

One-of-a-kind services
for one-of-a-kind people.

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.

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Save the Date

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

For event information,
please contact Peggine Giambra
at 716-505-5502 or via email at
peggie.giambra@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™

Everybody Wins in the World of Work™ Program

Wegmans Says WOW program brings benefits to the company and its employees in addition to students



Sweet Home 2018 WOW interns, Joe Saldi (left) Caleb Sendziak (right) and mentor Alberta Drive Wegmans Café associate Rachel Gould.

When Aspire of WNY began its World of Work™ (or "WOW") program in 2011, expectations were high that the participating high school students with disabilities would benefit from hands-on experience in real work settings. What was not quite as obvious was how much participating companies and their employees would benefit as well. Wegmans, a participating employer since 2015 in the Alberta Drive store and who just added its McKinley store to the program in 2017, can attest to the impact it has had on the students, the company, employees and even customers.

The WOW program is a community-based vocational program set up in partnership with 15 area school districts for students with disabilities. The WOW program works with area

school districts to meet their vocational needs. It relies on a number of area employers to host students in their workplace for a half day, Monday through Fridays. The work experience gives students an opportunity to experience varied work places and to build both vocational and soft skills that can be transferable to jobs after high school. In the process, students build their confidence and independence and have a chance to sample various jobs to determine what fits best for them. The students are always accompanied by an Aspire job coach and are assigned tasks appropriate for their abilities. Currently, there are five students working at Wegmans and another 30 interning at a variety of area employers.

According to Wegmans employees involved in the job skills enrichment program, the students contribute substantially from a work perspective and also help teach their employees as well. According to Michelle Kwiatkowski, restaurant manager in the McKinley store, "Employees are not that much different than the students at the beginning of the program – they are a little

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Fight, Survive, and Thrive with the Help of ACCES-VR

The year was 2008, and Luther Vucic had graduated from Georgetown University with a Masters of Physiology and Biophysics. After working tirelessly through school for 5 years with no breaks, Luther decided to reward himself upon graduation by accepting a job teaching Physics at a private school on St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands. Sunday was typically Luther's day to relax and enjoy the beach, until one warm December Sunday, he ran into the water and dove into a crashing wave. His momentum carried head first into a shallow sandbar rendering him paralyzed from the neck down. While face down in the water, in a moment a clarity, Luther completely understood his situation and made the choice that he was going to fight, survive, and thrive. He spent the next six months in a hospital until returning home on the July 4th weekend.

Luther eventually reached out to Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) in 2011 to begin transitioning toward employment activities. After a few stops and starts, many series of interviews, and no success on the job front, Luther decided to pursue self-employment opportunities. By that time, he had been volunteering with several local non-profit organizations and had learned quite a bit about leadership, website development, fundraising and much more. He turned his hobby of designing and crafting decorative wooden signs with his father into a small business, called My Side of the Garage.

With his sign business still in development, Luther began interviewing again which ended up with him working with Aspire's Assistive Tech services to develop a tech assessment for a company he was interviewing with. As fate would have it, just as Luther was about to line up financing for his My Side of the Garage business, he received a return call from Kent Custom Cases for a part-time job. With his tech assessment still valid, Luther worked with Brendan Stapley, Technology Evaluator Supervisor with Aspire's Technology Today, to set up his workspace.

"Thanks to Brendan," Luther explains. "He is very detail-oriented and really helped place things in the optimal place to offset my mobility issues. We solved a few software and hardware challenges and my system was soon running great!"

Within a short time, Kent Custom Cases decided that with his breadth of experience, Luther would be more



Luther at work using his adaptive workstation.

valuable to them as a full-time employee. He was soon assigned to additional projects like material cost analysis, database management, and cost reduction planning. Luther has found himself in a great employment situation thanks to ACCES-VR and support from Aspire of WNY. He feels like he is making progress and learning many things about how to handle his disability as it relates to the working world, but most of all he is looking toward the future to see what is in store for him.

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 716-505-5262, 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!

Aspire Health Center Simplifies Care for Young Adults



Dilhat Askin

Destiny Danao has been bringing her young adult son, Dilhat, to the Aspire Health Center since 2016. The Aspire MSC assigned to Destiny and Dilhat's case originally recommended the Health Center for his Physical therapy and Speech services. This soon led to Destiny choosing to have his Primary Care handled at Aspire also.

"It is so much easier," Destiny explains. "Just being able to have his appointments at the same place is very convenient. And everyone knows Dilhat here, so he feels more comfortable coming here for his medical care and therapy services."

Destiny is very happy with the quality of care that her son receives at the Aspire Health Center. He is making great strides in his Physical and Speech Therapies which Destiny attributes to the level of caring that the Aspire staff exhibits.

"The most important thing about the clinic is that to me, it is all value-based care, not volume-based," she explains. "That is important because people aren't treated as a number. The staff is always smiling, and we are all treated so respectfully. It has come to feel like home to us."

