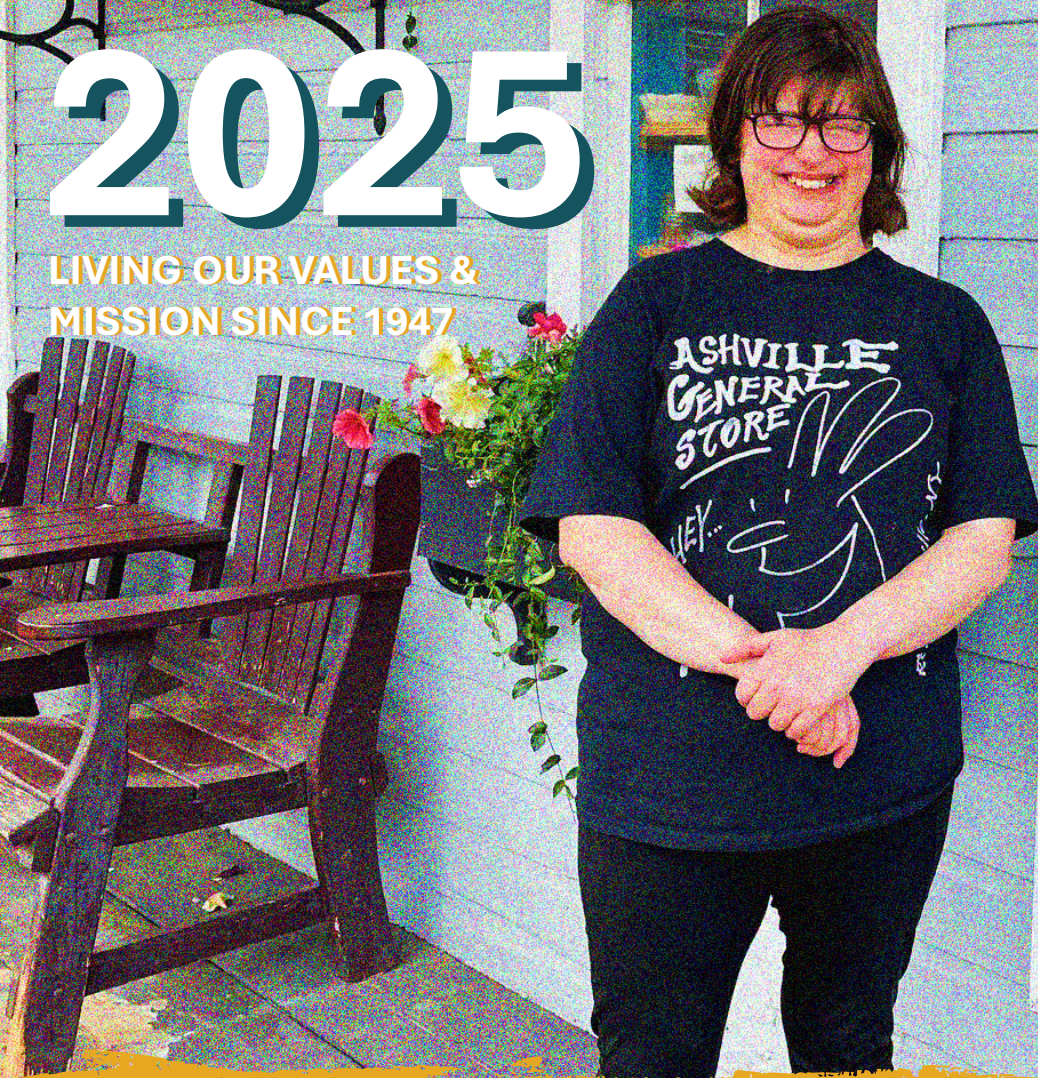


IMPACT REPORT 2025

LIVING OUR VALUES &
MISSION SINCE 1947



MEET MELISSA:

*Hard Worker.
Big Smile.
Independent.
Supported.
Friend.
Achiever.*

Aspire
of WNY

SUPPORTING CHILDREN & ADULTS
WITH DISABILITIES IN WNY

**“In nature, nothing
exists alone.”**

- Rachel Carson



**Members of
Aspire of WNY's
iXpress Art
Program created
the artwork
featured in this
impact report.**

PEOPLE, PERFORMANCE, PARTNERSHIP

Reflecting on the past year at Aspire of WNY, I'm filled with immense pride and gratitude.

