

Narrative Statement – Next Steps of O’Connor Foundation, Willow Springs, IL

Next Steps of O’Connor Foundation is a non-profit out-patient physical therapy and exercise facility devoted to the rehabilitation and overall wellness of people living with paralysis. In 2004, two years after suffering a debilitating neck injury that rendered him a quadriplegic, Jon O’Connor created Next Steps of O’Connor Foundation as a 501(c)(3) organization and opened a small gym facility to provide progressive methods and treatments for post-injury rehabilitation. Next Steps is devoted to offering patients living with paralysis or other neurological disorders an exercise/rehabilitation facility that will aid them in taking their next step towards a more functional, independent, and healthy lifestyle. Next Steps is also committed to supporting the advancement of scientific research that will aid in the treatment of spinal cord injury.

With the burden of rehabilitation shifting to the outpatient setting, Next Steps offers a unique fusion of physical therapists, physical therapist assistants and personal trainers working closely together to provide cutting-edge, innovative, and aggressive state-of-the-art treatments for people living with paralysis. Our staff, programs and equipment provide an enthusiastic environment for patient achievement in meeting functional therapeutic goals and overall health improvements in cardio-pulmonary functions, spasticity and bone density.

Neurological conditions devastate not only one’s physical abilities, but too often the financial conditions of their families. To help offset out-of-pocket costs, Next Steps provides both financial assistance to qualifying individuals as well as low cost group programs. Our standard cash pay rate is \$90 per hour for Neuro Adaptive Fitness and Wellness sessions with a certified personal trainer and is already significantly discounted from an industry standard rate of \$150 per hour at “traditional” therapy clinics. Additionally, financial aid is given to patients who demonstrate financial need based upon the completion of the financial assistance forms available at the Next Steps office and are evaluated for their unique situations. Aid is given between a 15% discount from the cash rate of \$90 per hour to a full 100% discount. Disability affecting employment, medical costs and lack of a support network put people in devastating positions and the fifteen years that Next Steps has operated has taught us that our facility often offers the only hope and progress they have in their lives.

Funds received from the Paralysis Recovery Foundation could be used for:

- a. Expanding the personal financial scholarship program at Next Steps: Many of the patients and clients of Next Steps lack sufficient funds to participate in long term recovery programs. Support from the Paralysis Recovery Foundation will allow participants to add additional therapy days to their current program so that they can continue to see improvements in both functional gains and overall well-being.
- b. Developing low cost alternative programs for health/fitness/overall well-being improvement: Next Steps is developing group exercise programs to provide low-cost alternative options for our clients and patients. Our current model for adaptive exercise group classes is based on a donation-driven fee structure in which participants determine the class fee they can afford to pay. Group classes are schedule during our normal operational hours but are limited in size due to space constraints. Funding from the Paralysis Recovery Foundation will allow Next Steps to refresh and update unused office space at our current location with a dedicated group exercise room, classes can be offered more frequently, and additional class offerings can be created.

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1. Investing in new cutting-edge equipment (evidence based that is available in the market.

Next Steps is devoted to researching and investing in cutting-edge technology that will help our patients and clients in their recovery process. Funding from the Paralysis Recovery Foundation can be used to support evidence-based research projects on new technological developments in activity-based therapies.

2. Research and Continuing Education:

The Next Steps team strives to make an impact on neuro-rehabilitation, health, and fitness sciences by promoting the most effective evidence-based activity-based therapies to clients, colleagues and ourselves. Funding from the Paralysis Recovery Foundation can help the team attend continuing education symposiums, summits and clinics and incorporate the new knowledge into our programs to get the maximum possible benefit for our clients.

– Mickey Shah, Director of Operations, Next Steps of O'Connor Foundation