

2013 ANNUAL REPORT

Aspire  
of WNY



learn



work



create

# Message from the Aspire Leadership

As we enthusiastically report on the recently concluded 2013 there is much to comment on, as usual.

In May of 2013, we began the \$9.2M renovation and expansion of our educational programs on Union Road in Cheektowaga. Our excellent staff of teachers, therapists, and nurses have facilitated bright futures for 30 years in a 50+ year old elementary school. As construction advanced through a rough winter, we continued conducting a \$1.8M capital campaign as part of the funding package.

We have been so humbled by the response of our boards, employees, vendor partners, area foundations and new supporters towards this fund raising effort. To have our mission and outcomes validated by the generous gifts to this campaign is extremely rewarding. At the end of 2013, we had raised nearly \$1M of the \$1.8M goal. Your support of this campaign would be greatly appreciated (see brief article on page 3 of this report).

It seems each year on this page we comment about the unprecedented level of change occurring in our field. That pace did not slow in 2013, instead accelerating with significant input from the federal government. Aspire continued growing self-directed and individualized services, while extending person centered planning deeper into our organization. We have also begun collaborations with Niagara Cerebral Palsy and Heritage Centers through the operation of their Article 28 health clinics. We envision collaborations like these will be increasing requiring us to best respond to the challenging regulatory and reimbursement environment.

We trust you will enjoy reading about the unique and creative programs we have developed, or our partnering with others, to increase the number of high school aged students with disabilities that become gainfully employed. Both the WOW program and Project SEARCH™ had outstanding outcomes in 2013.

Our field will continue the movement of individuals from supervised living arrangements to more independent, community-based options. The Tom G. story is notable not only for the outcome but also the truly person centered process we employed to facilitate Tom's dream.

Thank you as always for your support and interests in Aspire of WNY.

Sincerely,



**Thomas Sy**  
President/CEO



**Jacob Herstek**  
Board Chairperson

## Employment Success

For several years, the ever-changing landscape of the Human Services industry has gravitated toward an employment-first philosophy. Fortunately, Aspire of WNY is ahead of the curve regarding employment and transition-based services. An examination of 2013-2014 demonstrates that Aspire's inventive solutions are giving children and adults with disabilities an opportunity to learn relevant skills that translate to the working world. The Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) recently recognized Aspire as a "high-performing" agency for its success in finding person-centered employment for individuals.

Utilizing personalized evaluations and assessments, the Individualized Career & Transition Services (ICTS) team is better prepared to administer programs, develop training plans, and find suitable employment opportunities for participants. A shining example of this creative approach is the World Of Work (WOW) Program. WOW is a job skills development program for students in their last years of high school. WOW, in



Robert Snyder works at Beechwood Continuing Care.

collaboration with participating local businesses, combines classroom work and internships to prepare students for work life. Gina Dubai, a WOW participant, made such an impression at Orchard Fresh Market that she secured permanent employment in their bakery department.

A program highlighting Aspire's leadership in evolving transition services is our partnership in Project SEARCH™, a multi-agency and local business partnership that immerses participants into the work environment. With Beechwood Continuing Care as a business partner, Aspire is collaborating with Summit Education Resources and BOCES in developing this internationally recognized transition to work program. Participants receive a combination of job skills training and work experience while at the business partner location. Robert Snyder, a Project SEARCH™ participant, was recently hired on at Beechwood.

Aspire has long recognized that focusing on students nearing their transition from high school to adult life is not enough. Doing so excludes the adult population of individuals receiving services. Aspire's Supported Employment (SEMP) team utilizes person-centered assessments to help individuals identify their goals and dreams. Self-direction is the key component to finding the right job opportunity with the proper supports. Markese Moses first learned critical job skills through volunteer opportunities before being hired at Target as a cashier. In May 2014, after only six months, Markese has earned a raise and consistently receives accolades for his attitude and performance.

While others try to keep up with the evolution of the human services industry, Aspire is poised to continue growing individualized programs and achieving successful placements by fostering the realization "one size doesn't fit all" and that those engaged in self-direction have the greatest opportunity to achieve their dreams.



## Living His Dream

For more than 10 years, Tom Gugliuzza lived at Aspire's South Park IRA. During that time, he made many friends with fellow residents, staff, and people in the community while holding onto his dream of one day living independently. To prepare himself for living on his own in an apartment, Tom spent a lot of time learning and working on his independent living skills. With the help of Stacia Paluszynski and the Individualized and Customized Supports and Services Team, a plan was developed to gradually bring Tom's dream to fruition.

