

Circles of Support

Annual Report 2009



Aspire
OF WNY

Turning Disabilities
Into Capabilities

Circles

Circles of Support

There's a circle of support around every person Aspire serves. The circle of support helps the individual with disabilities achieve the dreams they have for their life. The circle can include family, friends, Aspire staff, and staff from other agencies and organizations related to the person's goals. With a strong circle of support, the person at the center can thrive.

In the same way, Aspire as a non-profit organization has a circle of support. It includes our staff, families of those we serve, board members, donors, supporters and members of outside organizations. We all work together to help people with disabilities live their lives to the fullest.

In difficult economic times like today, it is more important than ever for Aspire's circle of support to be strong. And indeed, we have seen the members of our circle rise to the occasion. Despite budget cuts, staff have done more with less to minimize the impact on those we serve. Board members are assuring that Aspire's senior management finds a balance between continuing quality programs while maintaining fiscal discipline.

Families are responding to our calls for political advocacy. And faithful donors are filling in the gaps and making it possible for Aspire to continue to grow.



Lennell Johnson (left) and Derek Hartley shoot hoops of a community center on the site.

On the Cover:
Angela Kaznica (center) benefits greatly from the strong support of her parents, Tony and Emily.

Telling Aspire's Stories

While Aspire has elected to find financially prudent ways to present the results of our operations over the last few years, we have insisted on a professional looking report filled with stories that tell our message for us. This year is no exception.

As a prime example of our industry-leading work in the individualized supports arena, you will read about Joe Caffery. Joe's story about how his circle of support is helping him reach lifelong goals is both inspiring and informative. In addition, the developmental disabilities field would not be where it is in New York without the work and passion of parents as advocates – individually and collectively. The Kaznica family story is a perfect representation of a caring, supportive and active family. On a side note, Aspire has aided the Developmental Disability Alliance of WNY (DDAWNY) in forming a Family Committee as it has become clear that the fiscal challenges in New York are beginning to erode the progress and promise the system once held.

Aspire is now in its third year of developing, recognizing and advancing the work of the Direct Support Professional (DSP) – the core caregiver, facilitator and advocate for the individuals we support. As a great representation of this plan, you'll read about Lennell Johnson and the bond he has formed with a handful of the individuals he serves. Be sure to also read about the successes reached by Brittany McNierney from our Center for Learning.

As is tradition, within this report Aspire also recognizes the generous giving evidenced by our many supporters – be they individuals, organizations or corporations. You truly do join us in forming a circle of support for the agency as a whole. Note the story on board member Jacob Herstek and his employer, Nixon Peabody, as wonderful examples of individual and corporate support even in these challenging times.

Thanks to each of you for your own individual show of support.

Sincerely,
Thomas Sy Thomas Andruschat
Executive Director Board Chairperson

You truly do join us in forming a circle of support for the agency as a whole.



JOE CAFFERY, age 29, says, “My dream job would be an advocate for the disabled in a hospital or nursing home.” That dream is in the works thanks to *Aspiring Choices*, a grant-funded program that provides person-centered planning. “It means the services are tailored to the individuals so the individuals don’t have to conform to the services,” he explained.

Joe has cerebral palsy, learning disabilities and is visually impaired. He is gaining computer skills at *Aspire*, where he also receives physical therapy. Meanwhile, Joe’s circle of support – which includes family and select *Aspire* employees – is working to help him experience the life he wants. “Joe has given us what he’d like his life plan to be,” said Dawn Bieniek, housing coordinator. Now the group is exploring options to fulfill Joe’s goals. As a member of *Aspire’s* Political Action Team, he’s off to a great start. “I want to help legislators understand why programs are needed,” Joe said.

HENRY WESLEY paints because it makes him feel good and strong. “My work makes others feel good, too,” he said. At 64, Henry is also writing his life story, from his earliest memories of growing up at the notorious Willowbrook State Institution until now. “I want to include my artwork in the story, because it can say more about me than words do.”