Our 2025 Impact Report highlights our unwavering commitment to our core values: People, Partnership, and Performance.

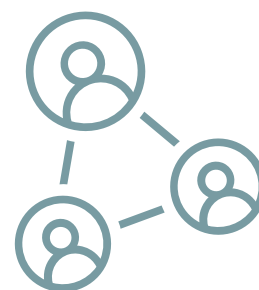
These pillars are the essence of our growth and the profound difference we make. At Aspire of WNY, our **People** are our heart. This year, the individuals we support have made incredible strides, embracing growth and achieving milestones. It's an honor to witness them reach their full potential. This success is built on the tireless dedication of our staff—from direct support professionals to managers—whose compassion and expertise foster a nurturing environment.

Our achievements are deeply rooted in **Partnership**. This year showcased the strength of our collaborations with families, caregivers, community organizations, funders, and volunteers. By working hand-in-hand, we amplify our impact, creating an inclusive and opportunity-rich environment. These alliances enable us to innovate, expand our reach, and provide comprehensive, diverse support.

Finally, our commitment to **Performance** drives us to excel. Our focus on high-quality, person-centered services has led us to embrace new approaches and strive for excellence. Together, we build a future where every individual can thrive. Thank you, and be well,



Renee A. Filip
President & CEO
Aspire of WNY



Renee Filip, President & CEO of Aspire of WNY, attends the 2024 Going For the Green golf tournament, accompanied by Sean, who kicked off the event with his version of the National Anthem on electric guitar, and Megan Rechin, Vice President of Communications & Growth Opportunities.

Aspire of WNY'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.

Aspire of WNY is built upon a foundation that supports individuals in making their personal choices, which determine their life path, actualize their dreams, and help them achieve their own highest levels of independence. We believe that everything we do is an opportunity to have a positive, meaningful, and lasting impact on our partners – the people we support, their personal support systems, employees, other care agencies, and our broader community. The future of Aspire of WNY is in our commitment to listen with a positive attitude, relentlessly pursue opportunities, work together as one, and be accessible to all.



People

We prioritize the personal needs and goals of those we support. We recognize the value and the potential of every employee. We listen and learn from those around us, especially those for whom we provide services. We recognize that everyone can make a difference and act accordingly, and we acknowledge the dignity and unique rights of all those we encounter.

Performance

We strive to give our best at all times, demonstrating compassion and passion. We strive for excellence in all that we do. We are honest, ethical, and accountable. We meet every challenge with professionalism and with heart. We meet change with innovation. We fulfill our responsibilities and uphold our commitment to those we support.

Partnership

We work together as a team to make a positive impact in the lives of the people we support and in our own. We are responsive and responsible to our partners – employees, the families and personal support systems of those who receive our services, other care agencies, and our community.



Defying Limits: Sandy's Journey with Cerebral Palsy

Sandy remembers the moment she took her first steps. She was eight years old, newly moved from Niagara Falls to the bright and flashy entertainment capital of the world, Las Vegas. Before then, walking had been an impossibility. But something about that city—maybe the energy, maybe the change—gave her the push she needed.

Her mother had known since she was three that something was different. As a baby, Sandy couldn't hold her balance; she'd tip forward or backward, never quite steady when her mother would try to help her stand. Eventually, doctors put a name to it: cerebral palsy. To this day, those two words have never gotten in the way of Sandy doing what she wants. When one path is blocked, she finds another way around!

Even now, when an injury, three slipped discs in her neck, has taken her ability to walk again, her independence remains. "If I could get out of this wheelchair, I'd have it made," she remarks. But if there's one thing she's learned, it's how to adapt. "I always find another way to do things. I can do whatever I try," she says with complete confidence.

