



**Annual Report  
November 2020 - June 2021  
Financial Statements 2020**

*CHY 114438 / CRN 231996*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **Contents**

About Aspire _____	1
Financial Summary _____	9
Income and Expenditure Summary _____	11
Statement from the Board of Directors _____	12
Contact Information _____	13

# ABOUT ASPIRE

## Aspire

Aspire – Asperger Syndrome Association of Ireland, was established 26 years ago to support members of the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Community, most specifically those with a formal diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome. Today, our goals are still aligned to that which we believed in 26 years ago, which are:

- To provide information, support and assistance for people who have the condition known as Asperger Syndrome or ASD in Ireland, in particular in the areas of diagnosis, education, training, remedial treatment, housing, employment and personal development;
- To promote a support network for families, friends and carers of those living with Asperger Syndrome, and provide a general forum to discuss topics associated with ASD or Asperger Syndrome;
- To advocate on behalf of people with ASD, and provide them with the tools to advocate for themselves; and
- To provide a residential unit for those living with a diagnosis of ASD or Asperger Syndrome, providing independent living skills and the tools to live independently.

To achieve these goals, Aspire focuses on five key areas:

1. To meet the needs of people living with Asperger Syndrome or ASD throughout their lives, from diagnosis, through education, social exploration, career development and independent living;
2. To ensure that information and a network of support is available to anyone who needs it
3. To promote an understanding of the unique qualities of people with Asperger Syndrome or ASD and their needs, to ensure support is provided in social, educational and employment environments;
4. To facilitate families of people with ASD or Asperger Syndrome to gain the tools and resources needed for them to support their family member in achieving their goals; and
5. To participate in and encourage research into ASD or Asperger Syndrome as opportunities present themselves.

## Our Vision

Our **Vision** is a world where people with Asperger Syndrome or ASD have the same opportunities to work, socialize and participate as everyone else.

# OUR MISSION AND VALUES

## **Our Mission**

Our **Mission** is to provide supports and services to people with Asperger Syndrome or ASD that will help them to fulfil their goals, to provide information to them and their families, and to promote an understanding in the community.

## **Our Values**

### **Inclusion**

We believe that people with Asperger Syndrome or ASD have an invaluable insight and should be central to decisions regarding what supports are required and how our message is communicated.

### **Equality**

We believe that people with Asperger Syndrome or ASD have the right to access the same supports, community resources, educational and employment opportunities as everyone else.

### **Promote Understanding**

We believe that a greater understanding of Asperger Syndrome and ASD in the community will lead to greater inclusion and awareness of the unique combination that people with Asperger Syndrome or ASD can make

### **Achieving Aspirations**

We believe that people with Asperger Syndrome or ASD have the right to choose their own path. Aspire is committed to providing support to individuals and promoting a level of understanding to make this achievable.

# SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

## **Services and Supports**

Aspire proudly continued to offer services and supports throughout the year, demonstrating our flexibility through government restrictions, to ensure our community continue to avail of important supports and services:

### **Career Development**

Aspire has entered into an exciting and highly successfully strategic alignment with Specialisterne, offering bespoke relationship management and career development support to those on the spectrum. Further supports and services in terms of in-house career development has been through the provision of informal agreement with professional bodies and agencies for our Social Enterprise (Aspire Productions) staff, recruits and volunteers. This has included industry talks, business planning, and opportunities to engage in diversity action planning.

### **Sub-Committee Work**

Aspire has created strategic committees to focus on the important work of the charity and on the strategic plan for the business over the next 5 years. Established Sub-Committees include our Financial Committee, Risk, Audit and Ethics Committee, and Strategic Planning Committee. These comprise of staff, board and community membership, offering valuable and diverse thinking, strategic and action planning.

### **Telephone and Email Information Line**

Aspire provides consistent support to individuals with Asperger Syndrome or ASD, their families, professionals and educators across the country through the telephone and email support and information line, in cooperation with ASIAm.

### **Aspire Social Group**

The Aspire Adult Social Group meets on the first Tuesday of every month. Prior to the pandemic, the group met at a retro arcade game bar near the Smithfield area of Dublin, however in the last year the group adapted to government restrictions, and now meet online to facilitate social get togethers. These include movie nights, games nights, social events, and more. The board have noted that moving the social group online has greatly increased our capacity for social outreach, and this is reflected in the increased attendance from people living outside Dublin.

### **Aspire Productions**

Aspire Productions is our successful and hugely important social enterprise, offering paid employment, employment support, training and engagement opportunities for adults with a diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome or ASD, in the media sector. This talented team continued to flourish this year, adapting to government restrictions when required by producing high quality documentary, design, editing, filming and other creative work.

# SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

## **Aspire Residential Unit**

The Aspire Residential Unit provides independent living support to individuals with Asperger Syndrome and ASD through a talented and dedicated team of qualified social care workers. A person-centric approach is used to facilitate engagement and activities both with the community and with our social enterprise, providing progressive opportunities to further independent living. The Residential Unit works with various government agencies such as HIQA and the HSE to ensure compliance with all relevant regulations and best practice.

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2017 - 2020

## **Strategic Plan 2017 – 2020**

Aspire's first Strategic Plan was successfully completed in December 2020. Given the pandemic, the board shifted priority focus from research and information provision to service provision, which saw a move from the delivery of in-house services to strategic partnership with specialist not-for-profit services. This has included career development provision with Specialisterne, and the intended provision of Adult and Parent Support Groups through a similar strategic partnership model later in 2021.

Other services, including the Residential Unit Service, Information Line, and Community Engagement continued into and throughout 2020 and early 2021. Our social enterprise, Aspire Productions, provided paid work and engagement opportunities throughout the year, as well as exciting training and certification opportunities.

## **Strategic Plan 2021 - 2026**

Committee work has commenced on the new Strategic Plan, with scope of delivery including service provision, information provision and awareness, fundraising, and a new and updated website (currently under construction). The new website will provide a range of important information to those with a diagnosis or suspected diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome or ASD, as well as to their families, educators and professionals on topics ranging from education to services, allowances, mental health, and more. We will also be running a competition for the design of a new logo to replace the current one, in the coming weeks.

## Aspire Board of Directors

Aspire is governed by a Board of Directors, including a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Treasurer and Company Secretary, who meet at least 10 times per year, and are responsible for steering Aspire towards a sustainable future by adopting sound, ethical, and legal governance and financial management policies - ensuring the organisation has adequate resources to advance its mission.

The Board is currently compiled of 7 Non-Executive Directors, all of whom are experienced and qualified corporate professionals, passionate about providing the ASD community with effective support and services. The board is made up of individuals who have a diagnosis of, or a family member with, Asperger Syndrome, as well as other neurodiverse diagnosis, including ASD, ADHD and Dyslexia.

Directors have a range of experience, including finance, commercial business, communications, human resources, not for profit management, and psychology. The Board have also established three sub-committees, including Strategic Planning, Financial and Risk. Both the members of the Board and the sub-committees are recruited through our professional membership, via the ASD Community, through professional services who link in with Aspire, and through board level search facility, Boardmatch.

Due to the nature of the work the Directors are connected to through Aspire, a Board Members Conflict of Interest and Loyalty Policy is in place to ensure objectivity in decision making. The Board is responsible for delegating operational duties to the Chief Executive Officer and providing support and oversight to this role.

Key decisions can be requested through the provision of proposals or questions from the CEO. The Chairperson, Company Secretary and CEO prepare the agenda and board pack in advance of meetings, including major decisions that require contemplation, minutes of previous meetings, and important documents requiring review. An Action Tracker schedule and decisions register is utilized to ensure decisions and actions are followed up on and carried out as planned.

The Treasurer is responsible for financial oversight and oversees and approves all transactions made via online banking, reviewing statements and invoices on a quarterly or more regular basis to identify issues.

Aspire has a risk management policy in place and operational and basic risk to the organisation is currently being assessed on an ongoing basis through the Risk, Audit and Ethics Committee.

The Board of Directors has met its objectives in ensuring compliance with the Charities Regulator Code of Governance, with the following work undertaken:

### **Board Governance:**

- the appointment of Sub-Committee Chair roles, draft Terms of Reference, and commencement of Strategic Planning, Financial and Risk Committees - comprising members of Aspire, Staff, Management and Board.
- proposed Audit Schedule to review documentation and processes in line with Strategic Plan

# GOVERNANCE

- a detailed review and update to the Memorandum and Articles of Association as aligned to the Companies Act 2004
- complete review and update to the Board Manual including key policies such as the Board Recruitment Policy and Conflicts Policy
- the establishment and adoption of necessary registers including Action Tracker, Voting, Decisions, and Conflicts Registers
- consistent application of board pack including agenda template, Action Tracker and minutes distribution via google drive, with board pack distribution within one week of board meeting
- review and update to formal board position descriptions, as well as full review of all staff position descriptions including CEO spec
- board competency skills matrix to understand gaps that exist and could be filled with final board member roles
- establishment of board-only sessions in line with good practice
- annual board evaluation as required