Henry, who has cerebral palsy, became an artist through *Aspire’s* *iXpress* program. Sara Baker Michalak, art facilitator, describes Henry as a contagious force who expresses life experience to the core. “His larger than life qualities emerge with bold and fresh colors, lines and forms,” she said. “The unique ways that Henry’s disability influences the manipulation of paint and pastel lends his artwork quite a distinctive character.” At *iXpress*, Henry has improved fine motor control, upper body strength and mental acuity. In addition to painting, he enjoys spending time with his wife, Jean.

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BRITTANY MCNIERNEY was bounced around from school to school. When she started at Aspire’s Center for Learning (CFL), though, her family knew it was a place where she could finally grow. “The teachers at Aspire listen to me and ask me what works,” said Brittany’s mom, Lisa Delaney. “They incorporate my ideas into her behavior plan. The whole team is just phenomenal.”

Age 20, Brittany has Down syndrome and Triple X syndrome. The CFL provides her with the services and therapies she needs to succeed in a more personal learning environment. Her teacher, Crystal Szatkowski, has high expectations as she looks to Brittany’s graduation next year. “The team is working hard to prepare Brittany for a work skills program, because she can do so much,” said Crystal. “She helps her peers and can always make everyone laugh. She also teaches them her secret handshake!”



For **LENNELL JOHNSON**, work is more than just a job. As a direct support professional at Aspire’s community-based day habilitation site in Cheektowaga, Lennell enjoys building relationships with the people he serves, such as Derek Hartley. “The site is smaller so you get to really know the people you work with,” Lennell said. “The participants tend to come to me for many things. We get to spend a lot of time with each other.”

Less than 20 people attend the site. Lennell feels that the resulting opportunity for stronger relationships and individualized services has brought an increase in happiness for those he works with. Lennell’s supervisor, Lisa Harrington, said that his commitment shows in his selfless attitude. “It’s not about him. It’s about the people he serves,” she said. “If there’s a way, he’s going to find it for them.”

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JACOB HERSTEK volunteers double duty. Since 2003, he's served on the Aspire Board of Directors and Foundation Board. During this time, Jacob has encouraged those around him to support Aspire – particularly his colleagues at Nixon Peabody LLP, where he is an attorney. The firm graciously shows its support by sponsoring special events and purchasing Christmas gifts for those served by Aspire.

But for Jacob, it's not enough to simply garner a donation on Aspire's behalf. Through his efforts, Nixon Peabody has become a true partner with Aspire. "My coworkers understand Aspire and have generously supported its mission," he said. "In return, one of the individuals Aspire serves came into the office for lunch and thanked us." It's those face-to-face visits that makes volunteering so rewarding for Jacob. "The most satisfaction I get as a board member is spending time with those served by Aspire. When you see the services taking place and the joy on someone's face – that's why I do it."

For **TONY AND EMILY KAZNICA**, the motto is simple. Despite the challenges of caring for a daughter with disabilities, they maintain their family unit. This has been their focus ever since a few days after the birth of Angela, when doctors discovered she had bacterial meningitis. As a child, Angela could walk and ride a bicycle. She learned how to cook and clean. But over time, the disease has caused her to lose functional ability.

Now age 38, Angela lives at an Aspire residence in Cheektowaga, where the Kaznicas say she receives services that they as parents can't provide every day. "I feel that the people she lives with and the staff are her extended family," said Emily. "Parents need to know they can put their child in a place where they can still be involved."

Continued on page 4

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State Funding Allows Aspire to Add Electronic Records

State Sen. William T. Stachowski has helped secure \$50,000 in legislative funding for the installation of an electronic health record (EHR) system at the Aspire health center. More than 2,000 individuals with developmental disabilities are treated at the center, where nearly 30,000 visits are delivered each year.