For Tom, having an independent living plan created was a little nerve-racking at first. However, having a strong circle of support is critical to both the individual and the plan's ultimate success. Tom's circle of support included his parents, various Aspire representatives including Clinical, Day, and Residential Services, and the CSS team; all of whom were there for Tom every step of the way.



**Top:** Tom settles into his new apartment.

**Bottom:** Tom tries adaptive skiing at Holiday Valley.

Tom has been making the most of his newly earned independence and his confidence is growing with each passing day. Making the most of new opportunities, Tom is participating in activities that he had never even considered before. At Aspire's Ski The Valley event in February at Holiday Valley, Tom tried adaptive skiing for the very first time and loved it.

Tom's mother, Lucille, spoke of his new life with some concern but also profound happiness. "At first, I was concerned about him being in his own apartment after so many years," she said. "But, I couldn't be happier for him now that he is living his dream. He is right where he wants to be."

Stacia recalls the steps taken to help Tom learn to be independent and achieve his goals, "There was a lot of trial and error on the things which would help him increase his independence. But as he achieved them, he was just so proud, especially about learning to do his own laundry."

Once Tom felt he was ready, an apartment in Amherst was located, allowing him to live close to his family. Leaving behind his friends and South Park "family" was difficult for everyone involved.

"It wasn't easy to see Tom leave us, but we were all very pleased to see him so happy about this next chapter," explained Chris Grinsell, Team Coordinator at South Park IRA. "We care about him and have all developed a loving and caring relationship with him. He will always be a part of our family."

## Aspire's Center for Learning

Aspire is currently in the midst of the largest capital campaign in our nearly 70-year history – a \$1.8 million effort to renovate and expand our Center For Learning on Union Road in Cheektowaga. Once completed, it will be a state-of-the-art educational facility for children and young adults aged 3 to 21. We believe it will also be the envy of other school districts throughout our region.

Highlights of the project include an interior redesign and building expansion to include 16 new classrooms specifically designed to serve children with disabilities, new heating and cooling systems, additional space to house adaptive equipment, cafeteria, and auditorium for assemblies. In addition, there is infrastructure for state-of-the-art technology resources with expansion capability as new technologies become available.

To-date, Aspire has raised nearly \$1.5 million from 78 donors and a successful conclusion to the campaign is expected prior to this fall. Many thanks to those who have contributed thus far, including extraordinary gifts from Accessium Group, Inc.; The Ballow Law Firm; The James H. Cummings Foundation; Keybank; New Era Cap Co. Inc.; Parkview Health Services of New York LLC; and Rich Products Corporation among others.

We are particularly grateful to The John R. Oishei Foundation for their commitment of a \$500,000 matching grant towards the project. The John R. Oishei Foundation strives to be a catalyst for change to enhance economic vitality and quality of life for the Buffalo Niagara region through grant making, leadership, and network building. John R. Oishei, founder of Trico Products Corporation, established the Foundation in 1940.



**Top:** Space being created for the new administrative wing.

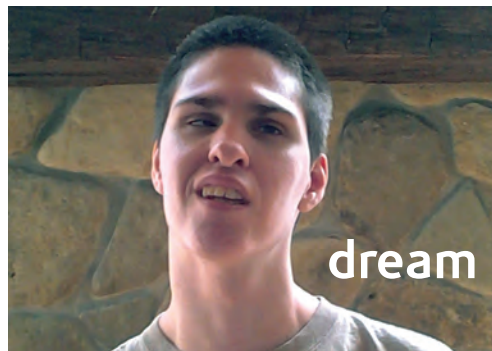
**Middle:** Foundations is being laid for the Physical Education Space.

**Bottom:** CFL students sharing their gratitude with Robert Gioia, president of The John R. Oishei Foundation.

# Navigating His Future

When Cody Hemmis and his family approached Aspire in the summer of 2013, he had not yet been approved for services through the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD). They had previously tried to access needed services while with a different agency and were unsuccessful. A family friend told them that they should contact Aspire of WNY.

Kelly Anderson, a Medicaid Service Coordinator (MSC) for Aspire, met with Cody and his family and explained that New York State has a new process for acquiring services through OPWDD, called Front Door. She further documented Cody's eligibility through additional testing and resubmitted his request to OPWDD. In August of 2013, Kelly referred Cody to Front Door for MSC, Residential, and Transition services. On September 3rd, Cody received approval and his journey began to find the right combination of services that would allow him to achieve his greatest level of independence.



