

## PATH Intl. Undergoes Its Own Accreditation

### CREDENTIALING

#### ACCREDITING THE PATH INTL. REGISTERED THERAPEUTIC RIDING CERTIFICATION

Most PATH Intl. members would certainly be able to pass a test if defining the following three words were on flash cards: Accreditation, Standards and Certification. But PATH Intl. has undertaken an initiative that somewhat redefines these familiar terms in a very exciting and progressive way, once again setting a precedent and blazing a new trail in equine-assisted activities and therapies (EAAT). The association is undergoing an accreditation

is the result of a natural progression of events and a powerful step toward continuing to raise the bar for the professional delivery of services to participants in EAAT. Feedback from thousands of stakeholders (including members, partners, donors, medical professionals, PATH Intl. Board of Trustees and Staff) went into the creation of the association's current strategic plan. This data reflected a great desire for enhanced quality control among PATH Intl. Member Centers

#### Credentialing

We are recognized by the EAAT industry, health and wellness community and the public for our excellent and rigorous credentialing in order to enhance the professional credibility of individuals and centers.

#### Objective 1:

Become an accredited credentialing program that validates the quality of our standards, certification and accreditation.

#### Objective 2:

Evolve to meet the credentialing needs of the industry.

#### Objective 3:

Increase value of credentialing programs that results in highly trained certified professionals and accredited centers credentialed by PATH Intl.

#### Objective 4:

Increase value of advancing through credentialing programs that results in a successful career path and sustainable business.

As the industry becomes more scrutinized due to the increase in visibility, legitimizing the industry and profession has escalated in importance. By demonstrating that

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process of its own for the PATH Intl. Registered Therapeutic Riding Instructor Certification that will be based on meeting and exceeding certification industry standards. The target completion date is 2019.

Applying for this accreditation

and Certified Professionals and the ongoing challenge of the professionals being able to make a living wage.

These and many other factors resulted in Goal One of the strategic plan and its objectives:

a PATH Intl. Registered Therapeutic Riding Certification, and the testing that leads to the certification, meet certification industry standards, the public as well as potential instructors, may rest assured the process meets and exceeds best business practices. PATH Intl. Certified Professionals have been demonstrating their acumen and value for decades. A credentialed professional certification becomes far more meaningful to medical professionals, families, institutes of higher learning and possibly insurers. In the same way most people would never go to a physician who doesn't maintain proper credentials, nor an uncertified acupuncturist, nor trust their financial well-being to a non-Certified Public Accountant (CPA), in the future even more than now, families and professionals will seek out only the services of a credentialed PATH Intl. Member Center or Instructor. PATH Intl. has chosen to raise the bar in quality in credentialing and will do so by adopting independent, third-party benchmarks and best practices. This is great news for the industry and EAAT participants!

## The Process

After the strategic goals and objectives were approved by the PATH Intl. Board of Trustees, based on a yearlong process of gathering member and stakeholder feedback, staff began laying out a project plan.

In order to meet the goal of being recognized for excellence in credentialing and the objective of becoming an accredited credentialing program, PATH Intl. will be seeking third party accreditation from the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA, <http://www.credentialingexcellence.org/ncca>). The NCCA's Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs were the first standards developed by the credentialing

industry for professional certification programs. NCCA is the accrediting body of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE).

The PATH Intl. Registered Therapeutic Riding Instructor Certification will be the first accredited certification in EAAT. In the future, the association would like to structure all its certifications to align with NCCA standards. This accreditation will bring value to instructors and member centers by providing confidence that the credential represents the excellence of a high quality instructor. It will ensure employers and the public that PATH Intl. Certified Instructors meet and demonstrate a widely accepted standard base of knowledge and skill and will demonstrate to the public accountability to maintain a set of standards in the field of EAAT to provide safe and effective services.

An independent firm that specializes in helping organizations accredit their certifications was contracted to conduct a needs assessment that compared how PATH Intl. certifies individuals within the NCCA standards framework. The result of this assessment showed the association has a lot of work to do in order to meet the rigorous standards.

Since then, PATH Intl. has begun laying out the project plan and looking at modifications necessary to become compliant. Moving forward, there will be one major study and three major changes to the current organization. The major study is a job task analysis to determine what the daily job function is for the certified registered therapeutic riding instructor in order to design a valid certification test. The three organizational changes include: separating membership from certification so membership is no longer required to be certified; no longer requiring only PATH Intl. education as a requirement for certification; and forming



**PATH**  
INTERNATIONAL

Professional Association of Therapeutic  
Horsemanship International

## Benefits of credentialing to PATH Intl. Certified Instructors and Member Centers

- Elevates status and prestige of credential holders
- Improves reputation of credential holders
- Promotes continuous improvement of credential holders
- Increases ability of credential holders to help others
- Safeguards the public
- Expands the opportunities of credential holders
- Provides justification for investment in programs, processes, systems or infrastructure
- Helps employers as a recruitment or retention tool
- Serves as recognition and reward for performing to standards
- Provides a sense of achievement
- Provides justification for investment in professional development activities
- Promotes ethical conduct
- Helps ensure accountability
- Supports compliance with standards

an independent, public-focused, governance body that focuses on credentialing.

