



Fall 2022
Annual Report

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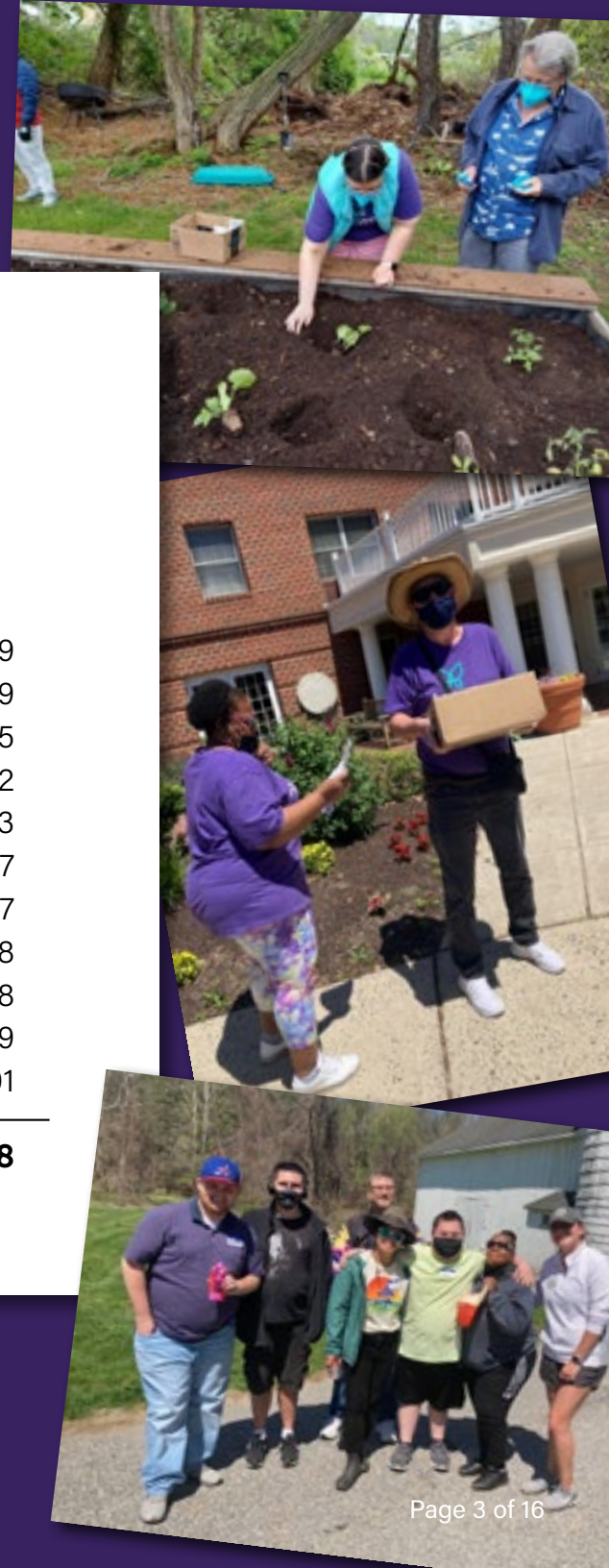
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Fiscal Year 2022 Financial Results

Expenses:

Salaries & Fringe	\$59,461,699
Provider Payments & Professional Services	12,323,669
Conferences & Education	350,005
Occupancy Costs	6,370,422
Advertising, IT, and Office Supplies	2,724,423
Insurance	350,887
Travel & Vehicle Expenses	1,854,077
Client Expenses	1,103,358
Interest, Depreciation & Misc. Expenses	808,258
ARPA Purchases	644,709
COVID-19 Purchases	279,401

Total Expenses:	\$86,270,908
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A Message from Our CEO



Dear Friends:

I'm delighted to report on this past year at Aspire Living & Learning. The people Aspire serves have made remarkable gains with the help of a diverse, dedicated group of employees, providers, and stakeholders like you. It wasn't easy.

