

A NEWSLETTER FOR ASPIRE'S FAMILY AND FRIENDS



Answering the Call, Filling a Need

Aspire Children's Services reaches for new heights

left: Occupational Therapist
 Robin Manus with Noah
 right: Ben Prine

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Barb and Doug Prine have been involved with **Aspire** since their son Ben, who contracted meningitis as a newborn, was just three months old. The hospital's intensive care unit staff suggested the Elmhurst couple investigate physical therapy when it became apparent Ben had vision impairments and developmental delays.

The Prines say they are happy Aspire Children's Services has significantly expanded its offerings for children ages three to eight. Ben, now age four, can continue to benefit from the occupational and speech therapy he receives at Aspire, in addition to the therapies he gets at preschool.

"At school, he gets therapies that are school related, which is great," says Barb Prine. "But Aspire is able to supplement those therapies with occupational and speech therapies that are based on his life outside of school and here at home. He's learning to eat with utensils, get in and out of the car, and improve his sensory

issues, like walking."

Meeting the Need

A couple of years ago, says Kathy Ruffulo, Vice President of Children's Services, parents began asking Aspire for expanded services for children past age three. "They saw their children benefiting and getting results, so they began asking us if they could stay on in the programs. Now, we're happy to report, they can."

Over the past 30 years, Aspire has grown into one of metropolitan Chicago's premiere providers of early intervention services for children, birth to age three. Now we are building that foundation by continuing services for children ages three to eight.

This expansion fills a need for the child who has "graduated" out of the early intervention program, but still has developmental, occupational, or physical therapy needs that can be helped at Aspire's state-of-the-art Eamon Shannon Center in Hillside.

"We're able to focus on skills and partner

Leading the Way on the Web

WE KNOW WE HAVE A COMPELLING STORY to tell about what we do at **Aspire** and the people we serve. It's one of the reasons you're reading this newsletter – this is one vehicle for us to “talk” and share our mission via words and pictures.

“But in this day and age of high-tech, fast-moving information, we also need the immediacy and visual impact of the web,” says Candi Carter, Chair of Aspire’s Resource Development Committee. As a senior producer for The Oprah Winfrey Show, Carter knows a thing or two about reaching people and getting the message out.

“The new site, which was just launched, is attractive, has great flow and gives a wealth of advice and help. We wanted to build a community that keeps coming back to the site for information and we want it to be even bigger and better in the future,” says Carter, who is thrilled with the combined efforts of the families, volunteers and staff who worked on its development.

Carter’s son Emerson, who was born with a rare chromosomal disorder that caused

mental retardation and health problems, is one of the “Success Stories” you can read on the website. He’s joined by several other children and adults who have benefited from Aspire’s services.

You will read about Aspire’s history, news and events, and donation and volunteer opportunities, and you can get a wealth of information via videos on YouTube that Carter helped to produce. YouTube is a video sharing website where users can upload, view, and share video clips. One three-minute video on the site features Aspire’s CEO Jim Kales describing the organization and its services, along with heart-warming clips of children and adult participants while at work and play. Other videos cover volunteer opportunities, fund raising events such as Aspire’s Beautiful Children Fashion Show, and practical advice to parents about how to help their children develop physically and emotionally through

balancing activities and games.

“The site is where it should be,” says Carter, who hopes to build on the site in the future to make sure Aspire’s community stays informed and engaged in our activities. Visit www.aspireofillinois.org and experience Aspire online!



Emerson

 **Read Emerson’s story at www.aspireofillinois.org**



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT:

Meet Judy

“Aspire gives our family members a future we could never have imagined.”

VOLUNTEER EXTRAORDINAIRE **Judy Lorch** has racked up some pretty impressive stats in her many years “on the job” at **Aspire**.

She’s donated 750 hours to Aspire on Broadway, our resale shop in Melrose Park. Last year alone, she sold 376 donated items on eBay and raised \$12,000 for Aspire. That doesn’t include the dozens of cakes she’s made to celebrate the birthdays of other volunteers, the hours she works backing up the manager of the resale shop, the time she volunteers as part of the Aspire Siblings Network, or the work she’s done for the Big City Night gala.

