

ASPIRE

The Autism Spectrum Association of Ireland

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2025

Anniversary Edition



**Aspire's Founders
Des & Treasa McKernan**

Dear Aspire Community,

This year marks an extraordinary milestone for Aspire – our 30th anniversary. It's a moment to celebrate not just the passing of time but the countless lives touched, the progress made, and the unwavering commitment that has shaped who we are today.

Since our foundation in 1995, Aspire has stood as a beacon of support and advocacy for the autistic community in Ireland. From providing services, and resources to promoting greater understanding and inclusion, we've grown alongside the communities we serve.

Our residential service, social enterprise, employment support programmes, social groups, and educational initiatives have empowered individuals to reach their full potential, while our advocacy work continues to break down barriers across society.

This anniversary is not just about looking back but also about embracing the future. As we move forward, Aspire remains dedicated to expanding our services, amplifying autistic voices, and ensuring that every person has access to the opportunities and understanding they deserve.

We owe this journey to the incredible individuals, families, volunteers, and supporters who have stood with us. Thank you for being part of our story. Here's to the next 30 years of progress, inclusion, and hope.

Linda Blake
Aspire CEO



[Website](#)



[Facebook](#)



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Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Arna chomhchistiú ag
an Aontas Eorpach
Co-funded by the
European Union



ASPIRE

The Autism Spectrum Association of Ireland



Aspire Designs

Our award-winning social enterprise specialises in unique and high quality greeting cards and offers a range of sensory items for both adults and children.

We are thrilled to soon be expanding our range to support schools and businesses in creating inclusive environments by offering customised sensory boxes.

Our talented team also provide professional graphic design services, crafting visually striking logos, posters and flyers for businesses across Ireland. Additionally, we are now creating beautiful personalised wedding card favours, ensuring your special day is as unique as you are.

Our expert neurodivergent team continue to deliver tailored Autism Talks to schools, businesses, sports clubs, parent support groups and others covering topics such as employment and reasonable accommodations, life as an autistic individual, common challenges, post-diagnosis support and independent living skills.

We continue to grow and this Spring we welcomed Niamh, Jack & Dylan to the Team.

Come by St Anne's Park Market on Saturdays where you will find our friendly welcoming Stall which serves as a focal point for our community

If you are looking to shop with purpose, don't hesitate to get in touch - every purchase supports our mission to provide employment opportunities for unemployed autistic adults.



Autism Talks
Social Groups
Schools Sensory packs

TEEN MEETUPS

TEEN ART and TEEN DRAMA

Teen Meetups continue to run weekly, fostering friendships and reducing isolation for autistic teens. Regular social opportunities like these provide a safe and supportive space for young people to build connections, develop confidence, and feel a sense of belonging.

Lunch outings in town have become increasingly popular, providing a great opportunity for social interaction, enjoyment, and a sense of community among participants.

Our weekly **Art classes** are held on Thursdays in Clontarf where participants are free to be themselves and explore their creativity and we have just launched weekly **Drama classes** in Smithfield which are running great with fantastic feedback so far

email: info@aspireireland.ie for details on signing up



The advertisement features a background image of a young girl in a red shirt looking through a telescope. To her left is a large stone bust of a man's head. In the foreground, there are several open books. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.


Creative Drama Classes
FOR AUTISTIC CHILDREN
By Audrey O'Sullivan

 **Empowering your child with the gift of confidence, connection, and creativity!** **Free Taster Class**

Aspire - The Autism Spectrum Association of Ireland

Upcoming Events

For Students

Learning to Learn:

Study Skills for Autistic Students

Monday, 7th April 2025

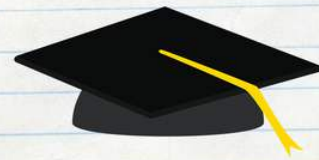
or

Tuesday, 8th April 2025

time: 6:00PM - 7:00 PM

Hosted by Maria Terracciano,

Study Skills Coach & Neurodiversity Specialist



Are you an autistic student navigating the challenges of third-level education? Join us for a FREE and interactive 60-minute webinar

What You Will Learn:

- ✓ How to leverage your strengths to improve focus and productivity
- ✓ Time management strategies that reduce overwhelm
- ✓ Note-taking techniques suited to different learning styles
- ✓ Memory-boosting methods to enhance retention
- ✓ Stress management tips for a balanced study routine

Who Should Attend?

Autistic students over 18 who are preparing for or currently attending third-level education. Anyone looking to develop effective study skills in a supportive and understanding environment.

Limited Spaces Available – Register Now!

We look forward to helping you unlock your learning potential!

Send an email to register for a place:

info@aspireireland.ie

Upcoming Events

For Parents

Aspire Designs is thrilled to participate in the upcoming Parents' Seminar hosted by AllAbilities. We will be showcasing our full range of sensory products along with our unique greeting cards, providing attendees with the opportunity to explore our offerings. We look forward to engaging with parents and sharing insights about our services. Midland Parents please pop by to say hello.