The unprecedented challenges of recent years continue. The pandemic lingers on, with the need to continue protecting vulnerable individuals, even as the country seems to have lost its appetite for it. The nationwide workforce shortage has hit human service agencies especially hard, as we compete for workers with for-profit companies who can afford to pay more. Inflation is taking an increasing bite out of our budgets, but unlike other businesses, we can't just raise prices.

On March 14th, 2022, the Aspire Board of Directors unanimously approved the agency's next three-year strategic plan to ensure that we can continue to thrive within the reality of a dynamic, potentially volatile environment. The plan was the result of months of discussion, input from stakeholders, and a deep assessment of the agency's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Our work on the plan led us to further develop and fortify the agency's mission, vision, and guiding principles.

Mission: Aspire Living & Learning serves neurodiverse children and adults who are discovering their passions, unlocking potential, and thriving.

Vision: Communities are stronger when people realize their passions, potential, and power.

The plan includes three strategic goals to advance the mission and vision. The most important element in achieving these goals is our Person-Centered Approach. This guiding principle defines our relationships with each other, as well as how we serve those who come to us for help and support. Simply put, a person-centered approach is a process of engaging with others from a place of service; from a place of acting according to their needs without assuming that we know what they need. The strategic goals found in the plan are grounded in this person-centered approach to service.





Aspire is focused on three strategic goals.

Learning. By focusing in the coming years on communication, training and development, and compensation, Aspire will continue to build an exceptional work environment, where employees and board members want to come, stay, and grow. A new workplace learning department is now taking shape, growing out of initiatives this past year to retool the DSP onboarding process and to provide formal mentoring for new and aspiring managers.

Integration. Aspire has been on a journey of integration – to create a stronger, more unified organization capable of riding the winds of change and pursuing exciting new opportunities. Aspire is empowering employees at all levels to lead and instilling even greater rigor in our decision making. Through an agency-wide budgeting process laser-focused on our priorities, 2021-2022 saw a positive bottom line, creating the opportunity to invest further in employee compensation and agency reserves.

Impact. Our mission and vision challenge us to an ambitious future, changing lives and thereby strengthening communities. However, unless they result in better outcomes for individuals, families, communities and Aspire employees, our actions matter little. This year Aspire conducted its first all-agency satisfaction survey to serve as a baseline for ongoing measurement of the outcomes of our efforts.

I invite you to join us on this powerful journey and to help us fulfill our mission in the coming years.

Lou Giramma, CEO

Board of Directors

Larcina Carrington Wynn

Ed Denmark

Jennifer Emens-Butler

Andrew Feinstein

Heather Higdon

Chris Meehan

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Robert Sheil

Arlene Silva



Thanks to Our Generous Supporters

Ambassador (\$10,000 and above)

The Ellen Au-Yang Charitable Foundation
Eventide Foundation

Champion (\$2,500 - \$9,999)

Bangor Savings Bank Foundation
Civitan Club of Baltimore
Cogswell Benevolent Trust
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Northeast Delta Dental Foundation

Mentor (\$500 - \$2,499)

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Lou Giramma & Suzanne Turner
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Favour Akhidenor
Beneth Akinle
Kerry Antolini
Daniel Archambault
Rachelle Asante
Bonnie Augur
Eileen Backman
Rose Ballaro
Parnell Barmer
Megan Bassett
Patricia Bastian
Joe Benhardt
Elizabeth Benhardt
Kayla Marie Berger
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Andrei & Elizabeth Chahine
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Donella Crenshaw
Elaine Cruz
Dan Cunningham

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Kathryn Cyr
Lauren Dannenberg
Stacy Danner
Ashley Davis
Victor & Marie DeSantis
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Joyce Driscoll
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Alma Joseph
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Samantha Helen Pozucek
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Jennifer Riccio
Crystal Rickard
Katharine Rocci
Shrouk Samhan
Nichole Sardinha
Wendi Saunders
Steven Schultz
Liz Sellinger
Arlene Silva
Nahshon & Geraldine Smith
Ezax I. Smith
Mary Stermer
John Stout Jr.
Stowe Insurance Agency, Inc.
Mary Tannouri
Francesca Turner
John Vespaziani
Jason Vitakis
Rosemarie Warner
Donald & Patricia Webster
Jennifer Welcome-Miller
Deborah Wells
Loretta White-Clementi
Julia Wilcox
Daminga Williams
Tonya Williams
Sandra Williamson
Laura Young
Helen Zhu
Kathryn Zimmerman