For now, her love for crosswords, cleaning, gardening, and the occasional casino visit—a thrill that takes her back to her Las Vegas roots—keeps her busy. Her faith grounds her, whether she's sitting in a pew or streaming the Sunday service at home from her computer. Still, she loves speaking Italian, a language that once danced through the streets of her Niagara Falls neighborhood as a child.

Her hands used to be kept busy with sewing and baking—cakes, cookies, anything sweet—but time has slowed her down. Still, she takes pride in her independence. "I make my bed, I clean my room, I can sometimes still cook for myself," she says. "I try to be as helpful as possible."

When she first moved into an Aspire of WNY group home, she wasn't sure she'd like it. Now, she can't imagine it any other way. The staff is kind. The residents have become family. "I didn't think I'd like it at first, but I do now."

Growing up with CP, though, wasn't always easy. She recalls a time when strangers used to laugh at her. With time, though, she developed her own defense mechanisms. Now, if someone stares, she locks eyes with them, refusing to look away first. "I try to freak them out a bit," she chuckles. "You just have to show them up."



The biggest misconception about CP, she believes, is that people assume she doesn't understand what's going on around her. "They see us, and they forget about us," she says. "I wish they would take more time to know us."

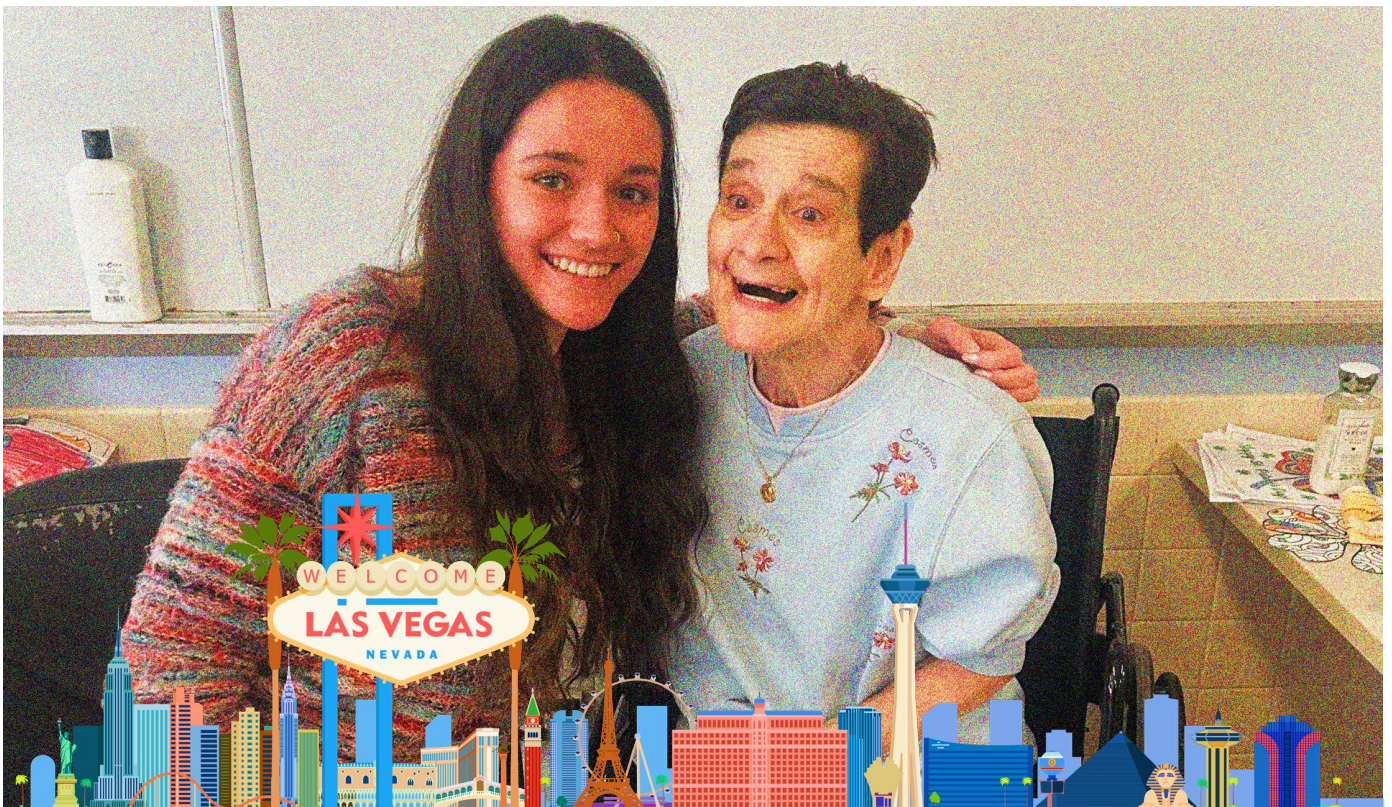
And what would that look like? "They'd sit down and talk to you. Maybe invite you to do stuff." Her church is just across the street from her house. She doesn't get to go as often as she'd like, but when she does, people talk to her. They see her. And that means everything to her.

