



Fall 2021 Impact Report

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Fiscal Year 2021 Financial Results

Expenses:

Salaries, Wages, & Benefits	\$56,475,960
Travel & Vehicle Expense	1,545,536
Service & Professional Fees	12,513,031
Offices & Occupancy	8,506,788
Depreciation & Amortization	864,332
Interest	183,151
Insurance	898,035

Total Expenses:	\$80,986,833
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A Message from Our CEO



Aspire Board of Directors

Heather Higdon, Chair

Robert Sheil, Secretary

Joshua R. Mello, Treasurer

Larcina Carrington Wynn

Jennifer Emens-Butler

Chris Meehan

Susan Sheckley

Arlene Silva

Dear Friends,

Though the pandemic has dominated the headlines, COVID-19 is not Aspire's entire story this year. While everyone in our community continues to feel its impact, the people we serve are thriving and pursuing their dreams. We are sharing some of their stories here, and I hope you will be moved by their courage and achievements.

Aspire's employees, shared living providers, and foster parents are working incredibly hard to keep everyone safe, to support a return to community life, and to advance the ongoing transformation of the organization. They are turning challenges into opportunities through their dedication and commitment to service, day after day.

I am grateful beyond words for their dedication and all they have accomplished.

We're celebrating Aspire's 40th anniversary. This year the value of our successful Vision 2020 strategic plan really came into focus. As a unified organization, we've created more impact and success for those we support. We've benefited from streamlined processes and are on a sustainable financial path. We've already begun the process of developing a new strategic plan to keep us moving forward in these uncertain times.

Doing the right thing for the people we serve means addressing the challenges of funding and workforce shortages and embracing a more equitable world. We must be willing to constantly evaluate where we are and plan for where we are going. Over the next few months, the strategic plan steering committee will lead the effort to engage stakeholders and finalize the next plan for Board approval by early 2022.

Aspire will continue to draw on the expertise and values that have enabled us to build strong communities by empowering individuals for the past 40 years. Aspire's commitment to a holistic, person-first approach to services means listening to the people in our community, learning from experience, and utilizing evidence-based approaches. These elements will contribute to our solid foundation.

Because we live in an ever-changing landscape and we are ever evolving as an agency, the structures and services we build may not look exactly like those in place now. Our strong foundation will ensure that what we offer will be the types of services the people we support need — and expect — from us.

I hope you will join us in celebrating Aspire's 40th anniversary to commemorate all that has brought us to this moment, and to harness that excitement for the future.

All the best,
Lou Girammo
CEO



A New Day

The notion that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities should spend their days in isolated programs receiving services separate from the rest of the community is going the way of the dinosaurs, thankfully.

What people need is not a program, but support to build a good life, support in doing the things that are important to them.

This transformation is playing out in numerous ways across Aspire.

The No Walls program in Massachusetts has expanded to include almost all the participants of the former day program in Fitchburg. The building has been sold, and individuals are spreading their wings and exploring new experiences. Leaving the building behind has meant that folks are free to do what suits them best. In one case, four housemates have formed a landscaping crew to keep the yards at all the staffed residences looking great. Their paychecks enable them to do the things they love, whether it's getting coffee every morning, going out to eat on their "Fun Fridays," or saving up for special trips.

"They're living their own life," says Yared Nesperan, direct support professional lead. "They're happier now and proud of themselves. Their families are proud of them too. They're contributing."

Making choices and advocating for oneself are crucial skills for creating these successful life experiences. In Maryland, the Voices of U.S. self-advocacy group comes together to share stories and resources, socialize with new friends, and join forces to advocate for change. Hearing each other's successes and challenges opens participants to the many opportunities they can pursue. This past year the group invited

individuals supported by other provider agencies to come to their meetings, adding to the rich diversity of voices. They celebrated their fifth anniversary together in September at a well-attended virtual gathering.

“They’re happier now and proud of themselves. Their families are proud of them too. They’re contributing.”

Having access to virtual communities has become an important resource for so many people during the past two years. Aspire Online in New Hampshire is continuing to offer online supports, enabling individuals to access flexible virtual options from any location. While Aspire Online was initially a response to the pandemic, being able to mix and match virtual sessions with in-person community activities has given individuals the opportunity to do what matches their interests and tolerance on a daily basis.

Changing the way we think about services will continue to have ripple effects throughout Aspire's operations over the next several years. The possibilities are wide open and as diverse as the people Aspire supports.

Sharing Life, Empowering Each Other

Malachi Abuga was an experienced direct support professional working at a group home when he answered Aspire's emergency call for a shared living provider — not once, but twice.