Building Relationships One Skill at a Time

According to the National Core Indicators (NCI) national survey of outcomes of developmental disability services, 43% of adults with IDD report that they are lonely at least some of the time. The NCI survey of families indicated that 38% of individuals have no friends outside the family or paid caregivers. Difficulty forming friendships starts in childhood, and researchers attribute this difficulty to a lack of social skills.

Social-emotional learning has been part of Aspire's educational curriculum since the school was started. At ALL Academy, social skills are taught using a variety of evidence-based programs from kindergarten right through to post-high school transition services.

Principal Lisa Riggi is currently finishing a program evaluation of ALL Academy's use of the Second Steps curriculum with middle school students. This sort of evaluation is important because, like most curricula of this type, Second Step was not created from the lens of students with special needs. "Teachers have been pulling from a variety of social skills

programs — such as the PEERS, Zones of Regulation, and Second Step — and breaking down skills themselves to meet the needs of individual students," reports Riggi. "I wanted to understand if the Second Step curriculum could be implemented effectively for ALL Academy students, given their diverse needs."

Riggi found that the program was effective at keeping students engaged. Mike DeNegre, ALL Academy teacher who works with the students using this curriculum, sees good outcomes as well. "What I've seen is much less yelling and arguing when they don't get their way — a lot more stopping




and reflecting on how the other person feels. I remember one student said something mean about another, and immediately a third said to the student being targeted, 'Well I always like having you around. I'm glad you're in my class.'"

This longstanding work at ALL Academy is having an effect beyond their classrooms. When Danielle Epperson switched departments from Aspire's education services to become clinical director for adult services in Connecticut, she brought that commitment to evidence-based training with her. Although Aspire had long used evidence-based treatments like Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) with adults experiencing significant behavior challenges, formal social skills training was not offered widely to people who did not also need ABA services.

Epperson is committed to bringing those practices to the adults supported by Aspire. Along with the Connecticut clinical team, she selected the PEERS curriculum to pilot with a group of adults who were having difficulty forming relationships. The participants gather once a week for teaching sessions that include instruction, video models, and role play. They also practice with a social coach who gives them feedback in real life situations and helps them identify where to meet potential friends.

Participant skills are evaluated at the start and end of the course. One of the clinicians, Cole Mills, reports that progress is already visible. "One of our participants didn't want to leave the house at all before this class. Now the person comes every week and is engaged and smiling throughout class. The other participants are very responsive and help motivate the person."

What's happening in Connecticut with the expansion of social skills training is the kind of thing that was envisioned in Aspire's 2022 strategic plan — integration that harmonizes perspectives, practices, and programs across the Aspire culture. Integration is making Aspire's programs more effective in supporting people to build the relationships they need to thrive.

A young person with short dark hair and glasses is sitting in a classroom, looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. They are wearing a grey and black hoodie. The background is slightly blurred, showing other students and classroom furniture. A teal text box is overlaid on the right side of the image.

What I've seen is much less yelling and arguing when they don't get their way — a lot more stopping and reflecting on how the other person feels.

Self-Advocacy, A Cornerstone of Person-Centered Services

Nothing about us, without us.

-James I. Charlton, Disability Activist

Providing person-centered services demands that the needs, wants, and preferences of the person supported drive the services being delivered. Everyone can learn how to embrace their autonomy and ask for what they want and need. Unfortunately, the communication between the person served and those around them is not necessarily straightforward.

Some people are natural advocates for themselves, and others are not. Many individuals who have intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have learned to be compliant, to go along, to not complain, to say yes to whatever those with power over their lives want them to do. It's especially difficult for people with significant communication disorders, or who are non-verbal, to advocate for themselves without the right supports. Not having a say in your own life can lead to behavioral challenges and poor quality of life.