Through every challenge, Sandy has never backed down. "I like hard stuff," she says. "Having CP is a challenge, but I like challenging things." If there's a way to do something, she'll find it.

She credits her strength to her parents, who never let her take the easy way out. "They always made me try to do stuff. If I couldn't do something, they would still make me try." She misses them every day, but their lessons live on in her.

Her advice to others with CP? "Never give up and keep moving on." And for those who want to be good allies, she offers this simple request: "Have a lot of patience and take time to get to know us."

Sandy is living proof that resilience isn't just about enduring, it's about thriving. It's in the way she finds joy in the smallest moments, the way she pushes back when the world underestimates her, the way she doesn't just face challenges but embraces them. And if she catches you staring? Be warned, she's got all the time in the world. ●



Confidence Takes Root at Aspire of WNY's Beautiful Blooms Garden!



Tucked away in a quiet corner of Aspire of WNY's Jamestown Day Hab, something magical is blooming. The soft glow of hydroponic lights, the sound of shared laughter, and the scent of fresh basil fill the air, coming together to create a tranquil oasis where confidence and independence are nurtured.

Thanks to an Innovations Grant from the New York State Association of Day Service Providers, Aspire of WNY's Beautiful Blooms Garden Program has flourished into something even greater. The grant allowed the team at Mall Boulevard to install an indoor hydroponic garden that now grows an impressive variety of produce, including lettuce, basil, lemon basil, arugula, chives, thyme, and sweet peppers.

At the heart of the program is Sarah Sorci, a community herbalist who sees the importance of personal choice. Every step, from the first scoop of soil to the final harvest, is shaped by the individuals that participate in the program.

They choose what they want to grow, how they want to care for it, and what they'll do with the harvest. In a world that too often overlooks their voices, here, every decision is theirs to make.

"In the garden, every choice belongs to the individuals. We're just here to support their journey. Watching someone light up as the plant they chose starts to come to life is a beautiful thing to witness," explains Sarah.

With time, the garden has become a gentle, grounding space where confidence takes root. It nurtures not only plants but also fine motor skills, communication, emotional regulation, and the deep sense of pride that comes from tending to something meaningful. Take Jeff, for example. On a recent afternoon, a handful of garden-picked basil became the star of the show in a homemade pesto. Focused and engaged, he added garlic and pulsed the blender. You could see it in his eyes, a sense of calm that settled over him as he worked.





“Something unlocks with him in the kitchen, almost like finding his voice through food prep. It’s a beautiful thing! I’ve never seen him smile so much,” shared Kelly Blake, Intake and Outreach Specialist at Aspire of WNY, who was there with Jeff during the activity.

