

A NEWSLETTER FOR ASPIRE'S FAMILY AND FRIENDS



Aspire's Vision in Action: Partnership

left: OfficeMax's new part-time employee Arnold Smith hopes to earn a full-time position soon.

right: Aspire therapist and Microsoft Store employee look on as Xavier Delgado uses fine motor skills to see animal pictures on a touchscreen tabletop computer.

One of the keys to Aspire's success is leading partnerships that help people with disabilities.

Aspire has always worked to provide our participants with job opportunities in area businesses and at Aspire Industries, our employment workshop for adults with developmental disabilities.

The recession has made it hard for people with developmental disabilities. Nationally only one in four people with developmental disabilities is employed. Given these trends, a bold approach is needed.

Aspire is taking new action. We're now visiting with, for example, the vice president for community affairs at a company and saying, "How can we work together?" It's a collaborative approach and we're getting great

results in the form of jobs, sponsorships and volunteers.

In one case, Aspire created Aspire CoffeeWorks by partnering with Metropolis Coffee Company to create a line of hand-roasted coffees and related items. Aspire participants prepare each order and 100% of the proceeds from Aspire CoffeeWorks benefit Aspire's life-changing programs.

These exciting partnerships are getting us close to a community where people of all abilities live, learn and grow together.

In this *Aspirations* we feature four different partnership stories. I hope they inspire you to think of ways you can help make our vision come to life.

JIM KALES
 President and CEO, Aspire

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PARTICIPANT SPOTLIGHT:

Meet Tristan

IT'S 8:30 ON A WEDNESDAY MORNING AT Tristan Cavada's day care center and his parents are meeting with the toddler's therapist and his teacher before going to work. They are comparing notes, discussing any concerns and talking about what Tristan needs to keep progressing.

Tristan was born with extra fluid in his brain and, as a result, has delayed motor skills and some vision problems. In his first two years, he was hospitalized several times. Worried about his social and physical development, Tristan's parents, Clint and Janeth, turned to Aspire for help.

Tristan needed several types of therapy —physical, developmental, occupational and speech. But it was hard on Tristan to get all of his therapy at home in the evening. He was just too tired. Clint and Janeth approached Aspire with the idea of having some of the therapy done at their son's day care center in Berwyn.

"We agreed right away," says Ashley Stoffel, Tristan's occupational therapist. "This teamwork is a perfect example of Aspire's vision in action. Tristan and his caregivers are all learning and growing together."

Carmen Trejo, Tristan's teacher, admits she was nervous when she first learned that Tristan was moving up from the infant room to her classroom of toddlers.

"I thought it was going to be hard and I knew his parents were concerned," says Carmen. "But we took that extra step together. It feels good to see him improving and participating in our classroom. Now Tristan is learning, I am learning and all of the children are learning, too."

The ten boys and girls in the room, ages 15 months to two years, include Tristan in all of their activities.

"At first, they called Tristan 'baby' because he wasn't sitting up or walking," says Carmen. "They don't do that anymore. They interact with him and, at the same time, watch out for him."

Stoffel has been impressed with how the children treat Tristan. "They are interested in helping him and are so compassionate," she says.

One of the first things Stoffel acted on in the toddler room was to help Tristan be at the same level as his playmates. She worked with the teachers on techniques to help him sit up at the table so he could

"I can't even put into words what the help of Aspire and the teachers in the school has meant to us."

take part in snack time and other activities. A gait trainer, or adaptive walker, is helping Tristan learn to walk while enabling him to stand up and take steps around the room.

Carmen and Tristan's parents have witnessed his social and emotional development blossoming. At first Tristan was imitating his friends in the classroom. Now, Carmen says, they are imitating him. "He is social with the other kids and they respond well to him," she explains.

Clint and Janeth are happy to see Tristan's personality coming out.

"He didn't smile or even cry when he was an infant," she says. "He communicates now. He giggles. We know when he is frustrated and when he is happy. I can't even put into words what the help of Aspire and the teachers in the school has meant to us."

Stoffel sees Tristan moving along and making progress. "It's not so scary anymore.