How does she do it? She says she’s lucky to be retired and has “the opportunity of time” on her side. She became involved 18 years ago when her brother, Jim, became a resident at Aspire. He grew in independence and now Jim lives with a group of

seven other men in one of Aspire’s community homes in the western suburbs. Jim also works at Sam’s Club three days a week.

“This is my way of repaying Aspire for all that it does and continues to do for my brother,” says Lorch. “There is such a need for volunteers and I have to say my parents instilled how important volunteering is when I was growing up. It just makes sense to me to help those who help my brother.”

Lorch says an unexpected bonus of volunteering is being able to work alongside staff. “I see how caring and committed they all are. For many, working at Aspire is far more than just a job. They really are dedicated to providing the best possible care for our loved ones and they give our family members a future we could never have imagined.”

Our President :



Aspire provides a wide range of caring programs for children and adults with developmental disabilities. Our name – **Aspire** – best

sums up our approach. We help our participants and their families to aspire to a world of possibilities. We pride ourselves here at Aspire on the “can do” spirit we bring to each child and adult we help.

Our task recently got much more challenging.

Aspire receives about 85% of our funding through the State of Illinois (much of the remainder is through generous, private support), and **Governor Blagojevich’s budget may cut Aspire’s public funding by up to \$400,000 this year.** I humbly ask each of you to think of the 1,000 children and adults we serve, and join us in helping to secure the quality care and support that is Aspire’s hallmark. Please call or write your state legislators today—ask them to restore full funding to community agencies like Aspire. And if you are in a position to make an “extra” generous gift to Aspire this fall, know how thankful we will be.

JIM KALES, President & CEO, Aspire

“Aspire is able to supplement school therapies with occupational and speech therapies that help Ben outside of school and here at home.”



with parents in the process,” says Ruffulo. “After age three, most kids are in Special Ed programs for school-related therapies, but parents are not a part of that learning process. At Aspire, families are always at the center of what we do.”

Partnering with Parents

“The goals in the school-based setting might be learning to use scissors or other tools, while our services are more life- and home-based, such as learning how to dress yourself and ride a bike, for example, or learning social skills,” says Paula Cox, Manager of Clinical Therapy Services and a physical therapist. “But it really depends on the needs of the child since all of our services are individualized and tailored.”

Our services meet the developmental needs of infants and children with a variety of disabilities and delays, such as autism spectrum disorders, cerebral palsy,

chromosomal abnormalities and disorders and Down syndrome. Our therapies and specialized services help address sensory integration issues, speech and language disorders, motor skill disorders and many other issues.

Aspire Children’s Services is thankful for the generosity of three foundations that provided \$375,000 to expand and enhance our programming for children, ages three to eight. The funding allowed Aspire to purchase new challenging toys and equipment for older children, provide continued education for therapy staff, and complete other needed enhancements. Aspire thanks The Chicago Community Trust, the Oberweiler Foundation, and an anonymous foundation for helping children and their families to reach a little farther and a little higher, together with Aspire.

SibShops:

This is a program for brothers and sisters of children with disabilities. Since having developmental disabilities or delays often means taking more time to go to the doctor and receive therapies, it can be hard for siblings to understand why their brother or sister is getting so much special attention.

Every other month, a program is held for kids age five to 12 to offer games and arts and crafts. It also offers the siblings a chance to meet other families. “We make it fun but we also teach the kids it’s okay to be angry or jealous about their family member,” says Ruffulo. “We spend time discussing how the siblings of our participants can cope with other kids making fun of their brother or sister. We use that as a teaching moment and suggest they say, ‘he’s like that because he has Down syndrome. Do you know what that is?’”

Support for Families

It’s no secret that it can be emotionally and physically challenging for families with a special needs child. Aspire offers several programs for parents and siblings to meet, interact and receive support.