These are the moments that show us that Beautiful Blooms is so much more than a garden, but a sanctuary where people grow alongside the plants that they’ve chosen to nurture. As the seasons shift and spring tiptoes in, hands will return to raised beds to cut perennials and stir compost into the soil. New seeds will be planted, and the hydroponic garden will welcome its next round of leafy greens. From soil to seed, to harvest to homemade pesto, the garden is a place for growth. Not just for plants, but people too. ●

Owls, Doves, Eagles, and Peacocks: A Colorful Expression of Teamwork at Aspire of WNY



Aspire of WNY’s fiscal conference room has taken flight—literally. Once a blank space, it now bursts with color, texture, and meaning, thanks to a stunning new art installation created by Aspiring Artists from the agency’s iXpress Program! Four vibrant birds—an owl, dove, eagle, and peacock—soar across the walls, each symbolizing a unique personality and approach to teamwork.

It all started with a single painting. Years ago, Jen Ball, Chief Financial Officer at Aspire of WNY, fell in love with a peacock piece at the agency’s Art and Wine event. With its funky textures and saturated colors, she gave the peacock a home in her office. But something was missing.

Fast-forward to a meeting of Aspire of WNY’s OASIS workgroup, a team dedicated to improving workplace communication. Inspired by Ann Van Eron’s OASIS books, the group explores how people approach conversations and problem-solving, encouraging open, judgment-free discussions.

As part of this initiative, they took the “bird test,” a personality assessment that categorizes individuals as peacocks, doves, eagles, or owls—each representing a different way of thinking and collaborating.

When Jen took the test, she discovered she was an owl. Suddenly, her beloved peacock started to seem a little lonely, hanging up on her wall by itself. She started to envision the full flock, with each bird representing the diverse personalities and talents that make up the agency.

Wanting to bring this vision to life, she turned to iXpress art facilitator Terry Lair, who recruited talented Aspiring artists from the Mall Blvd. Day Hab program. The iXpress program encourages individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to express themselves through artistic mediums, and reinforces that participants are first and foremost artists, who happen to have disabilities.





“They love making art, especially when it’s something meaningful,” Terry shares. The artists eagerly began their work, layering acrylic paint, molding paste, and even a touch of glitter to bring each bird to life in what Terry describes as an “abstract art deco” style.

Beyond the lively colors and textures, the pieces represent a deeper truth: every voice matters, every perspective adds value, and there is beauty to be found in collaboration here at our agency.