At the same time, self-advocacy is only effective when someone is listening. Aspire is committed to embracing person-centered supports. As part of that ongoing commitment, Aspire is ramping up its support of self-advocacy across the agency through training for supported people and for the direct support professionals who provide that service.

People receiving services from Aspire in Maryland have been running their own self-advocacy group, Voices of US, for a number of years. Voices of US expanded its reach this past year and joined forces with individuals being served by other agencies. Parnell Barmer, director of day options, helps to facilitate their meetings. The group is successful in supporting each other to speak up along their personal journeys, and in meeting with local and state politicians regarding disability issues.





“People supported by Aspire...were interested in learning about self-advocacy, but didn’t know where to start.”

People supported by Aspire in other states were interested in learning more about self-advocacy, but didn’t know where to start. In response, human rights specialist Linda Kaiser, organized a monthly Aspire-wide advocacy group to introduce advocacy concepts and offer training both online and in-person.

The initial meetings have focused on how to speak up individually and as a group and also on the upcoming satisfaction surveys. Kaiser uses many different teaching styles, incorporating conversations, pictures, and videos. The participants are learning about how to manage their group as well.

“They learned how a meeting runs. We have meeting rules that they developed themselves about how to be respectful and conduct yourself at meetings,” said Kaiser.

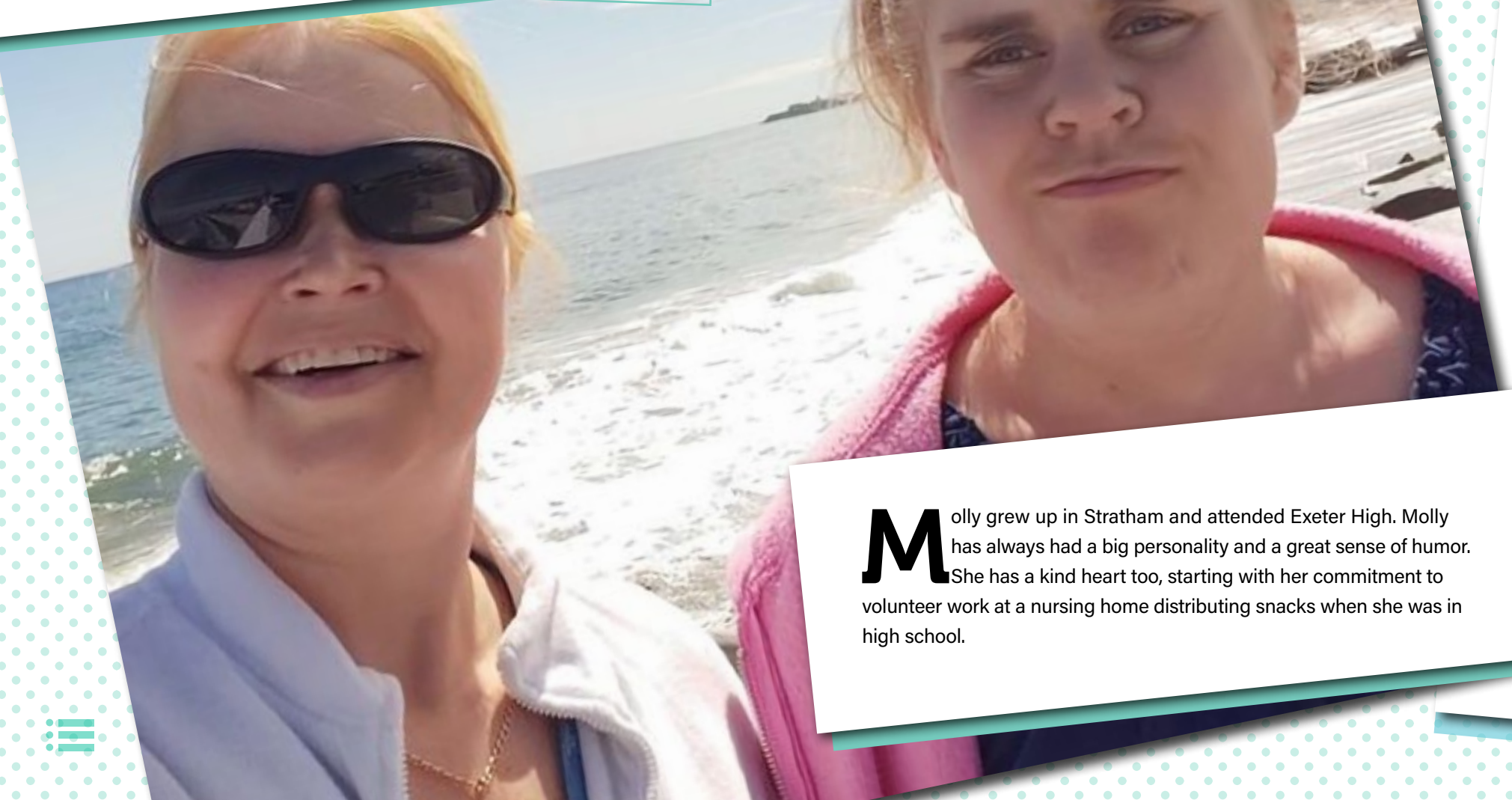
Kaiser is recruiting potential advisors for the self-advocates in each state. The group will vote on their choices for advisors moving forward. This process will be part of a larger conversation this fall about voting in elections, including their rights and responsibilities.

