

2018 | ANNUAL REPORT



Aspire is excited to share a few highlights and interesting stories that capture the essence of who we are and also to inform you of lingering challenges within the developmental disabilities field.

Aspire prides itself on strong, person-centered work in the area of supported employment. The story of Deb Glinski, her job coach, and Walmart is a heartwarming example of that work. With Medicaid Service Coordination ending last year and the advent of Care Coordination Organizations, Aspire created an Outreach and Central Intake Department.

Part of their responsibility is managing Aspire's Committee of Last Resort fund. Enjoy the story of how one grant from that fund ensured a critical relationship continued.



Agencies like Aspire are still underfunded and impacted by workforce challenges, like historically low unemployment and a rising minimum wage. To educate our State Legislators, Aspire sent a team to Albany consisting of senior leaders and Board members. While the effort succeeded in obtaining money (bFair) for direct care staff in 2020, a much needed cost of living increase was not funded.

Thomas Sy, Aspire's CEO, is ending his tenure at Aspire on July 31st of this year. After nearly 20 years of service, Tom believes it is time for new leadership as Aspire faces unprecedented industry change.

On behalf of the Boards of Directors of Aspire and the Aspire Foundation, we extend our thanks and deep appreciation to Tom for his outstanding leadership and service to our organization. Tom will be remembered fondly for ably leading the agency through its largest period of growth. He has played a pivotal role in raising the profile of Aspire within the Developmental Disabilities field locally and across New York State.

By the time you are reading this the CEO Search Committee should be finalizing its selection of Aspire's next leader. As a key stakeholder, thank you for your ongoing support.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Thomas Sy in black ink.

**Thomas Sy**  
President/CEO

Handwritten signature of John Earshen in black ink.

**John Earshen**  
Board Chairperson

*Thomas Sy,  
top, and  
John Earshen*

Deb Glinski began her career at Walmart, on Southwestern Boulevard, in 1999. She started out as a greeter stationed at the main entrance to the store and was very proud of her work and her employer. Deb receives vocational supports through **Aspire of WNY's Community and Independent Living Services Division**, and over the years, her employment specialist, Alyce Herbert, worked with the management team at Walmart as Deb's position changed with the needs of the store. Eventually, Deb was working as a greeter in the Automotive Department.

Things changed again as Walmart, on a corporate-level, realigned the duties of those in greeter positions meaning that Deb would no longer meet the requirements of a position at the store. Deb and her employment specialist, Alyce, advocated for keeping her employed as she had been an exemplary employee and would soon reach her twentieth anniversary at Walmart. Even as her work hours were reduced, Deb maintained her hopes that her Manager and Human Resources at Walmart could come up with a solution.

In April 2019, Deb and her employment specialist, Alyce attended a meeting at the store with the entire management team present. They presented Deb with a 20-year plaque, a pin, and a certificate commemorating her achievement of working 20 years at the store. After receiving hugs and handshakes from the team, the managers left the room, and a representative from Human Resources came in to speak with Deb and Alyce. Deb was initially afraid that they were going to let her go, but instead, she received wonderful news.

They informed her that although her position as a greeter was being eliminated, they had decided that they wanted her to stay on as a Self Scan Associate. The store manager told her that the entire team worked on developing an appropriate role for her with certain accommodations allowing Deb to perform the duties. Deb was filled with emotion as she thanked them and began crying tears of joy.

Deb is excited about her new opportunity, although she will miss her role as a greeter. She has much to learn about her new position and is looking forward to the challenge and helping her Self Scan customers.

The story of how Deb and Alyce worked together with Walmart and ultimately arrived at a solution demonstrates the critical teamwork displayed between our Western New York corporate partners and Aspire's Vocational Services Division.



If there is one thing we know for certain about the Human Services field is that change will be a constant companion. Across New York State, changes are being made in the ways that services are provided to individuals with developmental and other disabilities. Aspire of WNY has adjusted over the past year to meet the requirements handed down by the state and also to meet the changing needs of those we serve. You may have heard of a new department that is performing several critical functions, **Agency Outreach and Central Intake (AOCI)**.

The Agency Outreach function ensures that the community being served knows about Aspire and all of the various services that are provided. Central Intake, as you might guess, is responsible for streamlining the intake process for all OPWDD waiver services available through Aspire. This includes being a single point of contact for individuals, their families, Care Coordinators, and Community Partners to assist in navigating supports and services.

AOCI is also overseeing these important services:

***Environmental Modifications (E-MOD) and Assistive Technology –***

Providing assistance in obtaining funding for modifications and adaptive technologies to ensure that a person's health, safety, and independence are met.

***Family Education and Training Programs (FET) –*** Provides education and training to families and caregivers of children under the age of 18 with disabilities.

***Individual Supports and Services (ISS) –*** Offers housing subsidies and transition stipends to eligible individuals who are or want to live independently in the community.

Additionally, AOCI oversees several grant-funded programs including:

***ELKS Home Services Program –*** A grant-funded outreach program seeking to improve the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities through support and advocacy in direct collaboration with the NYS ELKS Association.

***Family Support Services (FSS) Counseling Program –*** This grant-funded program provides access to counseling services for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families in Chautauqua and Cattaraugus counties.