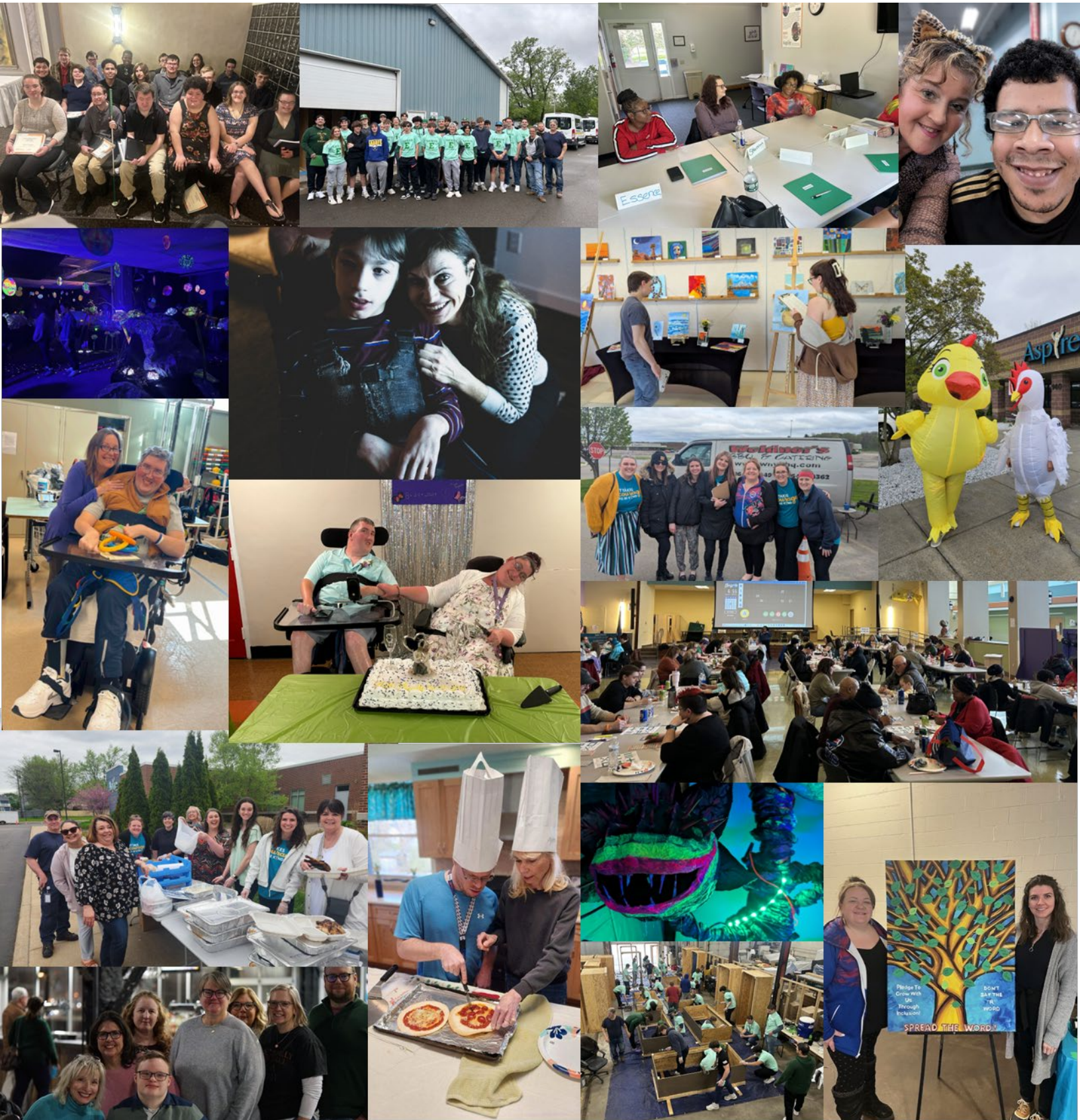
“We’re really making a conscious investment in helping people grow, personally and professionally,” explains Renee Filip, President and CEO at Aspire of WNY.

“In terms of just going through these exercises—OASIS group and the bird test—everything that we’re doing is all tied together and for the big stretch of providing the best possible services that we can for the people that we support.” ●



SHOW US YOUR SMILE!

2024 - 2025 PHOTO GALLERY



SHOW US YOUR SMILE!

2024 - 2025 PHOTO GALLERY



memoriam

Remembering the
individuals we lost
in 2024.



