

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
7:00pm

For event information, please contact Shana Caldarella at 716-505-5512 or via email at shana.caldarella@aspirewny.org

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THE "2 MEN" HOUSE



Marcus Romanowski (left) and Alexander Kohut (right) stand in their very own kitchen with Life Coach, Iesha Humphrey.

A group of families with young men who were aging out of school approached Aspire, stating that the young men wished to move out of their parents' homes into a home of their own. The families recognized the need for a safe transition while they were able to plan for, and be involved in, their sons' next steps in life. One of the men was already receiving traditional community habilitation services from Aspire to assist with goals to be as independent as possible and prepare him for more independent living.

Aspire had learned from prior, non-certified, group living arrangements with self-directed services that we needed to ensure it was a true "self-directed" model and not mirrored after a certified setting. The families and the "guys" were all on board and committed to being as independent as possible!

Several meetings were held where the families identified each person's unique strengths and needs for support, including what they like to do in their spare time, how they spend their days, and how many hours of support were absolutely required for their health and safety.

The families worked together to locate an apartment and executed the lease. They were able to access Individual Support Services (ISS) funds for household items to help with the transition from living with their families to living independently. Multiple scenarios were explored before agreeing to a plan that included hiring Community Habilitation staff that would support each person with 25 hours per week for life coaching, community habilitation as a group to accommodate activities they chose to work on together, as well as 1:1 community habilitation. The families also identified and hired a Paid Neighbor as a backup staff to cover in emergency situations. An electronic alarm/monitoring system, which has a monthly fee that is covered in their budgets, was installed that allows the families to assist as needed when situations arise. Their budgets also accommodate funds for transportation, classes and memberships, staff activity fees, internet, and housing subsidies, as well as other goods and services to support them to live independently.

Self-Direction later helped facilitate linking one of the young men to vocational services to support his work aspirations and a second is

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Transitioning With Confidence

Change can be a terrifying experience for any person. For those with developmental disabilities, that change is sometimes even more difficult.



Alex Rundquist, pictured, was a senior at Iroquois High School when he began his internship with the East Aurora Cooperative (Co-Op) Market; an internship he gained from Aspire's World of WorkSM (WOW) program. The WOW program is a community based vocational program set up in partnership with 15 school districts in the area for students with disabilities to meet the needs of the community. Alex has worked at several different businesses through the WOW program and with his senior year steadily moving along, the pressure to prepare for life after graduation was on.

On his first day at the Co-Op, Alex met his job coach, the person who would be assisting him in development, training, advocacy, and other supports while he worked toward paid employment within the community. He then headed into the building to learn what his new internship would entail. The first few days at the Co-Op began changing the way Alex looked at his pending graduation. Instead of being fearful

about what the future held, he now saw an opportunity to work in an environment where he was not only appreciated, but valued as a team member.

Alex began to ask for more responsibility from upper management and found success in doing so. He moved from cleaning and organizing, to stocking and helping customers. He started working in the bakery at least once a week and learned how to serve customers on a day to day basis. He made friends with regular customers and helped them find the snack foods they needed. Alex had found a new sense of self in the Co-Op. It provided him with a chance to see what life could be like after high school, making that transition just a little less scary.

While Alex was interning, a position for a paid staff member became available and, with a little help from his job coach and parents, he was able to apply for that position and GOT THE JOB!

We are proud to say that today, Alex is still a valued member of the East Aurora Co-Op family and continues to take on new responsibilities regularly, even having participated in the 10th annual Taste of East Aurora.

Change can be a scary experience, but when you are armed with the right tools and a great place to work, it makes that change just a little bit better.

THE “2 MEN” HOUSE

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currently going through the process to add his own job coach to the team. They are engaged in paid work and utilize their residential self-directed plan to staff their time at home and the summers they have chosen to take off!

Since the start of this project, the men have grown in their independence and the flexibility of self-directed services has allowed adjustments to be made as needed, to support and accommodate any bumps in the road.

While the families knew for a few years they planned to pursue independent living with self-directed supports, once they agreed upon a time line, it took about 6 months from hiring a broker and FI to moving into their apartment.

Collaboration + Communication + Natural Supports = SUCCESS!

Karen Brown, a teacher of Maryvale High School has been a longtime supporter of Aspire of WNY's Transition Services Department. Karen has referred several students over the years to the World of WorkSM (WOW) program and Project SEARCH.

One of her students, Matthew Chrostowski, pictured, is a hands on learner, whose vocational goal was to work in a maintenance department. Being familiar with Matthews's goals, Karen approached ACCES-VR with an opportunity in Maryvale Schools' Building and Grounds Department. After Matthew was approved for Coaching Supports for Employment through ACCES-VR, he was linked with Nicole Skaros Marcello, Aspire's School Project Manager in the Transition Services Department. Nicole met Matthew on site at Maryvale, along with Karen and the Building and Grounds staff, and from that point on, the partnership took off!



Matthew's success wouldn't have been possible without the support of his Classroom Aide and now coworker, Michele Hartzell. Michele's friendly face was a bridge to building natural supports for Matthew in this new position. Nicole, his job coach, worked with Matthew in his initial days on the job linking him to Cheryl, who became his point person each morning and assigned him his daily tasks. Matthew was part of the crew responsible for the incredibly important tasks of disinfecting and cleaning out classrooms to prepare for the next school year. Matthew's natural work ethic and collaboration abilities made the hard work fun!

As summer progressed, Matthew began to be recognized and valued as a vital part of the team, even getting asked to pick up more hours on the crew. In a note to ACCES-VR and Aspire of WNY, Karen Brown shared, "I want to thank you, Nicole. You were a great coach for Matt...Always encouraging him. Helping him "troubleshoot" when necessary, and backing away as he showed independence. To all of you...I offer my thanks. You have made a difference in this young man's life. I am so proud of Matt and so thankful for your services."

Matthew will complete his education at Maryvale High School in June 2022. The Building and Grounds Department hopes to have Matthew return again next summer and then move into a permanent full time position after graduation.

Congratulations to Matthew; and thank you to Karen Brown, and all the educators out there advocating for their students, partnering with Aspire of WNY, and allowing these success stories to become reality.

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?

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