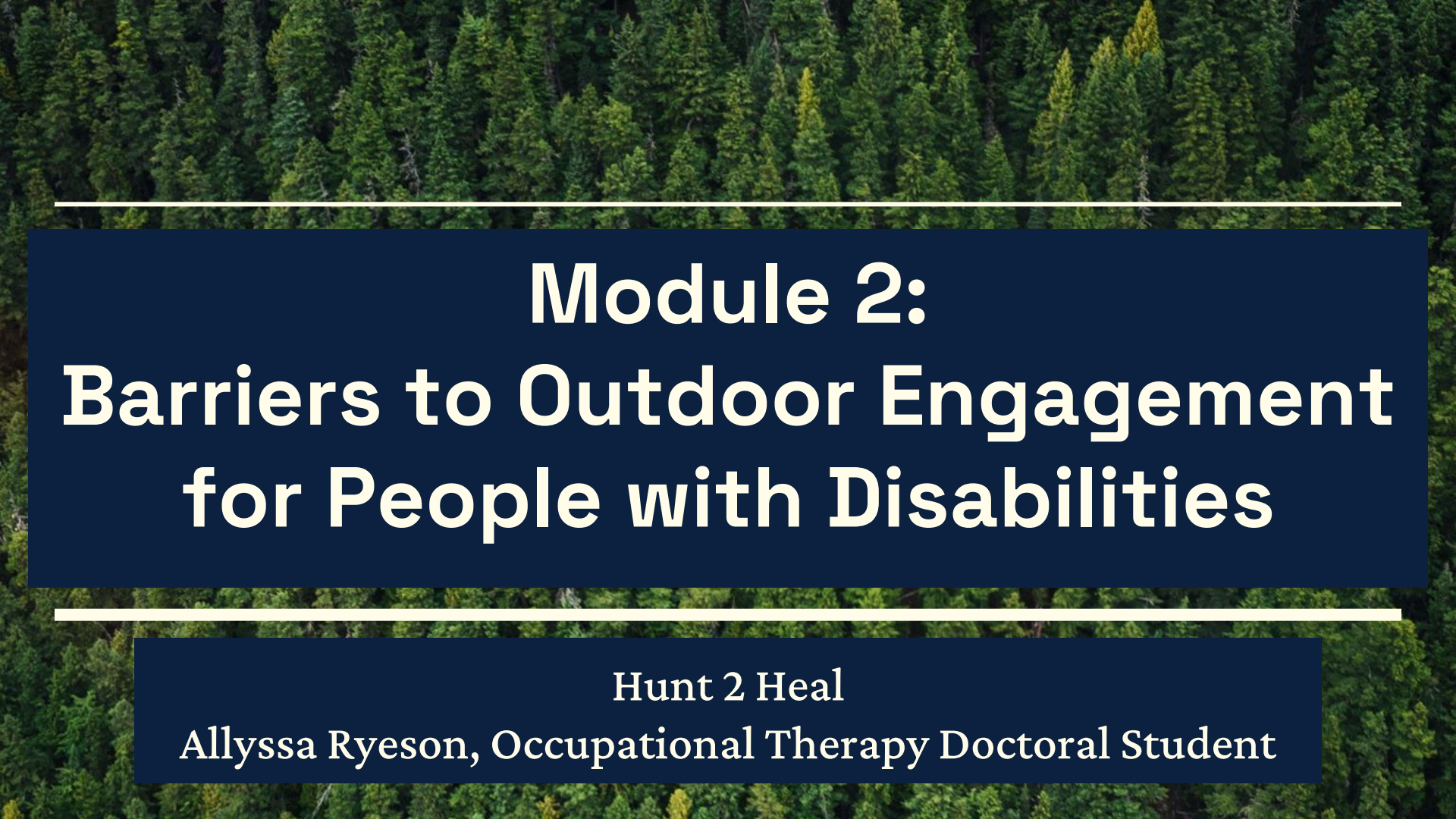
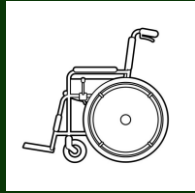




Module 2: Barriers to Outdoor Engagement for People with Disabilities

Hunt 2 Heal
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Physical Barriers



Physical barriers are among the primary reasons individuals with disabilities are unable to engage in outdoor activities and sports they once enjoyed. At Hunt 2 Heal, our mission is to break down these barriers and help turn outdoor dreams into reality. However, there are certain physical challenges that, despite our best efforts, remain a part of daily life for those with disabilities.