Now it's fun and the family can enjoy their son. They can make plans for his future."



Tristan stands up in his adaptive walker and take steps around the room.

ASPIRE'S NEW MISSION

ASPIRE'S VISION ENERGIZED OUR UNIQUE SPIRIT AND INSPIRED A NEW MISSION.

Aspire's mission is to support the successes of children and adults with developmental disabilities, strengthen their families and build embracing communities.

Teaching with Technology



Microsoft Store

ASPIRE PARTICIPANTS ARE HAVING SOME SERIOUS FUN AT THE MICROSOFT® STORE.

Through a new collaboration, adults and children with developmental disabilities are building life skills and becoming more independent, all while playing the latest in XBOX Kinect interactive video games and trying new Windows 7 PC applications.

“The adults have a great time learning at the Microsoft Store Oakbrook Center,” says Pam Ross, developmental training administrator at Aspire. “Whether they are knocking down pins in an XBOX Kinect bowling game on a giant screen or creating music together on a horizontal touchscreen computer, we find teachable moments among the fun and games. We call it therapeutic technology.”

Before the children visited the store, the Aspire Children’s Services team worked with the store staff to identify the games that best fit the children’s needs. When they found that the store could be too loud and bright for children with sensory issues and developmental delays, the Microsoft Store opened early to accommodate the need for a quieter atmosphere, lower lights and less foot-traffic.

“With the store to themselves, the children could concentrate better,” says Evon Mucek-Kucharczyk, administrator and developmental therapist at Aspire. “Like the adults they practiced motor skills, gained body awareness through movement and learned about taking turns and following directions through these activities.”

During a recent visit, it proved difficult for one child to find a game he could engage in. A store employee worked hard to choose an activity that matched the youngster’s skills. Soon the boy was playing the Kinect Space Bubbles game, concentrating and laughing as he bent down and reached up, stretching his body so he could pop floating bubbles.

“The program at the Microsoft Store fits perfectly with Aspire’s commitment to offer innovative methods helping children and adults build skills and self esteem,” says Mucek-Kucharczyk.

It also fits with the Microsoft Store’s community outreach mission: to help people and businesses realize their full potential by providing educational opportunities through community engagements.

“By supporting local organizations like Aspire through in-store events, the Microsoft Store is able to help drive awareness of our cause within the community,” says the Microsoft Store. “We are grateful for the opportunities to give back by teaching and volunteering.”

In addition to the program for Aspire adults and children at their store, Microsoft supported this year’s ABC Fashion Show at the top level, as the presenting sponsor. Employees from the Oak Brook store volunteered to work behind the scenes at the popular event.

The Microsoft Store also chose Aspire as one of the three organizations to be honored during November, their Month of Thanks. Aspire will receive a software grant valued at a minimum of \$2,000. Friends of Aspire can help increase the grant up to a maximum of \$10,000 by completing an in-store experience or voting for Aspire on Facebook at the Microsoft Store Oakbrook Center page. The promotion runs from November 1 to 30.

“We are thrilled to work with the Microsoft Store and are honored by their involvement and sponsorship,” says Jim Kales, president of Aspire. “With dimensions of education, inspiration and financial support, this is a great example of our vision in action.”



Xavier bending, reaching, stretching for a great score.

Visit www.aspireofillinois.org this November to see how one vote equals \$20 for Aspire!

REMEMBER

Aspire CoffeeWorks

FOR YOUR HOLIDAY GIFT GIVING. EACH SIP MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD INSIDE AND OUT.





PARTICIPANT SPOTLIGHT:

Meet Valerie

*“Valerie comes to her job ready to work and with a smile on her face every day,” says Theodora.
“Everyone here loves her.”*

IT TAKES FINE MOTOR SKILLS AND HAND/EYE coordination to assemble the rotators that Navistar will place in one of their International trucks. It takes a quick worker like Valerie Peacock to make 336 rotators and layer them carefully in a large tray.

Work is important to Valerie. She started her job at Aspire Industries 28 years ago, when she was 21, and she has been a positive, enthusiastic employee since the beginning. Aspire Industries staff and co-workers like having her as part of the work team.