The job task analysis is already in process and results will be available soon. Subject matter experts who represent diversity in gender, age, years of experience, geographic location, certifications and job titles have been assembled to define the domains and major skill areas.

The next step of this analysis is a survey being sent to every PATH Intl. Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor. The collected data will provide the necessary detail and validation of what is expected from a newly certified registered level therapeutic riding instructor. The job task analysis will be revisited every five years going forward.

Next, organizational changes will be necessary for compliance. An initial draft of what this might look like was presented to both the PATH Intl. Board of Trustees in June 2015 and to the volunteer leadership at the 2015 PATH Intl. Conference. The first change is that membership will no longer be required for certification. The potential risks to membership revenue are being assessed. The plan is to increase member value so that every certified individual continues to recognize the benefits and renews his or her PATH Intl. membership.

The second change will be that education provided by PATH Intl. will not be the only education requirement for certification. This is a sound requirement in that however a candidate chooses to educate his/

herself to prepare for the certification exam, that education should indeed be independent of the testing. In the future PATH Intl. will continue to expand its library of educational resources, including its delivery. The association remains committed to providing education for those topics the organization is uniquely qualified to provide. PATH Intl.–produced and delivered education will simply no longer be required for someone to take the certification exam.

Another important piece of this requirement is that the educators cannot also be the individuals conducting the certification test. This means a restructuring of current PATH Intl. Onsite Workshops and Certifications. For instance, the organization must look at how to restructure so that PATH Intl. trained faculty and member centers can continue to provide valuable education for potential certificants, but the education providers will not then on behalf of PATH Intl. be administering the exam to those same potential certificants. The future certification exam will be entirely separate from the education component.

The third change will be the creation of an independent credentialing organization within PATH Intl. that will have autonomy in running the certification programs. Certification organizations are rooted in protecting and serving the public, while membership organizations serve a select group of individuals or profession. It can be difficult to effectively serve the needs of two

varying populations. Therefore, certification organizations need to have the autonomy and independence to focus on serving the public. While some organizations spin off new, separately incorporated certification bodies, this is not a hard requirement, and PATH Intl. has chosen to keep the credentialing arm of the organization within the current structure. Think of it as a dotted line between the PATH Intl. Board of Trustees and the credentialing arm. This will certainly require a revision to the current staff and volunteer organizational charts. This may also require a bylaw change that the membership will vote on at the 2016 PATH Intl. Annual Meeting.

These changes can be thought of as the building of a firewall between PATH Intl. and the association's certification program to ensure that the certification program is operating in the best interests of the public.

All the answers to all the questions haven't yet been discovered, but association leadership is confident that all issues can be worked through. Every member can rest assured that the organization will be transparent in its approach, that member input is valued and welcome, and that the final goal is a stronger credential for PATH Intl. Certified Instructors.

PATH Intl. will join more than 270 NCCA accredited programs that are dedicated to public protection and excellence in certification and that certify individuals in a wide-range of professions and occupations including nurses, financial professionals, counselors, respiratory therapists, emergency technicians and more.

The Commission for Case Manager Certification recently received its re-accreditation of its CCM® credential from the NCCA and reported: "For the Commission, this means it has renewed its place among an elite group of healthcare certification organizations accredited by ICE. For case managers this means

## JOB TASK ANALYSIS SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

Jen Donahue, PATH Intl. Certified Advanced Instructor, Evaluator, TX  
Sarah English, PATH Intl. Certified Advanced Instructor, TN  
Ciana Gingola, PATH Intl. Certified Registered Instructor, CO  
Meggan Hill-McQueeney, PATH Intl. Certified Master Instructor, Evaluator, WY/IL  
Bill Lavin, PATH Intl. Certified Registered Instructor, Site Visitor, OH  
Katy Mead, PATH Intl. Certified Advanced Instructor, Evaluator, TX  
Kitty Stalsburg, PATH Intl. Certified Master Instructor, Evaluator, CT  
Amy Vessa, PATH Intl. Certified Registered Instructor, CO

the Commission's certification, the CCM, demonstrates an individual's professional competence, enhances their employability and career advancement and ultimately protects the public."

## The Future

It is not the intent, nor foreseen, that there will be an increase in the cost of membership or certification. It is not the intent to make certification harder. Nor is there the expectation that current certified instructors will have to recertify. While none of this can be 100% guaranteed at this point, and there may be unforeseen circumstances related to this process, these concerns are definitely being kept at the forefront of the planning process, and the association will do everything in its power to achieve these goals.

Stay tuned for more information. Webinars for interested members will be offered on a regular basis to provide status updates and seek feedback going forward. Updates will be offered in future issues of *PATH Intl.Strides* and the *eNews*.



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