Cody has thrived since Aspire has been helping navigate his future.

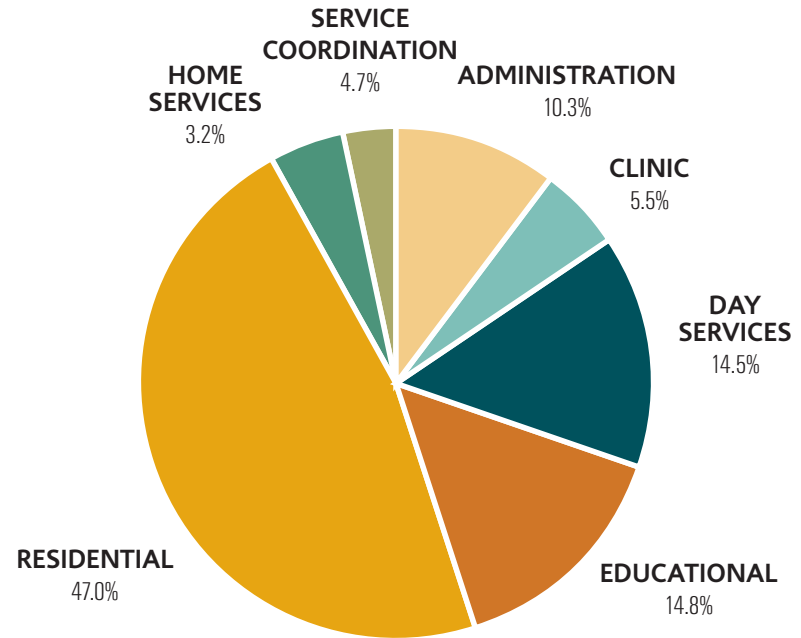
Cody, a student at Batavia School for the Blind, was interested in finding weekend Community Habilitation services and to find an appropriate residential living arrangement. He also wanted to prepare himself for a job someday. The Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped (CBVH) determined that Cody would need additional skills and independent living training before he would be ready to get a job.

In February of this year, Cody's MSC team received a break when an unexpected opening occurred at the Chautauqua IRA in Lakewood, NY. The residents at this IRA were all males, similar in age to Cody and it appeared to be a great fit for him. Cody, while initially reluctant to move into a new surrounding, received great encouragement from Aspire Team Leader Rachelle Nolan, who helped Cody to understand that this was a perfect first step toward learning the skills necessary to one day live independently.

Now Cody can hardly contain his excitement, "It's so cool here. They let me be who I want to be and they help me when I need it!"

In March, Cody's circle of support began the process of planning for the development of his Consolidated Supports and Services (CSS) plan. Ultimately, the goal for his CSS plan is to help him become oriented to and gain mobility in the community. By developing a variety of independent living skills, and providing him with the right combination of experiences and job skills development, Cody will be prepared for his future entrance into the job market and potentially his own apartment.

"Cody is a remarkable young man," explains Gail Saunders, Aspire Home Services Director. "He has great dreams for his future and is working hard to realize them. We're so happy that he has adjusted to his new living environment and he loves being there with his new friends."



## REVENUE

Program Service Revenue <sup>2</sup>	\$64,716,150
Government Grants	\$1,678,948
Fundraising	\$826,655
Other	\$249,775

**TOTAL REVENUE ..... \$67,471,528**

<sup>1</sup> The above information was developed by management based on information in the audited financial statements.

<sup>2</sup> 98.4% Federal and New York State Governmental Funding

## EXPENSES

Administration	10.3%
Clinic	5.5%
Day Services	14.5%
Educational	14.8%
Residential	47.0%
Service Coordination	4.7%
Home Services	3.2%

**TOTAL EXPENSES ..... 100%**

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## In Memoriam

### A Poem for the Lost and Fallen

*Matt Milholland, iXpress participant*

For those who know the highest love  
They need not read on  
For these words are for the fallen  
These words are for the lost  
These words are for those who have  
not found this lotus-flower love

### INDIVIDUALS SERVED BY ASPIRE WHO PASSED AWAY IN 2013

Joseph Bradley  
Robert Charles  
Joann Craig  
Paul Czamara  
Donald Ferguson  
Karl Kaye Jr.  
Craig Latham  
Theodore Manney  
Janice Martin  
Mary Myles  
Harold Rosie  
Craig Simmons Jr.





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"Red" by iXpress artist Brett Eller