Fatigue & Pain

While fatigue and pain are experienced by everyone, individuals with physical disabilities often face them more frequently, intensely, and at an earlier age. Engaging in strenuous or out of the norm activities can exacerbate these symptoms, making them more pronounced.

(Ability Centre, 2022)

Obesity

Individuals with physical disabilities are at a higher risk of being overweight or obese, often due to a more sedentary lifestyle. This not only limits their ability to participate in outdoor activities but may also present additional challenges for you as a volunteer when providing assistance.

Solution

It's important to remember that each person is unique and will experience physical barriers in their own way. Many individuals are accustomed to navigating these challenges and may not openly express when they are struggling. Keep this in mind and approach each person with empathy and understanding.

Environmental Barriers

Climate

Equipment

Snow, mud, uneven terrain, etc.
makes chair use more difficult.

SCI, CVA, and other neurological disorders can impair the body's ability to regulate temperature, with these challenges being exacerbated in extreme weather conditions.

For individuals with reduced sensation, it is crucial to ensure they are dressed appropriately for the weather conditions.

Terrain

Remember that participants will be using H2H equipment, which may differ significantly from their own and could be uncomfortable at times. Keep this in mind and be ready to offer assistance whenever needed.

Psychological Barriers

Negative Past Experiences:

A key reason people with physical disabilities avoid adaptive sports programs is the lack of sufficient knowledge, empathy, and support/encouragement from staff members they experienced previously (Derakhshan et al., 2024; Iverson et al., 2021; Lape et al., 2018).

Depression and Mental Health:

Depression is the most prevalent secondary condition linked to physical disabilities. Research indicates that individuals with physical disabilities are up to 10 times more likely to experience depression compared to those without (BrainsWay, 2025).

Fear:

The factors discussed above contribute to a sense of fear among people with physical disabilities when it comes to trying new activities. This fear is often linked to concerns about their abilities, potential complications related to their disability (such as bowel or bladder issues), and even the prospect of handling and shooting a firearm.

As volunteers, it is essential to recognize the significant impact you have on the participants throughout the weekend program. Understanding the factors outlined above is key, and it's important to keep them in mind when engaging with participants.

Benefits of Outdoor Participation

Attention Restoration Theory:

Connecting with nature offers more than just enjoyment; it provides individuals with a chance to relax, reflect, and rejuvenate. This time spent outdoors can help reduce mental fatigue, enhancing focus and overall efficiency. Living with a disability can be both stressful and exhausting, especially when individuals are unable to engage in activities they once deeply enjoyed. Reconnecting with nature has profound and lasting benefits across all areas of life, including school, work, and beyond.

(R. Kaplan & S. Kaplan, 1989)

- Enhanced outcomes for clients in their medical rehabilitation, boosted self-esteem, and greater overall inclusion of individuals with disabilities in society (Duvalla et al., 2021).
- Enhanced social integration, greater life satisfaction, and a higher likelihood of returning to employment (Lape et al., 2018).
- Improved mental health and well-being driven by elevated mood and increased relaxation (Derakhshan et al., 2024).
- Greater levels of growth and accomplishment (Derakhshan et al., 2024).

Benefits of Engagement at the Lodge

Belonging
Community
Improved Mental Health

Individuals with disabilities face unique challenges daily, which can often lead to feelings of isolation. Engaging in social outings with both like-minded individuals and those from different backgrounds fosters a sense of belonging, and has the potential to alleviate symptoms of depression. This can also help to increase self-confidence and foster a more positive outlook on their life for long lasting effects (Lape et al., 2018).

Many of the most meaningful connections and moments for our participants happen around the bonfire or at the lodge table. As a volunteer, it's essential that you remain dedicated to nurturing this sense of community at Hunt 2 Heal throughout the weekend programs. Your involvement plays a key role in creating those impactful experiences.

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