“Valerie comes to her job ready to work and with a smile on her face every day,” says Theodora Harris, vocational trainer at Aspire Industries. “She works consistently and at a fast pace. She’s pleasant and fun to be around. Everyone here loves her.”

Like her coworkers, Valerie wants to keep busy all day at the workshop. While she often assembles rotators for Aspire’s partner Navistar, she also excels on other jobs. For example, Valerie recently helped to sort items and fill welcome bags for 2,500 new Navistar employees moving to the Chicagoland area.

Asked what she likes about working, Valerie grins and, without hesitation, says, “I like to make money.”

When she gets her paycheck, Valerie might spend some money at the dollar store or treat herself to her favorite perfume. She likes going to the movies, swimming and taking dance classes. She once took

belly-dancing lessons and doesn’t mind showing off her talent. She enjoys spending time out in the community with her housemates and the staff from the Aspire group home where she lives.

“Valerie does well in the community,” says Glenda Wesley, house manager of the Aspire community home in La Grange. “She is always polite to everyone.”

Valerie moved into the Aspire home six years ago. Prior to that, she had lived with her mother, Janice Peacock, in Forest Park. After Janice lost her husband and suffered a stroke, it became too difficult for her to care for her daughter. Valerie was able to make the move right away.

“It was an adjustment for Valerie that took a while, especially since she was sad after her father passed away,” says Janice. “But she now refers to the La Grange house as her home and my house as a place to visit.”

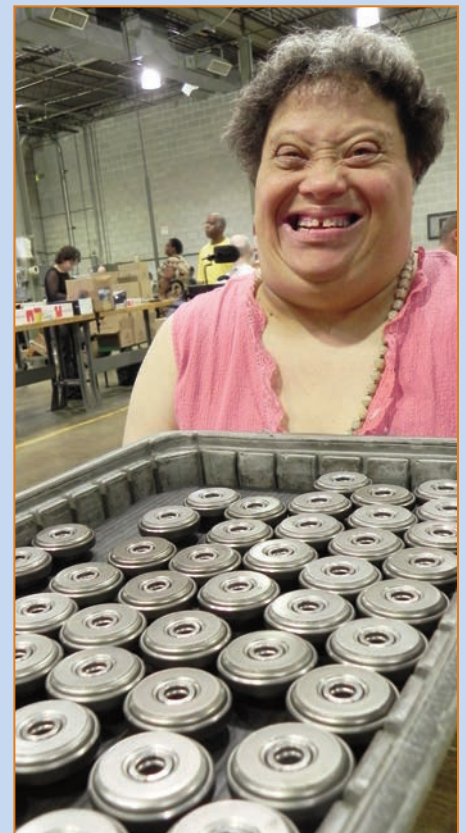
Valerie has her own bedroom. She keeps it immaculately clean and neat. She helps with dusting, vacuuming and other chores around the house.

During their weekend visits, Valerie tells her mother about her home, work and her social life. She might mention a particular guy, but if her mother teases her about it, Valerie is quick to explain, “Mom, he’s not a boyfriend, he’s just a friend.”

Whether Valerie is staying at her mother’s house or in her Aspire home, her favorite

activity is to watch television and to play movies on her DVD player. She has seen her favorite movie, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, so many times her mother recently replaced a worn-out copy.

“I love the part about the ‘bundt cake,’” says Valerie, smiling and laughing.



Valerie is quick, finishing this tray of rotators at Aspire Industries.

Two Organizations, One Goal

OfficeMax and Aspire share a vision.

BASED IN NAPERVILLE, OFFICEMAX HAS workplace diversity goals for the inclusion of people with disabilities. Aspire is building long-term relationships with local and national companies to develop job opportunities for participants and to create new revenue through these alliances.

About two years ago, the two organizations met to explore how they might create a successful partnership. It began with OfficeMax selling Aspire CoffeeWorks products through their catalog—a benefit not only for both parties but also for those who ordered the coffee. At the same time, Reuben Slone, OfficeMax executive vice president of supply chain, joined the Aspire Board of Directors.

