effective April 2025, all Nor-West registrations will occur through **Community Pass**, an online registration program that is used by all four of the municipalities that Nor-West collaborates with. All Nor-West participants must have an account registered with Nor-West and all program registrations must be completed in Community Pass. Please note: **Program announcements and important communications regarding programs will be sent through Community Pass as well**. It is vital for parents, caregivers, and agency staff to update the contact information as needed during each registration process.

All registrants will be waitlisted at the time of registration so that administration staff can verify the account as being a registered participant in Nor-West. The waitlist message states the program is full, however, that is not the case. If you are able to navigate (see) the program in our seasonal catalog selections, that program is not yet filled.

Once an administrative staff member verifies the account holder, the waitlist hold will be removed and registration will be completed. An email will be sent to the address on file notifying the recipient of the registration. *Payment must be made at that point to secure the space.*

Payments not made within three (3) days (unless a payment arrangement plan has been made) will result in a withdrawal from the program registration so that others can register.

If you are paying by check, please call the office to notify us so that we can delay the registration withdrawal.

FEES & CHARGES:

There are several types of fees & charges associated with our programs.

Registration Fee: Registration Fees apply to residents of Individual Residential Alternative (IRA), Supported Apartments, Group Residences, or those who live independently. Unfortunately, individuals who reside in state-funded settings do not qualify for respite funding. While contributions from our four municipalities supplement the fees, they do not cover the entire cost.

Venue Charge: Money needed at the program site as part of the therapeutic recreation activity. It may include admission charges, tickets, user fees, meals, beverages, or snacks. **All consumers (regardless of waiver status) need to pay Venue charges.** Typically, this means bringing cash to the program and paying venue charges directly to the commercial establishment. Pre-purchased tickets generally must be paid in advance of the event. There are no refunds for pre-purchased tickets.

Transportation Fee: Transportation Fees apply to those in an IRA, Supported Apartment, Group Residence, or living independently and must be paid at the time of registration for transportation in Community Pass or within 3 business days if paying by cash or check.

OPWDD Liability of Services Regulations: The *Liability for Services Regulations*, which explain how OPWDD services are paid and authorizes Nor-West to collect funds as a provider in the event we cannot bill for services. The form is a one-time notification. Most participants at Nor-West have a form on file. If you are unsure about the status of the authorization, please contact the Director. Nor-West will be adding the notice of Liability to the Community Pass platform in the future to reduce paper record keeping. At that time, everyone must electronically sign the liability notice notification acknowledging receipt of the information.

Participants in arrears: Participants with outstanding balances should contact the Director to establish a payment plan. Participants in arrears who HAVE NOT established payment plans with Nor-West will not be allowed to register for future program sessions until their balance has been paid in full.

Refund Policy: If a program is canceled in its entirety during a specific session, a full refund will be issued as an account credit for future use *unless otherwise specified*.

If certain program dates within a session are canceled due to inclement weather, facility closing, or other issues, we will attempt to "make up" the dates at the end of the session. If this is not possible, we will issue pro-rated program enrollment credits based on the number of sessions missed.

If a participant cannot attend for an extended period (three or more weeks) due to ILLNESS, providers can request a pro-rated refund in writing with an accompanying letter from a physician.

PARTICIPANT ELIGIBILITY:

Nor-West programs are designed for individuals ages 8 through adulthood who have recreational needs not met by the traditional municipal recreation departments in their community. Due to the nature of our funding, we are mandated to serve those individuals who have **developmental disabilities**. Individuals must be deemed eligible for services by OPWDD. Information about eligibility and OPWDD services can be found on their website, Front Door | Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (ny.gov)

If you are already enrolled in the HCBS Medicaid Waiver and want to join Nor-West programs, specific documentation is required before starting. Nor-West programs are considered Respite, and Nor-West needs to be included in your Lifeplan in Section IV. Your Care Manager can assist with the process. Individuals may not start programs until all required documentation is properly submitted by Care Manager or Parent and an intake meeting with Nor-West administrative staff has occurred.

To continue receiving our services, we need annual and semi-annual Lifeplan reports. We also require the Service Authorization Letter (SAL), Notice of Decision (NOD), and Level of Care and Eligibility Determination (LCED) on file. Nor-West regularly contacts Care Managers to obtain updated documentation. **Families are urged to make sure all paperwork can be freely shared with Nor-West through written consent and understand that failure to provide updated documents may lead to a suspension of program registration.**

SELF DIRECTION:

If you have self-directed services, funding must be allocated to Nor-West for respite services. Nor-West bills Medicaid directly, and our services are considered a "direct provider purchase." Adequate funds must be allocated in your self-direction budget for our services. Nor-West is required to submit monthly utilization reports for our services to your Fiscal Intermediary (FI). Please contact your broker to ensure that funds are properly allocated to Nor-West. Please note: Nor-West cannot provide services to participants who run out of funding during the budget year until more units are allocated or the budget rolls over into a new year.

PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY AND STAFFING RATIOS:

Generally, our youth programs are staffed at a 5:1 participant-to-staff ratio, and our adult programs employ an 8:1 ratio. We recognize that some participants require additional staffing to achieve success in our programs, and we will try to accommodate their needs IF staffing is available and program/bus space is available.

Intensive Supports: Sometimes participants require a 1:1 level of support based upon the following:

- Elopement (running away) from the program room or area;
- Physical safety of themselves or others in the program
- Behaviors that cause frequent disruption of the program or others in attendance

If we determine that a participant requires a 1:1 staffing ratio due to any of the above situations, the parent/guardian would need to provide a 1:1 aide. Nor-West cannot guarantee this accommodation for all scheduled programs (i.e., venues requiring ticketed attendance or exceeding bus capacity).

Unfortunately, we cannot accommodate individuals who have the following issues:

- Physical assaulting behavior or biting that cannot be curbed
- Invasive medical protocols or nursing assistance
- Require administration of any medications (daily, PRN, or rescue) by Nor-West staff
- Frequent seizures or other recurring medical conditions/issues
- Incontinence with no provisions for diapers or pull-ups

Please note that some Nor-West programs may require participants to navigate or be exposed to elements that are beyond our control. These elements might not be suitable for all participants. However, in such cases, we will make accommodations if they are available. Examples of such elements include: climbing stairs, walking long distances, extended waiting in lines, exposure to varying temperatures and weather conditions, animal encounters, strobe lights, smoke, loud sounds or music, and large crowds. Please be aware that Nor-West reserves the right to limit participation in any program or trip based on safety concerns for the individual or the group as a whole and available staffing.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS POLICY:

Nor-West conducts training programs throughout the year for Special Olympics events. The Nor-West Special Olympic program is made up of two categories: Team (Competitive) and Skills Group. Athletes will practice and compete in an appropriate division at Special Olympic competitions. Athletes ready and capable of competitive play will be selected for Team competitions. Those who require additional training in team concepts will be placed into the Skills Group.

Special Olympics of New York requires varying staff ratios (coach: athlete) depending on the event registration. Nor-West will make every effort to register all athletes into the appropriate competition; however, if staffing ratios cannot be maintained, then athlete moves from one group to another for competition registration may need to be made.

Athletes who train with Nor-West as part of the Team (Competitive) group leading up to competition dates are expected to compete with Nor-West at Special Olympics competitions. Athletes should make every effort to attend the competitions; the team depends on athlete participation.

*Note: Participants must have a current Special Olympics Medical, Athlete Release, and Communicable Disease Waiver on file at the Nor-West office. Special Olympics will not allow athletes to participate without current forms on file. *Special Olympics has implemented an online registration program. All athletes will be required to register in their new platform beginning in September 2025.*

ROTARY COMMUNITY CORPS OF NOR-WEST POLICY:

The Rotary Club of Cortlandt Manor and Nor-West RSS have collaborated to create the Rotary Community Corps (RCC) of Nor-West. Nor-West participants can develop a sense of community and satisfaction in helping others through volunteer work sponsored by the RCC of Nor-West. In general, RCCs are groups of non-Rotarians dedicated to service projects in their communities. An RCC is sponsored by the local Rotary club which provides oversight and assistance in planning and implementing service projects. Nor-West provides the meeting space, dates, and supervision for the group during monthly meetings to facilitate the group's planning and implementing the projects chosen by the RCC of Nor-West membership. Nor-West participants who sign up for the RCC of Nor-West should be aware of the commitment to volunteering and project work that is not part of the monthly meetings. Often, there will be additional dates and responsibilities outside of the Nor-West calendar of programs. *Participant families and caregivers should be aware*, these additional events are **not part of Nor-West's programming and will not be staffed as such**. RCC events may conflict with Nor-West programs at times. Communication and coordination with the event staff about length of time, duties, etc., before RCC members commit to attending or are dropped off for events is strongly encouraged.

ABUSE PREVENTION:

Nor-West is committed to **zero-tolerance of abuse in any form**. Included in the definition of abuse are acts of: physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, seclusion, inappropriate use of time out or restraints, emotional and psychological abuse, mistreatment, and aversive conditioning. Also included in defined abuse is the failure to report any incident of abuse. Verbal altercations, threats, bullying, cyber-bullying, and virtual forms of communication (emails, texts, Direct Messages [DMs], social media posts, chatrooms, forums, etc.) constituting abuse will also not be tolerated. Incidences of any of the above behaviors between participants, depending on severity, could result in suspension or termination of services.

All Nor-West staff are hired only after a series of background screenings. Nor-West Staff are trained annually in identifying and reporting abuse. Nor-West staff annually review and sign the **Code of Conduct for Custodians of People with Special Needs**. All Nor-West Staff are mandated reporters under New York State law. Anyone who feels they have witnessed abuse can make a report to the **Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs**.