“The new electronic medical records system will save Aspire thousands of man-hours each year. I am pleased to have helped play a part in expanding efficient patient care here at Aspire,” said Stachowski. “This organization is widely recognized for its work with children and adults with developmental disabilities, and has become an intricate part of the Western New York community. This funding will play a role in ensuring successful patient care, increasing productivity and increasing the number of patients to better serve the community.”

Continued from page 3

The Kaznicas stay involved on several levels, from visiting their daughter nearly every day to helping raise funds for things like a patio. They even helped plan the construction of the Aspire residence where Angela lives.

“The Kaznicas support their daughter through being involved in the day to day operation of the residence,” added Helen Trowbridge Hanes, director of housing and residential. “And they’re not solely focused on their daughter. They are interested in the lives of the other five women who live with her. They also recognize how important the direct support professionals are in supporting their daughter.”

“Angela’s strength from within has been so powerful for us,” said Emily, who along with her husband seek to encourage other parents of children with disabilities to stay involved. “When you work together, you get things accomplished.”

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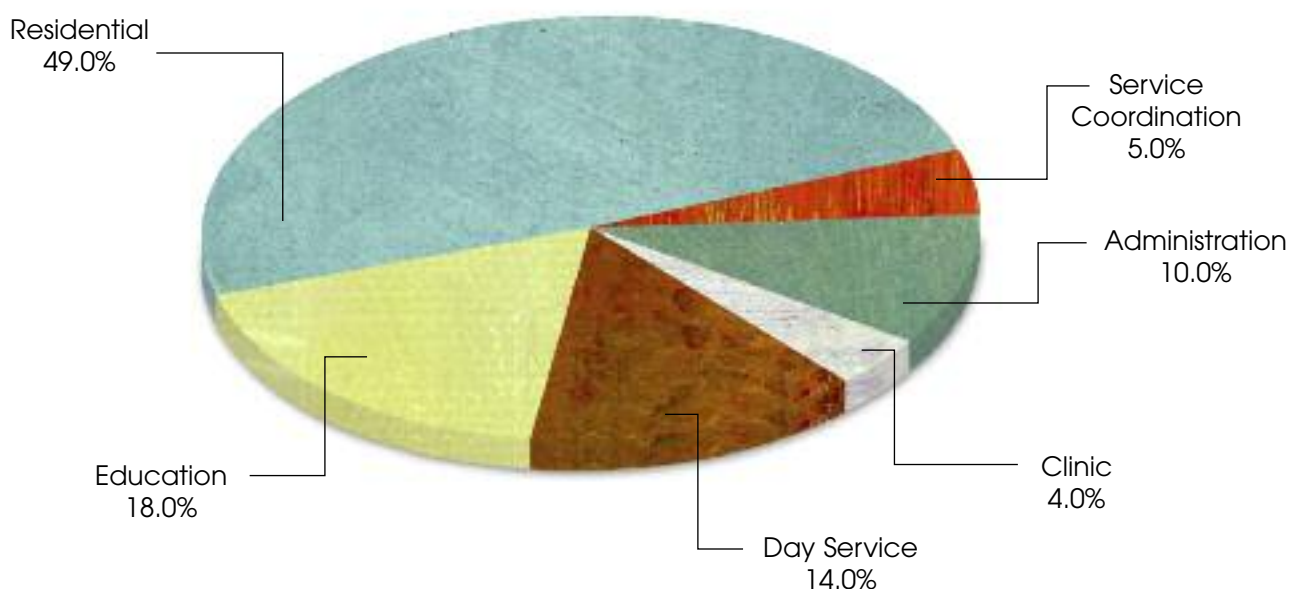
Revenue

Program Service Revenue (2) . . .	\$64,195,708
Governmental Grants	2,534,318
Fundraising	373,630
Other	615,762
Total Revenue	\$67,719,418

Expenses

Administration	10.0
Clinic	4.0
Day Service	14.0
Education	18.0
Residential	49.0
Service Coordination	5.0
Total	100.0%