## **Operational Governance:**

- understanding of landscape against other charities with a view to understanding our points of difference, other areas of specialization and opportunities for cooperation, especially in relation to programmes or services including for the Residential Unit, career development, parental support programmes, and Aspire Productions.
- consequential decision further to landscape review to change operational model which saw the introduction of partnerships with key charities and not-for-profits specialising in relevant areas. Strategic Partnership with Specialisterne established with a view for further partnerships envisaged this upcoming year.
- full review of all programmes and services on offer, with renewed vigour surrounding risk assessing programme outcomes by way of proposal template for utilisation prior to approval of programmes, noting operational model change with strategic partnerships.
- update to comms and social media presence, with organic posts now actioned up to 4 times per week to increase engagement online, in accordance with the Social Media policy and strategy.
- change to Aspire Productions model to include appointment of Creative Manager and focus on social enterprise quality and productivity, training and development, talks from industry/media experts, and strategic partnership with successful, established production companies.
- significant transformative work at Residential Unit to bring operations to a place of best practice since November 2020. HIQA action plan agreed and completed February 2021.
- all Residential Unit staff 100% compliant with training requirements, including the design of Training Needs Analysis.
- website overhaul and agency employed.
- update to services and supports in line with funding and fund-raising objective (to align also to new operational partnership model).

## **Management Governance:**

- review and update to all contracts of employment, Employee Handbook/workplace policies to ensure employment law compliance.
- performance appraisals for all staff carried out, with board commitment to invest in necessary training and upskilling of both board members and staff, on a rolling basis.

# GOVERNANCE

- appropriate and/compliant Induction / Onboarding programme, training and development, recruitment and selection processes now in place. These include succession and capacity planning and effective remote working onboarding.
- workstation ergonomic risk assessment carried out for all home working staff to ensure reduced risk of claim / personal injury. New equipment/furniture is being purchased as needed.
- appointment of Accounts Assistant in internal accounts and payroll processing (no longer outsourced).
- update and/or creation of internal forms and processes including timesheets in line with legislation, annual leave forms, induction checklist, orientation/onboarding manual, expense claim form, end of probationary period assessment (checklist and process), etc.

## **Agency / Bodies Risk and Governance:**

- Residential Unit Policies have been reviewed/updated to ensure HIQA, HSE and relevant Employment Law compliance.
- a high priority has been placed on relationship building with staff, alliance partners in sector, and key agency figures (HSE, Pobal, Charities Regulator, etc). Engagement with Pobal, HSE, HIQA, WRC and Charities Regulator and strong relationship developed with same.
- commitment of undertaking by the Board (as noted bullet points above) which has included full time working hours on volunteer basis as required to bring Aspire to full compliance with the Code of Governance.

# FINANCIAL SUMMARY

## Financial Summary

### Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements

Our annual report and audited financial statements, as presented by the Board of Directors, provides information on the financial status at year end and a breakdown of income sources and expenditure. The organisation maintains management accounts, including a forecast and monthly budget, throughout the year, and the audited accounts are prepared by external auditors C. O Sullivan & Co. Chartered Accountants, Quaestor Management Services Ltd, 50 Fortfield Park, Terenure, Dublin 6W.

The following review includes information regarding income and expenditure, reserves policy, challenges and sustainability.

### Income Sources 2020

The majority of our income in 2020 was from Government and public bodies, including a HSE Section 39 Service Level Agreement and Pobal Community Services Fund (Department of Rural and Community Development).

Membership, residential rent and donations made up the remainder of our income in 2020.

A decrease in income can be seen from 2019 to 2020 for the following two main reasons. As a direct result of Covid-19 government restrictions there was a reduction in income from social programmes and events. Also the income received in 2019 included the proceeds of a legacy which was a large donation that was not repeated in 2020.

Aspire is currently in discussions with Pobal to extend the Community Service Programme funding for Aspire Productions for a further year.

**Total Income: €357,708**

### Expenditure 2020

There has been an increase in expenditure of €81,347 from 2019 to 2020, this was mainly due to legal, consultancy fees and increased salary costs to support operations. Expenditure of €391,211 which arose on activities refers to the direct costs involved in delivering the services across the three main business units which are Residential, Aspire Productions and Aspire programmes. Overheads of €87,068 were incurred for the overall running of the charity. At the end of December, we made the difficult decision not to renew the lease at Coleraine House. This will help in terms of some cost savings anticipated for 2021.

**Total Expenditure: €478,279**

# FINANCIAL SUMMARY

## Reserves

Reserves are funds set aside or saved for future use. They can be built from retained profits, revaluation of assets and other surplus sums.

The balance sheet of the annual audited financial statements shows the total reserves that an organisation holds as at the balance sheet date. As at 31 December the reserves for Aspire were €263,010.

## Challenges

In our new operational model, Operational and Social Enterprise staff are now comfortably working from home as necessary, however when normalcy returns, it is expected that a new office space will be required on a part time basis at a minimum. This cannot be considered until Aspire is in a position to deliver programmes and cover their costs.