The partnership grew from there.

“OfficeMax has a customer fulfillment center in Itasca that hires workers to pick, pack, ship and receive office supplies,” says Lisa Dziergas, director of community employment services at Aspire. “We suggested that people with disabilities would be a perfect fit for some of their

warehouse jobs and that we could help them fill those positions.”

OfficeMax was willing and excited from the beginning and reached out to Aspire to enhance their interview and hiring process. Dziergas offered training on how to hire people with disabilities—a sort of “Disabilities 101”—to the OfficeMax human resources team. She helped them rephrase their applications and questions to be more disability-friendly. She also sat in on the interviews and gave suggestions. Before long, two Aspire participants were hired. As an added service, Aspire trained the employees and provided a job coach to supply on-site support to both the new employees and their supervisors.

“It was a good experience for both of us,” says Dziergas. “Together we created a ‘best practice’ model for this type of hiring process.”

OfficeMax saw an opportunity to expand their relationship with Aspire. “We asked Aspire to help us continue the success in Itasca and assist us in bringing more



people with disabilities to our workforce in Chicago and around the country,” says Larry Hartley, senior vice president of supply chain for the company.

Together, OfficeMax and Aspire held an “open house” to introduce the new initiative to other Chicago-area agencies that serve adults with developmental disabilities. Aspire agreed to serve as the lead agency for the organizations, screening the potential job candidates to identify the right people for the OfficeMax work force. In addition, Dziergas is working with OfficeMax’s customer fulfillment center in Kansas City to help develop and roll out their job placement program for people with disabilities.

“The partnership has been super for both organizations,” says Jim Kales, president of Aspire. “OfficeMax is helping people with disabilities reach their dreams. We’re learning about building true partnerships with corporations—including how to help them achieve their workplace diversity goals.”

Hartley says the associates with disabilities OfficeMax hired are contributing to the company’s success in new and inspiring ways. “It would have been difficult for us to place the right candidates in the right positions without assistance. We could not have done this without the help of Aspire.”



Arnold packs, ships and receives office supplies at OfficeMax’s fulfillment center in Itasca.

Video Highlight: Learn more about Arnold and his new position at OfficeMax at www.aspireofillinois.org.

Aspire is at the threshold of many exciting opportunities.
One way to invest in our future is through *planned giving*.

For more information, contact Erik Johnson at 708.547.3550 x3562 or ejohnson@aspireofillinois.org.

Mark Your Calendar

“Tee” for Tournament

BIG CITY NIGHT:

The 14th Annual Big City Night will be held on Saturday, February 25, 2012, at the Hyatt Regency Chicago. Join us in beautiful downtown Chicago for gourmet food, live entertainment and exciting auctions. The proceeds help bring life-changing therapies and services to children and families served by Aspire Children's Services. Sponsorship opportunities are available.

THE ASPIRE CLASSIC GOLF TOURNAMENT:

The Aspire Classic Golf Tournament will return to Butterfield Country Club once again! Aspire's 27th annual outing will take place on Monday, June 25, 2012. Tee off for employment opportunities and programs for adults with developmental disabilities.

We would love to speak with you about getting involved. Call Susan Clark now at 708.547.3550 x3558 or email sclark@aspireofillinois.org.

Aspire staff and golfers alike held their breath the morning of June 27, 2011, as the rain poured down at Butterfield Country Club only hours before the 26th Annual Aspire Classic Golf Tournament. With minutes to spare, the sun broke through for check-in. Sold out and sunny, the event was a phenomenal success. More than \$103,000 was raised to help provide vital services to adults with developmental disabilities.

Aspire honored Bruce Litt with the The John J. Angus Distinguished Service Award and PolyOne as the recipient of the Corporate Sponsor Award.

A very big thank you to our PREMIER SPONSORS who helped make this day possible:

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- Gibson Electric & Technology Solutions
- Meltzer, Purtill & Stelle LLC
- Porter Pipe and Supply Company
- The PrivateBank
- Ramrod Distributors, Inc.

And a special thank you to the Builders for Aspire, who were instrumental to the event's success!



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