(1) Unaudited
 (2) 98.9% Federal and New York State Governmental Funding



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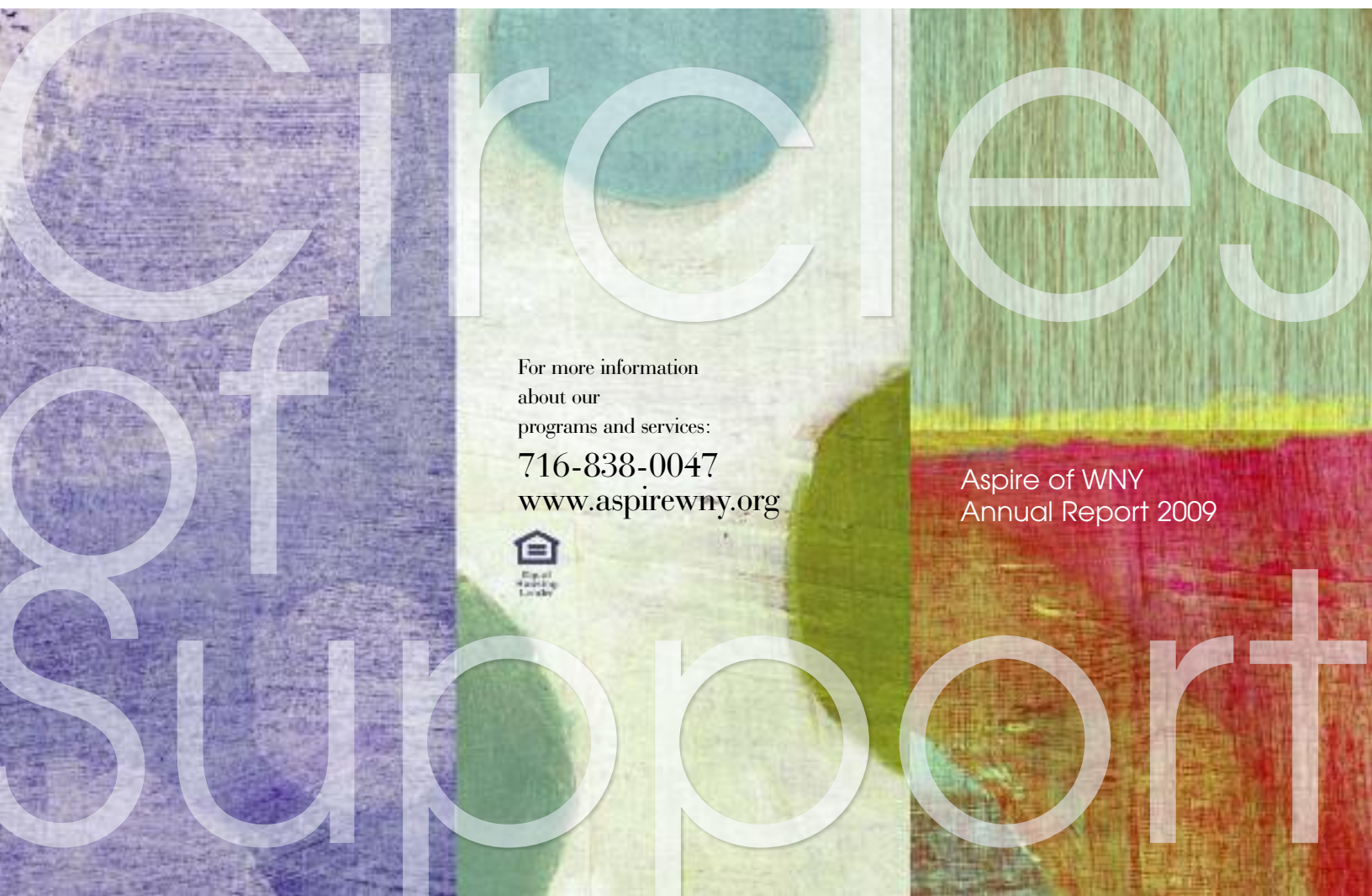


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