

Aspire's Mission:

Aspire's mission is to support children and adults with developmental and similar disabilities, helping them to live their lives to the fullest by providing individualized assistance based on personal choices.

What's Inside!

Project Search™ Openings Available	1
Success Through Transition: Nick's Story	2
Technology Today – Reaching Out to the Community and Beyond	3
Celebrating the WOW Program	3
Businesses Benefit from Aspire Internship Work Programs	4

Save the Date

DDAWNY Family
Committee Meeting
7 Community Drive
Cheektowaga, NY
Third Tuesday of the Month
7:00 pm

*For more event information,
please contact Megan Babirad
at 716-505-5514 or via email at
mbabirad@aspirewny.org*

Aspire of Western New York
Address: 2356 N. Forest Road
Getzville, NY 14068
Phone: 716.505.5500
Email: info@aspirewny.org
Web: www.aspirewny.org

Aspire of WNY's Success Through Transition™

Project SEARCH™ Openings Available

For the 2013-2014 school year, a new business-driven collaboration was implemented for the very first time in Western New York. Project SEARCH™ is an international program that was started in 1996, and now operates in 42 states and four countries. Beechwood Continuing Care is the local business partner in collaboration with Erie 1 BOCES, Aspire of WNY and Summit Educational Resources. While year one was a huge success, the program is looking to grow for the 2014-2015 school year.

Project SEARCH™ combines real-life work experience with training in employment and independent living skills. Program interns are immersed in a series of job rotations allowing them to seek out positions that best suit their interests and skills. They are fully supported with accommodations, adaptations, and on-the-job coaching. Upon completion of the internship, they may have an opportunity to receive a job offer from Beechwood Continuing Care.



Project SEARCH participants are ready to work at Beechwood Continuing Care.

“The fact that Project SEARCH™ students and Beechwood staff are so comfortable working together validates this partnership,” explains Kathy Simme, HR Director, Beechwood Continuing Care.

There are still a limited number of intern opportunities for students between the ages of 18-21 who are eligible for ACCESS-VR and/or OPWDD services. If your student has a current Individual Education Plan (IEP), it is not too late to have it amended to include Project SEARCH™ for the 2014-2015 school year. If you are interested in a placement in Project SEARCH™, contact your local school district's Committee on Special Education (CSE) Chairperson or your Medicaid Service Coordinator (MSC).



“Project SEARCH™ has given my son the opportunity to use the skills he has and learn new ones. His self-esteem has improved, and he seems more confident.”

– Parent of a Project SEARCH™ intern

SUCCESS THROUGH TRANSITION:

Nick's Story

Kim Mages worried about her son as he made the transition into adulthood, just as every parent does. The difference for Kim is that her son Nick has a disability, making his transition from school to work to independent living that much scarier.

“It was very difficult as a parent to let him try different things and not be successful,” she said thinking back to all of the things he tried before finding his niche. “But it is imperative to let our transitioning children take risks. It helps them grow and learn, just like a typical young child.”

Nick participates in Aspire of WNY’s Supported Volunteering Life Enrichment Program (SVLE), and continues to experience new things while developing skills in his areas of interest. He has interned with Aspire as a landscaper, and he thoroughly enjoys the work. He helps mow lawns, weed gardens, planting, and trimming. One day, Nick wants to work for a landscaper.

Today, Nick works as a dishwasher at Liberty Food & Spirits. He had previously worked with the owners for several years doing yard work and cleaning rental properties. They taught him how to handle responsibilities, and he impressed them with his work ethic. When they opened up their own restaurant in October of 2010, Nick was hired to join them.