RESTROOM SUPERVISION POLICY:

We serve a wide range of ability levels in our programs. All Nor-West participants must be able to toilet independently. We understand some of our participants may require support with toileting in limited circumstances. Our programs operate in public buildings, schools, and recreation centers, and the general public often has access to the restrooms that we use. We need to protect our participants in public restrooms while at the same time avoiding placing our staff in a potentially compromising situation where they are alone.

With this in mind, we have established the following policies regarding supervision/assistance in restrooms:

1. Adult and older teen participants who are ambulatory and verbal with mild cognitive impairments can go unescorted to the restroom.
2. All participants under 14 will be escorted by one staff to the restroom. Single staff members will visually check the restroom for other users and conditions of facilities as the participant enters, but will wait outside the room for the participant.
3. Any participant who requires physical assistance due to incontinence (e.g., diaper change, soiled clothes, etc.) in the restroom will always be accompanied by two staff members.
4. In situations where one staff member needs to check on a participant in the restroom, they will use our "15-second rule." They will enter the restroom and ask the participant if they need

assistance, remaining for no more than 15 seconds. If they require assistance for any reason, the staff member will leave to secure a second staff member to assist in the restroom.

PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARY POLICY:

All staff employed by Nor-West are expected to maintain professional, ethical boundaries with individuals receiving services, in compliance with Nor-West policies, the OPWDD **Code of Conduct for Custodians of People with Special Needs** and the **Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs** regulations. Staff must never exploit the trust and dependence of the participants of our programs. In order to maintain professional boundaries with participants, Nor-West strongly discourages relationships between staff members and participants outside of Nor-West programming without the written consent of parents/guardians, including: electronic communications, paid waiver services outside of Nor-West (i.e. community habilitation), and transportation in personal vehicles.

MEDICATION ADMINISTRATION:

Nor-West does not employ a medical professional, and the staff are not Approved Medication Administration Personnel (AMAP) certified. Therefore, we cannot administer medication at our programs. Participants requiring medication while at our programs will need to self-administer, or caregivers should plan to administer medications before/after programs.

TRANSPORTATION:

Please Note: Transportation sign up - All Transportation for weekly programming is listed in Community Pass as a distinct program. Participants must sign up for program transportation separately in the seasonal catalog. Sign up for transportation will become available once a participant has signed up for a program that offers transportation. Transportation forms will be sent out only to individuals requesting transportation after the transportation routes with bus stops and times have been created.

Transportation routes will be created based on the registrations on a first-come, first-served basis. We will close transportation when either vehicle capacity is reached OR the route time from first pick-up to the program site reaches 75 minutes. We will not allocate a vehicle to any program if there are fewer than three requests for transportation, and we may not use a particular stop if there is minimal request. Unfortunately, we cannot provide transportation outside of our catchment area.

In certain situations, home pick-up/drop-off for participants may be accommodated, depending upon the route, time of day, and home location. Please contact the Director to discuss possible arrangements.

Nor-West vehicles are equipped with video cameras as part of our risk management protocols. Anyone boarding a Nor-West bus will be videotaped from multiple angles so that the Nor-West administration can review footage as needed.

Nor-West staff cannot transport participants in their personal vehicles without prior signed consent from the participant's parents/legal guardians. Nor-West does not insure any transportation other than while riding on board Nor-West fleet vehicles.

PARATRANSIT / MEDICAL TAXI POLICY:

Nor-West fully supports participants using paid transportation to access our programs to live and travel as independently as possible. Participants who utilize the Bee-Line Paratransit or private medical taxi services, should take care not to arrive too early or depart too late from the set program times. Paratransit in particular has a 30-minute window on either side of the scheduled ride time. Scheduled times should always be set (at minimum) for arrival 15 minutes AFTER program start times and 15 minutes PRIOR to program end times. Please **do not** set times for actual program start and end times.

All paid private transportation services should only be *utilized for site-based programs where the program will remain on site for the duration of the program.* **Participants should never use these services to arrive at a Nor-West bus stop in case of arrival after the bus has departed.** The Nor-West bus will remain at a stop for 5 minutes before departing to the next stop. If there is no ride for a participant at a bus stop on a return trip, the person will remain on the bus with Nor-West staff until the bus returns to the office where pick up can occur.

All Paratransit riders who attend Nor-West are required to have a permission slip on file in the Nor-West office acknowledging the possibility of being dropped off well before programming begins and the parent/guardian/caregiver being aware of that possibility and the lack of Nor-West staff availability outside of program hours.

At Nor-West, we are committed to treating all participants with the utmost respect and dignity. This commitment extends to individuals of all races, religions, national origins, creeds, ages, ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and disabilities.