Parent-Child Play Groups:

These popular theme-based groups bring parents and children together to play, explore, and have fun while enhancing children’s social, emotional, motor and speech development. Parents have the chance to socialize and network with other parents in the program, often beginning supportive life-long friendships. *Daddy Let’s Play, Turning Three* and *Summer Funtastic* are several of our parent-child play groups.

Upcoming Nutrition Workshops:

Aspire recently received a grant from the McKesson Foundation to offer workshops focused on healthy eating and nutrition for kids with developmental disabilities. The workshops will also cover feeding issues and food allergies. A nurse and nutritionist will offer nutritional assessments and help parents be sure they’re offering quick meals that are healthy. For more information about our wide range of family support programs, please call Kathy Ruffulo at 708.236.0979.

Fraternity Brothers Lend a Hand

So, what does Phi Kappa Psi fraternity at DePaul University in Chicago have in common with **Aspire**? As it turns out, quite a bit.

When Paul DiMasi and his fraternity brothers investigated community service opportunities, they chose **Aspire**. Last year, 45 students worked many hours to paint the inside of **Aspire's** two resale shops, where they also found themselves sorting through donations.

"We worked at **Aspire** on Broadway, the resale shop in Melrose Park, and tried to make a small dent in Mount Everest, as they call it," DiMasi said. "By the end of the day, more bags of donations would be dropped off to take up the space we had just cleared up, but that's a good thing."

When the fraternity was looking for a good match for a service project, DiMasi called Julie Gies, **Aspire's** Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator, and then he took a

tour and learned more about **Aspire's** work and the people it served. "It's just an amazing place and the guys in our fraternity were very willing to volunteer knowing they were helping people with disabilities," he said.

Fraternity members worked at **Aspire's** annual golf outing, getting water and snacks to golfers out on the holes, and they worked at the Big City Night gala to set up the silent auction area, take the displays down, and even helped those attending the event to get their auction items to their cars at the end of the night. "We do whatever we can when Julie calls," says DiMasi, who organizes the volunteer team of 30 to 40 fraternity brothers.



Phi Kappa Psi

Says Gies, "It's awesome to see this group of guys roll up their sleeves and dig into a job, no matter what it is. They are always eager to step up when we need help." To volunteer and be a part of the **Aspire** spirit, contact **Julie Gies**, Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator, at 708.547.3550 ext. 3554 or email her at jgies@aspireofillinois.org.

thank you!

CONSIDER PLANNED GIVING

The way Eugenia Curry sees it, she wants to support **Aspire**, home to her son for the past 26 years, even when she is no longer around for him. That's why she joined **Aspire's** planned giving society, the **Everlasting Care Circle**. "I included **Aspire** in my estate planning because I have seen the wonderful care and home life given to my son, Eugene, and many, many other young men and women," she says.

Her son has learned how to live independently in a community home in Berkeley with eight other men. He works two days a week at **Aspire Industries**, the workshop that provides employment for people with disabilities and helps them learn useful job skills and work habits. Eugene also works at a restaurant one day a week, takes the PACE bus to his karate class, and makes it to church every week on his own, often arriving before his mother.

"I have personally seen the progress in my son and the positive growth the organization has gone through since the late '60s," adds Curry. "This is a way for me to support and contribute to **Aspire's** mission long after I'm gone."

For more information about the **Aspire Everlasting Care Circle**, please contact **Erik Johnson**, Vice President for Advancement, at 708.547.3550 ext. 3562.



Eugenia Curry's son Eugene

*"I included **Aspire** in my estate planning because I have seen the wonderful care and home life given to my son and many, many other young men and women."*



PARTICIPANT SPOTLIGHT:

Meet Michael

“What’s amazing to me is how Paula has taught us how to focus in on the exercises so that we can practice as a family when she’s not there,” says Holly.



MICHAEL BEVAN, AN IN VITRO BABY, was born three weeks early just nine months ago. His sibling twin didn’t survive, a heartbreaking outcome of the third pregnancy for the Bevans of River Forest.