Destiny is thankful that Dilhat is able to receive his Primary Care at the Health Center, not only for convenience, but she is also very pleased with the quality of care he receives.

"Dilhat has been seeing Jane Blake ANP-RN (Adult Nurse Practitioner), and I wouldn't want him to see anyone else. She is amazing with Dilhat, we are so happy with her."

Destiny is a big advocate for the services at Aspire Health Center and feels that it is the perfect destination for anyone seeking services for their loved ones with or without disabilities. She is currently there three times a week with Dilhat, twice for PT and once for speech. Destiny was sure to point out her hopes that Occupational Therapy services can resume at the Health Center, so she could truly have a one-stop shop for all of Dilhat's services.

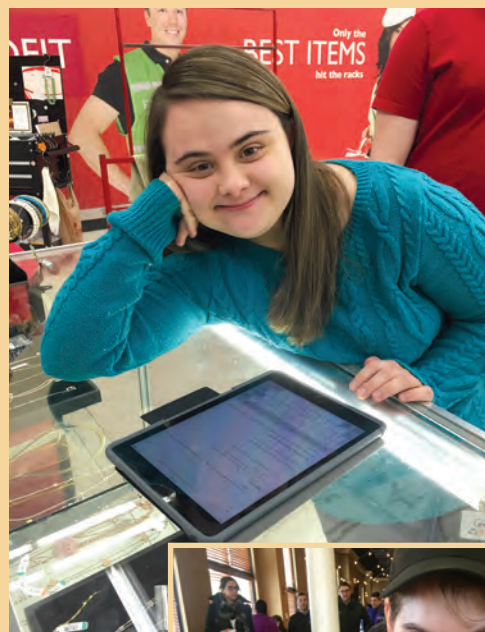
In response to this, Martha Farewell, Aspire VP of Clinical Services stated that "Aspire has hopes of resuming Occupational Therapy services in the Adult Health Care Center, in order to meet a wider array of needs for those served."

For any individuals, caregivers, or families that are interested in making an appointment or looking for more information about available services at the Aspire Health Center, please call (716) 505-5630.

Leveraging Technology

Aspire is excited to announce that high school students in both our Buffalo and East Aurora World of Work (WOW) sites are now regularly using iPads in both their internship and skill building sessions. The 43 iPads and cases were made possible through a grant from the James H Cummings Foundation. The WOW program is a community-based vocational program set up in partnership with 15 area school districts for students with disabilities and area employers who graciously host internship opportunities.

Both Genevieve and Brittani are already actively using their iPads at their internship locations. Thanks so much Cummings Foundation!



Top: Genevieve Specht working on the iPad at Savers.

Bottom: Brittani Ehlenfield practicing her money skills at Wegmans.



Steven, Matt and David of the WOW program with Chef Fred Torrell and Rachel Gould from Wegmans.



abilities with the needs of the store and specific departments. Wegmans has been a tremendous partner in being very flexible with our students and providing so many chances to try new skills or to work in new areas of the store.”

According to Fred Torrell, executive chef at the Alberta Drive Wegmans, “We have a saying at Wegmans that good people working toward a common goal can accomplish anything, and this could not be more fitting than with the WOW

program.” He notes that the Aspire students continually inspire Wegmans employees and contribute in getting the work done. “Everybody wins,” he adds.

Because many of the students are familiar with Wegmans before they begin work there, they connect with the work environment and have a sense of pride in working there, particularly if they see people they know in the store. For many, wearing the Wegmans uniform is a point of pride that demonstrates that they have the capabilities to work for a top company, developing their skills and their confidence. In a thank you letter to Wegmans after the semester was concluded, recent interns wrote that it was “the best opportunity” and that everyone “treated us like family.”

According to Lynn Scanlon, Wegmans employee representative, “We will truly know we are successful when we can hire those students who worked through the WOW program and they want to come back to work for us as our employees.”

To learn more about the WOW program as an employer, school or family, contact Paula Kerber, Coordinator of Transition Services at paula.kerber@aspirewny.org or 716-505-5262.

World of Work™ Program

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nervous, not sure what to say or how to act, and curious about how this new working relationship will work out. What we find is that everyone grows in their comfort level, in their confidence, their skills, and by the end, each student is just another employee contributing and working together as part of the Wegmans family.” Wegmans employees also note that the program has received notice and compliments from customers as well.

At Wegmans, culture and values are a big part of their decision to participate and also a significant reason that they have been so successful. The company has traditionally invested in their people and works to find the right fit for them within the company, leading Wegmans to be regularly ranked as a “Best Companies to Work for” in Fortune Magazine’s annual list. That philosophy aligns perfectly with the WOW program as students have a chance to experience a variety of departments and job responsibilities and discover what they like and what they may want to pursue after high school. With current employees acting as mentors, students have a chance to learn new skills and build their confidence in the job.

According to Aspire job coach Amy Pope, “We take a very individualized approach in matching the student and their