As the self-advocates gain skills, they will have opportunities to serve on Aspire committees and to participate in DSP trainings. According to Kaiser, “It’s about having a say in the agency. When we make changes in the homes, when we make changes with the staff, or changes to what we’re doing, often supported individuals are just being told instead of being part of the process.” There are already a handful of individuals participating in Aspire committees, including the Human Rights Committee in Massachusetts, and the Personnel and Provider Incentive Committee in New Hampshire. In the future, the group or their representative will meet with Aspire’s board of directors to share their accomplishments and concerns.

Molly's Day:

All About Community

At age 30, Molly Richards has established herself in her community on the Seacoast of New Hampshire.



Molly grew up in Stratham and attended Exeter High. Molly has always had a big personality and a great sense of humor. She has a kind heart too, starting with her commitment to volunteer work at a nursing home distributing snacks when she was in high school.



When Molly was still in school, she began receiving support for community participation from Aspire Living & Learning. Molly has Smith-Magenis Syndrome, which caused her to struggle with her emotions and with behavioral expectations in the community when she was younger. "In the beginning we spent a lot of time helping Molly manage her emotions and navigate relationships," said program director Katie Kelly. "All the learning she did had a big impact."

Molly has many friends with whom she connects during the week, including some former classmates. On Wednesdays, she meets up with several folks at the McDonalds for lunch and good conversation. On Fridays, she joins a group that takes day trips, both in and beyond the Seacoast. Recently, they went to the Seacoast Science Center at Odiorne Point in Rye. "It was all new. They had lobsters, starfish, and jellyfish," Molly reported.

Molly continues to serve her community as a longtime volunteer for Aspire's weekly gleaning program. She helps load and unload donated food from a local Hannaford Supermarket for St. Vincent De Paul food shelf in Exeter. One of the other workers at the food shelf is an old neighbor of Molly's, and she enjoys connecting with her there.

When Molly moved out of her family home a few years ago, staying in the Seacoast was a priority, so she could maintain all the ties to her community. She is close to her family, with both her mom and sister nearby.

Molly is most proud of her new job bagging groceries at the local Market Basket. At the end of 2021, Molly's mom noticed that they were hiring and suggested it. A little cautious, Molly asked a friend who had worked there what it was like. The friend gave a positive recommendation and encouraged Molly to apply. Molly got help from then direct support professional, Ann Stone-Doyon, to put together her resume and prepare for the interview.

Molly has many friends with whom she connects with during the week, including some former classmates.

When Molly was hired in December, Market Basket trained Molly and Ann on how to bag correctly, and Ann created a work checklist for Molly to use. Molly learned about providing good customer service, even when customers are not nice. Now, Molly does a quick review of expectations with her Aspire support staff at the start of each shift and takes it from there.