Malachi is dedicated to helping his two housemates, Robert and Patrick, follow their passions and make meaningful connections. He sees this as the heart of his role. Shared living providers support people on a deeper level, one that emerges from being together every day.

When Robert moved in, they worked hard to find the right balance between support and autonomy. Robert now takes great pride in caring for himself and has become a dependable employee at his

job. Robert serves on Aspire's Human Rights Committee, which protects the rights of people receiving services. And he's doing an excellent job managing his finances, even saving to go to Florida.

Their newest household member, Patrick, loves to draw and has created hundreds of colorful designs. Patrick also has a strong interest in the outdoors, and he built a backyard fire pit that the entire household enjoys. He also volunteers at a wild animal shelter.

The household grows much of their own food organically. Malachi grew up in Kenya on his father's vegetable farm, so he has a wealth of knowledge to share. Patrick works alongside Malachi in the garden, helping with all aspects of planting, care, and harvesting. Robert has come to enjoy eating vegetables, and he's lost 80 pounds in the past two years.

Patrick and Robert have become friends. They play cards, and Patrick is teaching Robert to draw. They love hanging out, hiking, and watching wrestling. Malachi makes time both for nurturing their friendship and for their individual pursuits.

Both individuals attribute their recent successes to the respect and support they receive from Malachi and the whole family. Shared living benefits everyone in the home. It's a busy household — Malachi and his wife Ruth have three children ranging in age from 1 to 15, and the financial stability that comes with shared living empowers the family.

Together, Malachi, Patrick, and Robert are building a great life for each of them.



When You Can't Go Home Again

Every social worker will tell you that the goal of child welfare interventions is to maintain or return a child to a safe, loving home with their family of origin or an adoptive family. And for many children, that does happen. But what happens to those who can't go home again?

Aspire's Permanency Program provides foster care to a diverse group of children with significant mental health and developmental challenges who don't have the option to remain with their families.

Adverse childhood events and trauma can lead to extreme disruptive behaviors that most families can't manage on their own. The vast majority of children with this level of need remain in foster care until adulthood. Many of them have never had an adult in their life who could stand by them during their most difficult days.

Lily was one of those children. She was abandoned in an orphanage in China and adopted at age 12 by a U.S. family that was

ultimately unable to meet her needs. When placed in foster care through Aspire, she joined a family that was focused on belonging and was able to see underneath all Lily's fear and rebellion. They never gave up.

"I think we often forget the importance of foster parents' resilience," says Michael AuYang, Director of Clinical and Permanency Services. "Resilience is the capacity to recover from stress and continue to do what needs to be done." Aspire clinicians and staff stood behind Lily's foster parents to ensure they had the tools to carry on. Their love and stability gave Lily room to begin healing, and Lily is now a college graduate starting her career as an accountant.

Cultural competence and the right match are important for all children to build a lasting bond with a foster parent. For children of color, that competence and match are especially critical.

"My parents are African American and I come from a strict background in some ways," says foster parent Linda Jackson. "Not everyone understands the life of a Black child. My job is to get them prepared for the real world. Raising a Black child in America is different from a white kid, even if they have the same trauma. The Black kid, when he walks out the door, is seen as dangerous. I can talk about the best way to support a young Black man with my case manager who is Black."

Aspire's goal is to create a safe and supportive home life that empowers each young person to thrive, grow, and participate actively in their community. Young people who transition into adulthood without a safety net can end up in unstable living situations or homeless, struggling with drugs or crime. Aspire's program has a strong record of stability among our foster families, and many become lifelong natural supports.

Foster parent Carmen Ayala has fostered several girls. "When they turn 18," she says, "they want to go on their own. I always stay involved, to help them get housing and connect them to resources in the community. They come back for the holidays. Staying in touch, you're able to be their support system, and also see their success. They

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all have their special characteristics and positive things they have done. Sometimes it's managing their mental health or their relationships better, or getting a good job. One went to college. One is a really good mom."



Chef, Businessman, EMT:

The many futures of Ryan Kozlowski

Ryan Kozlowski completed high school at Aspire Living & Learning Academy in Connecticut last year. Now Ryan is finishing Culinary School at Lincoln Tech.

He's studied everything from decorating cakes (not a fan) to making sushi, although pizza is still his favorite dish. The most unusual thing he's made is grilled octopus, which he prepared in meat cutting class. "The point where I am now in school, you really have to know what you're doing," he says.