Michael spent nearly three weeks in a hospital neonatal intensive care unit and was diagnosed with a minor kidney fluid retention problem, as well as a small heart murmur. When Michael was about four months old, Holly Bevan realized her son wasn’t hitting the milestones her daughter, three-year-old Lauren, had reached at that age.

“He was a couple of months behind where he should be so we had him assessed by an evaluation team through the state’s Early Intervention system,” says Holly. “They recommended occupational and physical therapy and a neighbor recommended the name of a great therapist she knew of at **Aspire**. We’re lucky Michael doesn’t have any serious health issues but he does have hypotonia (low muscle

tone), so our therapist comes to our house and we work on that.”

Therapist Paula Cox and the Bevan family all see ongoing improvement from his occupational and physical therapy sessions. “Paula teaches me exercises to do with Michael to help him develop stronger muscle tone. He’s learning how to track objects and we’re working on sitting up now,” says Holly.

The sessions have proven to be a godsend for the Bevan family. “What’s amazing to me is how Paula has taught us how to focus in on the exercises so that we can practice as a family when she’s not there,” says Holly. A bonus to the learning time is that daughter Lauren isn’t left out of the picture, either.

“Paula brings toys for her to play with and has taught me how to incorporate our exercises with Lauren so that she’s involved. Aspire tries to mimic real life experiences and that helps a lot. All three of us are on the floor doing tummy time exercises together and I’ve learned how to get Lauren to hand her brother a toy.”

It’s important to Holly, who is a part-time pharmaceutical sales rep, that much of the work with her son is done at her home. “I’m learning to work within our home environment because that’s where we are most of the time and that’s what makes this the best learning experience for Michael. Aspire is a phenomenal agency and the staff are so kind, gentle and encouraging. We’re lucky to have found them.”

Aspire’s mission is to provide people with developmental disabilities quality lifetime supports and opportunities to achieve their highest potential where they live, learn, work or play.



The Aspire Classic: Wrapping Up and Looking Ahead

What are you doing June 1, 2009? We suggest a great round of golf to support a very good cause. We hope you will plan to join us for the **24th Annual Aspire Classic Golf Tournament** at Cantigny in Wheaton.

This year's event was held May 18 at Butterfield Country Club in Oak Brook, where 160 golfers enjoyed golfing, a gourmet dinner, and a live auction with WGN Radio's Steve Cochran as auctioneer. Congratulations to Steve, who received the John. J. Angus Distinguished Service Award, and to Meltzer, Purtill and Stelle LLC, which received the 2008 Corporate Sponsorship Award. The proceeds from the May outing will support Aspire's employment and life skills training programs for adults with developmental disabilities.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR 2008 EVENT SPONSORS WHO HELPED MAKE THE DAY POSSIBLE:

- Banco Popular
- Complete Cleaning Company, Inc.
- Dyson, Dyson & Dunn
- Executive Construction, Inc.
- Fabrication Technologies, Inc.
- The Horton Group
- Meltzer, Purtill & Stelle LLC
- The Private Bank
- Ramrod Distributors, Inc.
- Wizard of Wood Flooring

Don't forget to mark your calendar for next year's outing: **Monday, June 1, 2009**. Please contact **Susan Ondreja**, Special Events Coordinator, at 708.547.3550 ext. 3558 for details.

Mark Your Calendar: Upcoming Events

• BIG CITY NIGHT!

The **11th Annual Big City Night Gala** will be held on Saturday, **February 21, 2009** at the Hyatt Regency of Chicago. Join us in beautiful downtown Chicago for gourmet food, live entertainment and exciting auctions. Help bring life-changing therapies and services to more than 500 children and families served by Aspire Children's Services. Sponsorship opportunities are available. For more information, contact **Susan Ondreja** at 708.547.3550 ext. 3558.

• THE ASPIRE CLASSIC

The **24th Annual Aspire Classic Golf Outing** will be held on Monday, **June 1, 2009** at Cantigny. Beautifully intertwined with lakes, hills and forests, it is a course that proves challenging to the avid golfer. Contact **Susan Ondreja** at 708.547.3550 ext. 3558 for details.

SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SINCE 1960
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