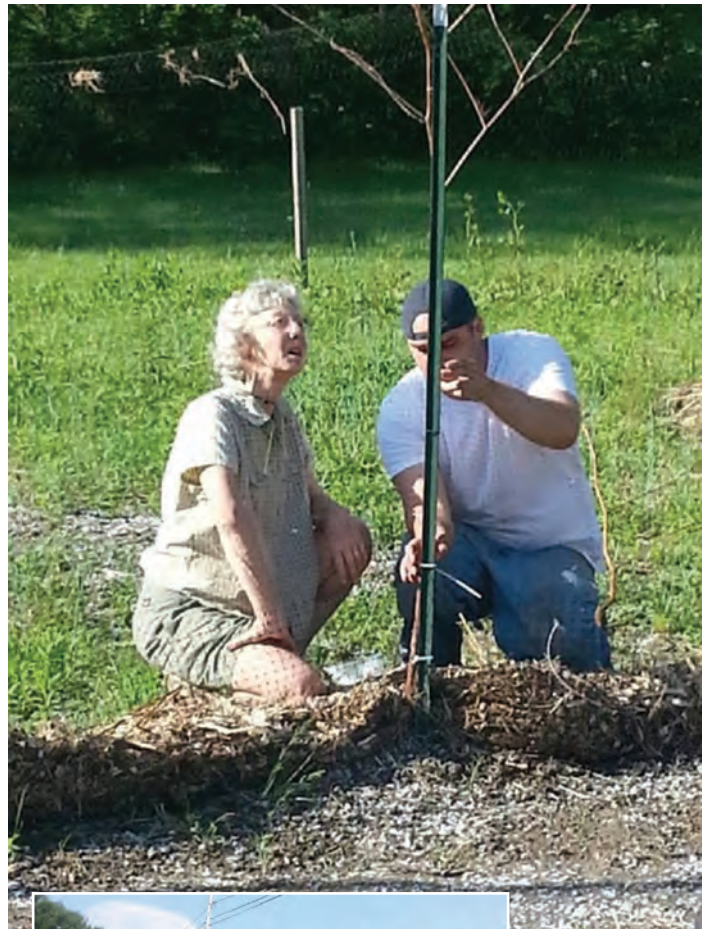
In addition to his successful work-life, Nick has also transitioned into an independent living situation after moving into his own apartment at Aspire-owned Cushing Street Apartments. That successful move was made possible by a highly supportive team of family members, Aspire staff, and friends. Nick’s mom states that she feels “so lucky” to have such a committed group of people helping Nick throughout the evolution of his transition.

Comments, Suggestions or Ideas?

If you have any comments, suggestions or a subject you would like to see in an upcoming newsletter, please contact Paula Kerber at 716.836.7235, or email paula.kerber@aspirewny.org.

Want an electronic copy of Transition Times?

Send your email to: paula.kerber@aspirewny.org and we'll send you an electronic version of Transition Times. Thanks for your interest!



Nick volunteers at Mancuso Greenhouse and Harvest Chapel to help with landscaping.

Socially, Nick is very involved in the community through his association with SVLE, and he is currently going through the process of becoming a social member of the West Dunkirk Volunteer Fire Department. He has always looked up to firefighters, and his association at the Fire Department is culminating a life-long dream.

Kim is extremely proud of everything Nick has accomplished thus far, and that early fear of transition is all but a memory. “Nick’s transition has been successful because it has been a partnership,” she explains. “Everyone plays a part, the school, family, agencies, and other members of the community all need to be partners in it in order to make sure the students are successful.”

Technology Today – Reaching Out to the Community and Beyond

Since opening its doors 20 years ago this year, Technology Today has been known as a unique program that specializes in adapting computers and teaching individuals how to access them. As technology has advanced, this program has kept pace with the new trends to incorporate iPads, tablets, cellphones, and digital cameras into the daily activities of the program participants. The Internet has also played a



Mike O'Brien using his adapted camera.

tremendous role in communication, research, and exploration for everyone.

Technology Today found that many of the program participants had a genuine interest and talent for digital photography. Cameras were adapted with single switches by the staff at Technology Today to make them accessible to everybody. The photographers, many with cameras mounted to their wheelchairs, sharpened their skills by going out and taking pictures of the communities they frequent. Their photos have been exhibited throughout Western New York, most recently at the Albright Knox Art Gallery in October 2013 in celebration of Disability Awareness Month.