Ryan has always been a foodie, so it's not surprising that culinary arts came up during planning meetings in high school. Academy principal Lisa Riggi sees this process as very important. "Our planning process brings the student, family, and school together to help the student identify their strengths and lay out a path for the future."

While Ryan enjoys cooking, he's considering other options. "It's a really cool experience," he says, "but I don't know if I'm going to use it as a lifelong career."

The business of restaurants is one possibility. Another is becoming an EMT. Ryan is planning to enroll in training this winter. He's confident about his prospects on the EMT exams because of his experience at ALL Academy.

The small class size at ALL Academy made a big difference. "They really understand you and take their time with you," he says. "I definitely needed therapy and anger management. Once I got good with the behavior stuff, I really started working on the academics."

Breaking down skills and mastering one step at a time was key: "Every year got more difficult until I was able to do everything they put in front of me."

Ryan spent his final year at ALL Academy in the Transition program to shore up his self-advocacy skills and learn employment basics. Lisa Riggi explains: "The Transition program is an option for students who have finished their academic work but need more preparation in other areas to take the next step."

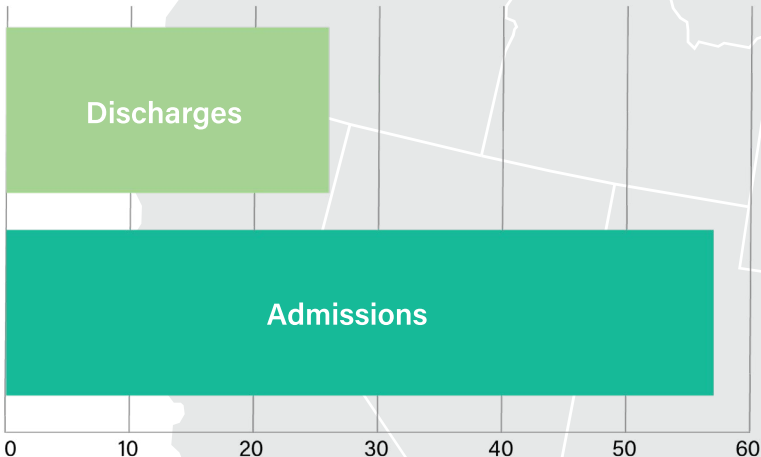
Ryan looks back on his time at ALL Academy proudly. "Over the seven or eight years I was at the Academy, I worked really hard to get myself to a point where I could function," he says. "Now I'm in college and functioning as an adult."



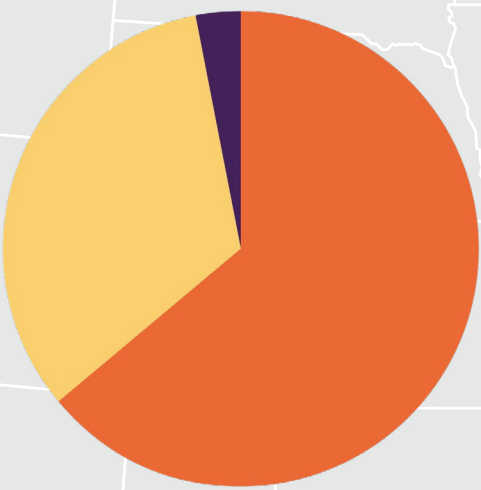
“Our planning process brings the student, family, and school together to help the student identify their strengths and lay out a path for the future.”