Because everyone came together to support her, Molly is on her way to independence at work. "That's what community is all about," observed Katie.

ASPIRE LIVING & LEARNING IS MAKING AN IMPACT

Aspire Serves Both Adults and Children Across Four States

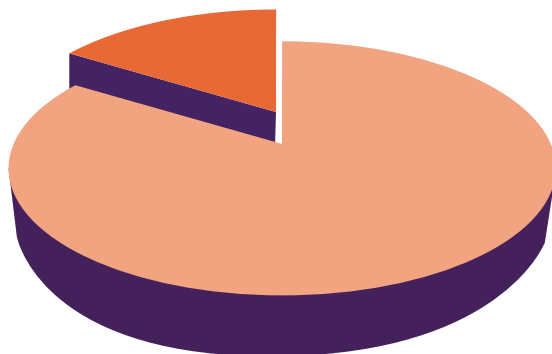
Census of 682 Individuals

Adults
56%

Children
44%

74% Adult
Services

26% Children's
Services



Aspire Services are Provided by
Employees & Shared Living Providers

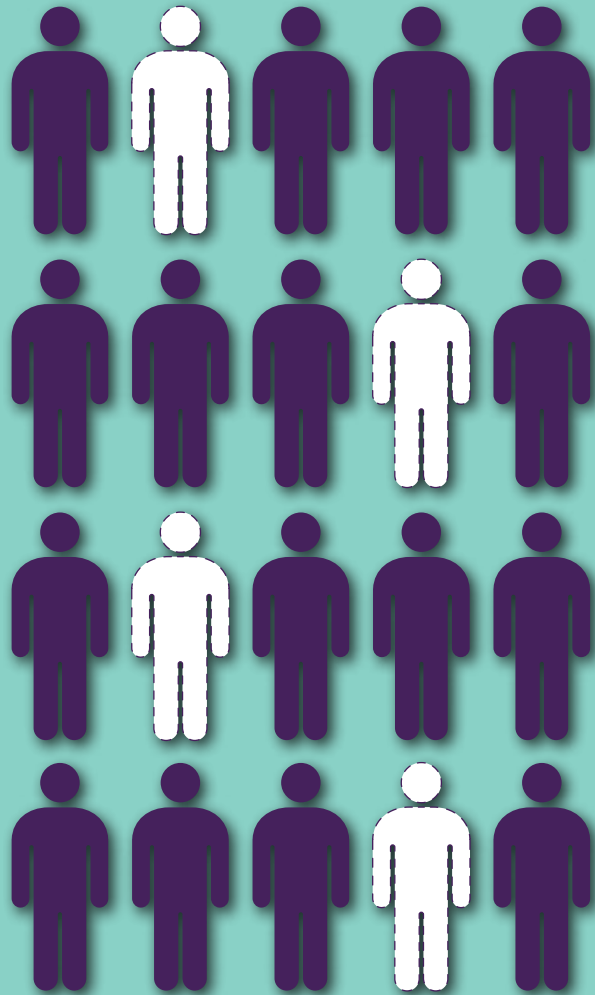
Employees

Home Providers



Aspire is Experiencing the Challenges of the National Workforce Shortage:

Vacancy Rate 20%



Aspire completed our first agency-wide satisfaction survey.

Of the 35% of individuals who responded,

Adults said they:



Felt Safe
95%



Were Supported
95%



Make Important Choices
84%

Students said they:



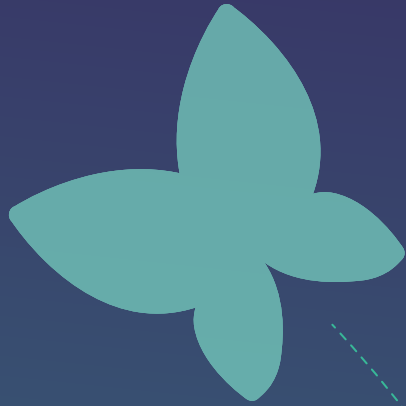
Felt Welcomed
91%



Were Learning
90%



Had Friends at School
84%



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