Aspire Productions continue to produce fee-based work, including documentaries and conferencing products for clients. However, new equipment and ongoing training will soon be required to ensure high quality outcomes. Funding will be required to facilitate this.

The Residential Unit in Ballinteer is aging and requires increasingly more work to ensure a comfortable, safe and appropriate living environment. This comes at a cost, which is not always provided for by the HSE. Funding may be required to facilitate major works.

Like much of the not-for-profit sector around the world, the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly affected Aspire's operations, and notably the ability to charge out for events and programmes to support our community nationwide. A focus must now move to the delivery of services once normalcy returns, as well as funding opportunities and fund raising to claw-back on depleted reserves.

It is the board's view that the concept of paid annual membership is now outdated and unfairly exclusionary, meaning that those in our community who cannot afford membership are not entitled to the same high-quality service and support as those who can. The board therefore believe there should be a shift from membership to donations, and an equitable provision of service provided to the community nationwide.

The CEO has recently resigned from this role at Aspire. A new CEO is now required to ensure the continued provision of high-quality supports and services.

# INCOME AND EXPENDITURE SUMMARY

## Income and Expenditure Summary

	2020	2019
<b>Income :</b>		
Grants HSE	279,021	292,443
Grants National Lottery	42	2,215
Grants Pobal	53,128	52,113
Donations/fundraising	5,599	150,802
Sale of books	151	693
Conferences	-	1,710
Member Subscriptions	4,970	8,635
Resident contribution	5,249	5,200
Miscellaneous income	-	153
Aspire Productions	6,729	4,075
Social Eyes	2,819	19,043
	<u>357,708</u>	<u>537,082</u>
<b>Expenditure on Activities :</b>		
Cost of books	-	592
Conference costs	-	2,206
Social eyes expenses	2,734	10,669
Community Engagement Costs	42	2,215
Staff costs	4,341	1,353
Spectrum Alliance Workshops	- 170	145
Wages and salaries	325,662	265,902
Employers PRSI	33,989	27,398
Repairs and maintenance	8,615	6,043
Light,heat and power	2,344	3,190
House Supplies and Requisites	11,344	15,300
Aspire Productions	2,310	2,949
	<u>391,211</u>	<u>337,962</u>
<b>Overheads :</b>		
Training	5,780	8,847
Rent payable	16,013	15,856
Insurance	9,088	7,445
Computer costs	1,538	1,074
Printing, postage and stationary	1,493	4,729
Phone	836	244
Travel & subsistence	2,567	1,167
Legal costs	27,260	-
Consultancy	7,112	5,019
Audit & accountancy	9,135	9,932
Bank charges	921	1,733
General expenses	1,313	151
Subscriptions	450	25
Depreciation of tangible assets	13,342	12,528
Amortisation of capital grant	- 9,780	- 9,780
	<u>87,068</u>	<u>58,970</u>
Operating Surplus/(deficit)	- 120,571	140,150
Other interest receivable and similar income	38	-
Surplus/(deficit) for the year	<u>- 120,533</u>	<u>140,150</u>

# STATEMENT FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## **Statement from the Board of Directors**

As Covid-19 restrictions continued to persist this year, Aspire's shifted focus to an operational model surrounding informal and formal partnership with specialist not-for-profits and professional bodies has proven hugely successful in terms of engaging our community. Not only has this resulted in greater participation from business planning, career development, and social enterprise perspective, but we have seen a huge uplift in online/social media presence and engagement.

We are incredibly proud of the seismic work that has been undertaken to ensure not only compliance, but best practice across the business, with all staff having completed important training and development in recent months, as well as demonstrating ongoing flexibility in adapting to our new model of operations. As Residential Unit staff continue to provide outstanding service to our Residents, our operational staff are best placed to provide the highest level of supports and services and once normalcy resumes, We fully expect our new and updated website to act as an important support function to our telephone and email information line, and we look forward to the completion of this later this year.

We take this opportunity to thank our staff, volunteers and recruits for their positivity, engagement and ongoing dedication to Aspire. As we have noted so frequently in recent months, we are incredibly fortunate and grateful to have such talented people working at Aspire!

We would also like to take this opportunity to recognise the considerable impact the pandemic continues to have on our community. While there is much to be positive about in terms of our planned expanded programmes and strategic partnerships, we understand there is more to be done as we strive for best practice and engage with you through the work of our committees and online.

Finally, this year I shall retire from my Chairperson post at Aspire. I would like to thank you most sincerely for allowing me to play an important role with my fellow board members and management team in bringing the charity forward beyond compliance to best practice. To not only watch Aspire grow and develop despite the challenges that have faced us in recent times, but over the last few years get to personally know many of the wonderful community members we support - it has truly been a pleasure and an honour.

**Melissa Stone**  
**Chairperson**

## CONTACT INFORMATION



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