Demographics

2021 Saw an Increase in People Supported

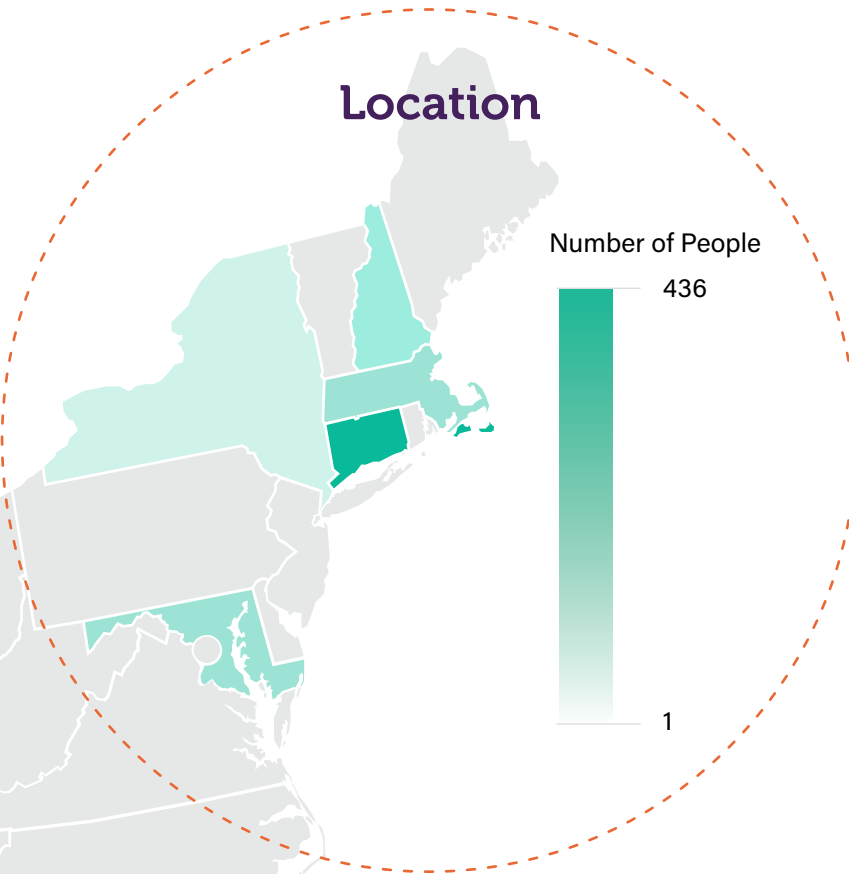


Gender

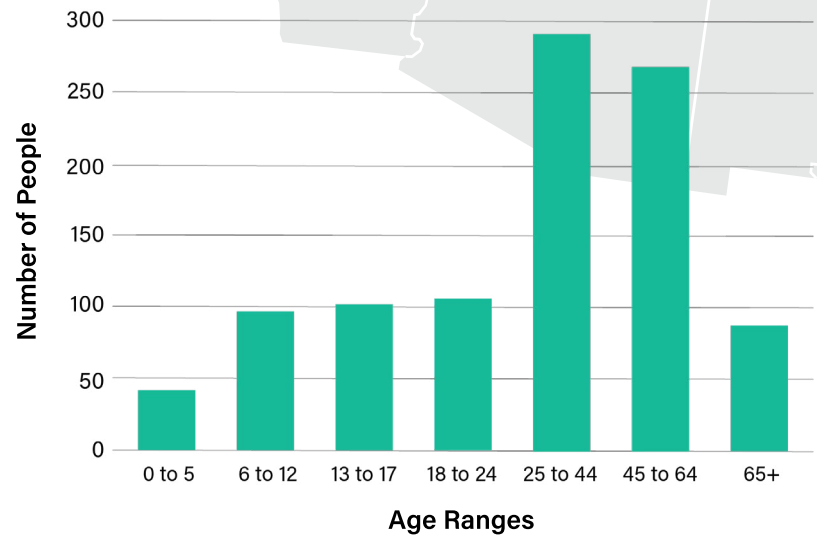


- Male
- Female
- Non-Binary

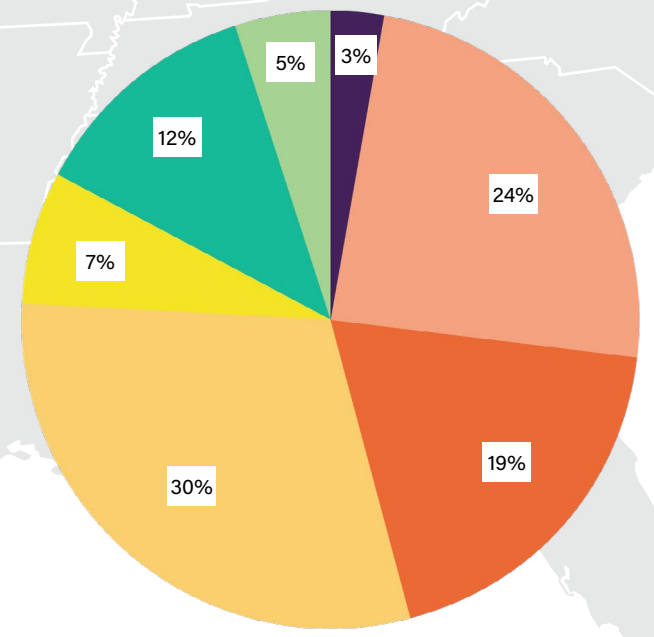
Location



Age



Proportion by Service



- Staffed Residences
- Shared Living
- Day/Employment
- Permanency
- ALL Academy
- ABA-Consult
- ABA-POW



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