Rodney Baran

Louis Keoppen

Leslie Bates

Sean Kirchue

Jennifer Clark

Elise Knowlden

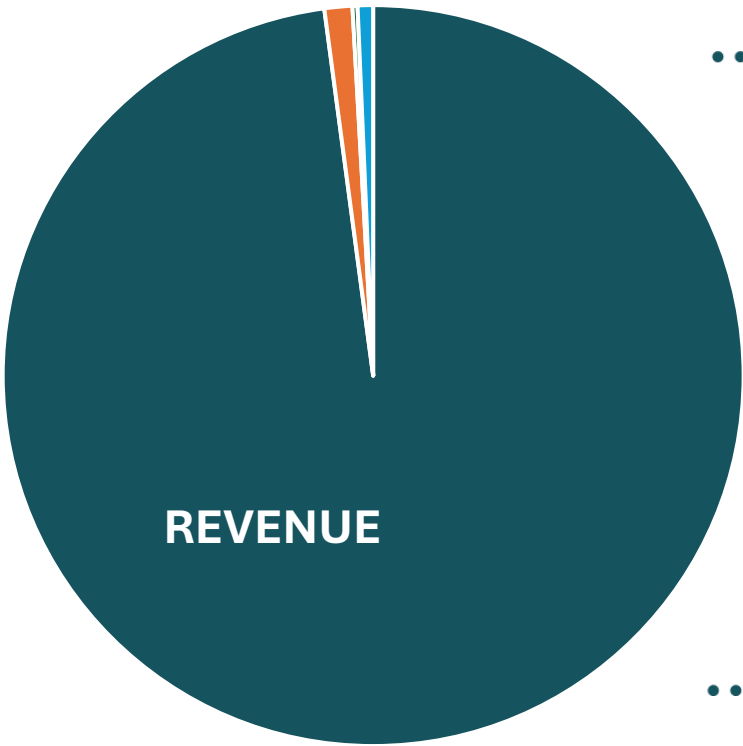
Kenny Dixon

Richard McMahon

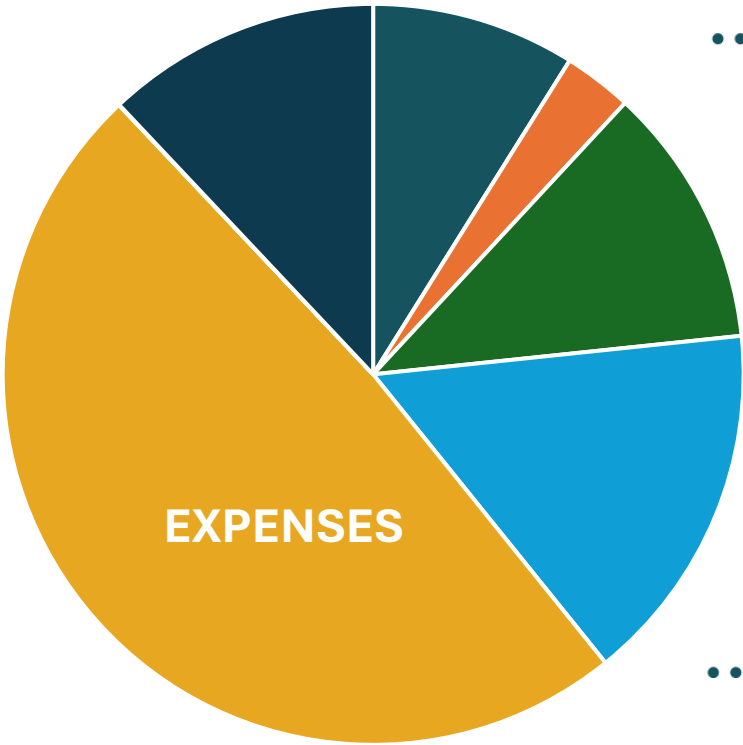
**“When someone you love becomes a memory,
the memory becomes a treasure.”**

2024 FINANCIALS

Aspire of WNY leadership developed the information presented on this page based on information in the audited financial statements. 99% of the Program Service revenue comes from Federal & New York State Funding.



- Program Service**
\$95,074,202
- Fundraising**
\$215,102
- Government Grants**
\$1,181,336
- Other**
\$652,171
- TOTAL:** \$97,122,811



- Administration**
\$8,200,143
- Clinic**
\$2,765,118
- Day Habilitation**
\$10,525,471
- Educational**
\$14,613,360
- Residential**
\$44,890,669
- Grants, Intake & Outreach, and Other**
\$17,956
- Community & Independent Living Supports**
\$11,072,102
- TOTAL:** \$92,084,819

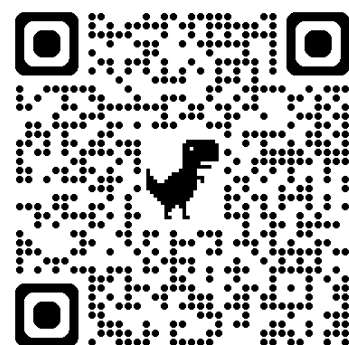


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Advocate.
Accountable.
Inspirational.
High-Fiver.
Goal-Setter.*

**We're dedicated to living our
mission & values. Can we
count on you to do the same?**

**Learn more & make an impact today
by visiting: www.aspirewny.org**



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of WNY