Currently, the photographers are hard at work collecting photographs in preparation for the 20th Anniversary celebration of Technology Today. They are also collaborating with L'Arche Erie, Inc. and EHCA, Inc., two non-profit agencies providing services to individuals with disabilities in Erie, PA, to plan this year's "As I See It" photo contest in Erie. Last year's award-winning experience in the photo contest was a perfect example of multiple agencies working together for a common goal: Building self-esteem through artistic expression and technology.

Technology Today encompasses the philosophy of teaching people to use technology to participate in society, and, most importantly, their own lives. For more information about the "As I See It Contest," or services provided by Technology Today, please contact Rebecca Smith at (716) 836-7232 or via email at Rebecca.Smith@aspirewny.org.

Celebrating the WOW Program

On Friday, May 30, representatives from local businesses, school districts, Aspire, and parents are gathering at Ilio DiPaolo's Restaurant in Blasdell to honor the 10 graduating students of Aspire's World of Work (WOW) Program. During the 2013-2014 school year, the students have been interning at several local businesses to learn marketable job skills in preparation for their work life after high school.

The WOW celebration begins at 8:30 a.m. and will feature an awards presentation, a short film, and presentations about WOW. The celebration is highlighting the notable achievements of the WOW participants this school year. If you would like to learn more about the WOW Program, or have an eligible

student who might benefit from the program, please contact your school districts Committee for Special Education Chairperson or contact Aspire of WNY's Paula Kerber, Coordinator of Student Services at (716) 836-7235 or via email at: Paula.Kerber@aspirewny.org.



Businesses Benefit from Aspire Internship Work Programs



Matt working at Botanical Gardens.

Aspire of WNY proudly offers a variety of work skills program opportunities to interested participants. These programs, World of Work (WOW), CFL Summer Work Program, Project SEARCH™, and others provide individuals with an opportunity to experience real-work environments, to learn responsibility, and gain marketable skills and confidence. However, the participants aren't the only beneficiaries of these work skills programs; the business partners benefit in ways they never imagined upon opening their businesses to the Aspire interns.

“For Andersons, it is much more than just having these kids come in and work for us,” explains Holly Anderson. “We love having them with us and our employees benefit from seeing how hard they work and how much pride they take in doing the job.”

Interns at Anderson's spend time replenishing condiments, making sure utensils and napkins are restocked, and much more. Holly claims that many times the interns are doing tasks that the managers would have to do because the servers are so busy with their customers.

“They really help us out,” she says. “The servers are busy with customers so if it weren't for the interns, the managers would be scrambling, but the job coaches work with the kids and get everything done. It's wonderful to have them here.”

Ken Cefaratti, the Store Manager at Savers in Blasdell spoke about why he jumped at the opportunity to have WOW interns at the store. “As a rule, Saver's is always partnering with non-profits. It is just something we do as a company. When I was approached by Aspire, I thought it was a great idea.”

The employees at Savers quickly found out how helpful the interns were and how hard they worked. Ken speaks highly of the group he had working at the store this year. “We loved working with those kids! Plus, we really came to rely on them because we knew they would get the job done right. We were sad when the internships ended because they had become vital to our operation.”

Ken explained that he would welcome another group of interns anytime in the future because of the experience they had this time.

For businesses, hosting the internship program is much more than having extra help around. Employees are inspired by the approach and attitude that the interns have and witnessing the joy with which they do their job is infectious. In today's world, finding “win-win” situations is often hard to do, but in these cases, it is virtually guaranteed.

If you own or know of a business that would be interested in partnering with Aspire to offer internship opportunities, please contact Paula Kerber, Coordinator of Student Services at (716) 836-7235.



Above: Shawn Dye working the racks at Savers.

Right: Ryan always works with a smile on his face.