**Committee of Last Resort** – This small grant-funded program provides emergency funding to individuals of all ages with disabilities in the WNY area. These funds can be for a variety of needs that the individual and their families cannot afford.

“As one of the newest divisions within the Aspire family, we are working hard to learn and grow as a team as well as part of the larger Aspire team,” explains Jenna Astridge, LMSW, Director of Agency Outreach & Central Intake for Aspire of WNY. “Since we are responsible for both community outreach and intake of new individuals to our services, it is very important for us to remain knowledgeable and approachable as we are often someone’s first contact with Aspire.”

### ▶ **Committee of Last Resort Helps To Save a Best Friend**

Anna Maria Lagona has had her best friend by her side for the past ten years. As a teenager, Anna Maria received her service dog Dodger, and the two have been inseparable ever since. No matter what Anna Maria is doing, Dodger is usually right there with her, except when she is out in the field playing “Challenger” baseball. While Anna Maria is in the field, Dodger watches her intently from the sidelines, even moving to keep a clear view of her if someone happens to stand in front of her.

Recently, during one of his veterinarian visits, Dodger was diagnosed with a tumor that would require very costly surgery. The Lagona family was heartbroken as they didn’t know how they would be able to afford the care that Dodger needed. That’s when Michele Halbert, Care Coordinator with Person Centered Services for Anna Maria and the Lagona family, told them about the Committee of Last Resort. They applied for a grant to cover a portion of the costs for Dodger’s surgery and were approved. The family was ecstatic!

During Dodger’s recovery, it was Anna Maria’s turn to stay by her best friend’s side. Afraid that Dodger would hurt himself trying to jump up on her bed to sleep at night, Anna Maria slept in a makeshift bed on the floor of the living room so she and Dodger could be together through the night. After all, that’s what best friends are for!



## Individuals Served by Aspire Who Passed Away in 2018

Francis Blersch  
Ron Brochowicz  
Howard Fries  
Theresa Giordano  
John Henshaw  
Sharon Irving  
Eva Miazgiewicz  
Jacqueline Mitchell  
Katherine Scibran  
Richard Wiacek



## Weather and Love

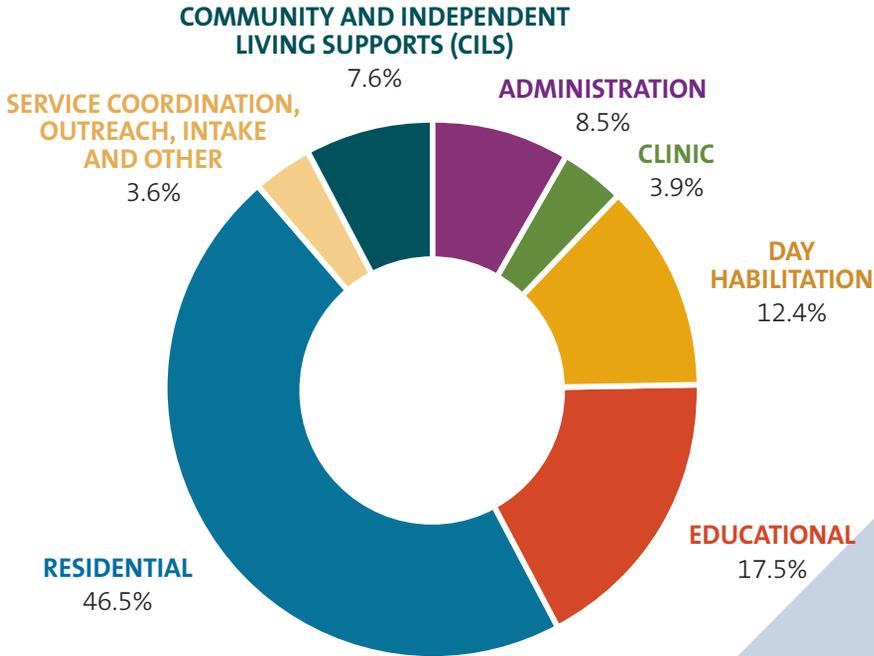
*Jeremy Pratt*

Things you cannot control,  
Weather and love.  
A rumble of thunder every few minutes  
Startles the precious skies  
Turning dark gray and looking hauntingly beautiful,  
A way of Mother Nature being wild.  
Then again, sometimes spiritually cleansing.  
It may be challenging to believe.  
Set your mind free and let go.

**For a listing of all of our generous 2018 donors, please visit our website at <https://www.aspirewny.org/donorrecognition/>**

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**Artist credit:** *Top of this page: "Moon Shadow" by Harry LaVoice*



Aspire of WNY & Affiliated Entities –  
Results of Operations Per Audited Financial Statements

Revenue	2018
Program Service Revenue <sup>2</sup>	\$71,516,662
Government Grants	\$1,644,986
Fundraising	\$428,773
Other	\$57,998
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$73,648,419</b>

Expenses	2018
Administration.....	8.5%
Clinic .....	3.9%
Day Habilitation .....	12.4%
Educational .....	17.5%
Residential .....	46.5%
Service Coordination, Outreach, Intake and Other ....	3.6%
Community and Independent Living Supports (CILS) .....	7.6%
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>100%</b>

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

<sup>2</sup> 99% Federal and New York State Governmental Funding



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For more information about  
our programs and services:

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[www.aspirewny.org](http://www.aspirewny.org)

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