Parent Seminar

“Emotional & Sensory Regulation”



Early Bird Price : €15
*valid until 28th of February



with Dr. Áine O'Dea
Occupational Therapist

Portlaoise
Tuesday 25/03/2025
at 7-9pm

Waterford
Tuesday 01/04/2025
at 7-9pm

SCAN ME 



FUNDRAISING

Vhi Women's Mini Marathon



Women's
Mini
Marathon



WHY RUN FOR ASPIRE?

SUPPORT EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS

RAISE AWARENESS AND ACCEPTANCE OF NEURODIVERSITY

CONTRIBUTE TO INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES AND COMMUNITIES

HELP FUND SOCIAL GROUPS, TRAINING, AND PEER SUPPORT FOR AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS

RUN FOR A CAUSE THAT DRIVES MEANINGFUL CHANGE AND IMPACT



Ladies, grab your runners and come with the Aspire ladies on Sunday 1st June to raise vital funds for our Charity

[CLICK HERE TO SIGN UP](#)



Walk, jog or run you can sign up [here](#)

FUNDRAISING



FUNDRAISER

COFFEE MORNING

THURSDAY 3RD APRIL 2025 11AM

THE HARBOUR CAFE
UNIT 1 HARBOUR HOUSE, COURTTOWN, CO
WEXFORD

A PERCENTAGE OF ALL TEA & COFFEE SALES AT THE CAFE
AND ICE CREAM SALES AT MR SPRINKLES

WILL BE DONATED TO
ASPIRE THE AUTISM SPECTRUM ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND



We would like to extend our sincere thanks to Chris, Billy and their
Team for their generous support of Aspire

We look forward to welcoming you all there
and truly appreciate your support!



FUNDRAISING

Are you a school Principal, Teacher or SNA? Would your School like to do a fundraiser for Aspire for Autism Acceptance Month this April?

A huge thank you to:

Scoil Naomh Padraig in Ballyroan, Dublin

Our Ladys National School in Clonskeagh Dublin

and Goatstown Educate Together Secondary School Dublin

for their upcoming fundraisers!

Get in touch we can send you our fundraising pack

As a small charity, we rely on fundraising, donations, and community support to continue providing essential services, creating employment opportunities for autistic adults, and continuing to run our social groups that make a meaningful impact.



Steven's Update

On February 21st, I had the opportunity to attend the Access Ambassador training at The Wayfinding Centre. This innovative, multi-functional hub is dedicated to making transportation more accessible for everyone, particularly individuals with access needs. The Wayfinding Centre provides a hands-on, supportive environment where people can receive practical training and gain valuable knowledge about transportation accessibility. Participants have the chance to explore various transport systems in a controlled, safe space, empowering them with the tools and confidence needed to navigate the transport world. This centre serves a diverse group, including transport staff, built environment professionals, designers, academics, and policymakers. It offers resources and training to help upskill individuals across the sector, ensuring that transport services are inclusive and accessible to all. A key component of the training is the involvement of Access Ambassadors—individuals with lived experience who offer unique insights to enhance the learning process. Their contributions are invaluable, providing perspective both for those with access needs and for those working in the transport industry. The Access Ambassador training is a one-day course that includes a comprehensive tour of the centre. I was especially excited to finally explore the facility, which features real-world transport elements like buses, part of a plane cabin, and a mock-up of a Luas tram, all designed to simulate real-life transport scenarios.

Once trained, participants are scheduled for training dates well in advance, and the compensation for the role is quite generous. It's an excellent opportunity for those interested in making a positive impact on the accessibility of transport services.

For more information, you can visit [The Wayfinding Centre's website](#).

The
WayFinding
Centre

Gustavo's Update

There's No Interoception Without Introspection

Interoception is a lesser-known but very important sensory system of the human body. Basically, it is the ability to tune into and recognise one's physical and emotional states. For example: how do you know when you're hungry, angry, or sad? What do you feel when you're anxious or need to go to the toilet? The interoception system is responsible for letting you know that.

Interoception skills are important for all areas of our lives, including mental health and social skills. Autistic individuals often have interoception that develops differently from that of neurotypical people. The ability to self-regulate can be more challenging for autistic individuals because, if you can't recognise the emotions or sensations you're feeling, how could you properly regulate and respond to them? It's practically impossible, isn't it?

I want to focus here, though, on our internal state and its relation to self-knowledge and fulfillment in life. I will try to make a quick correlation to what could become hundreds of pages of material. Take into account the following ideas:

1. Interoception is the ability to notice and respond to sensations and feelings.
2. Knowing yourself is important to living a good and fulfilling life.
3. To know yourself requires developing self-awareness.
4. To develop self-awareness, one must be in touch with their own feelings, desires, thoughts, and actions—among many other things.

Gustavo's Update

There's No Interoception Without Introspection

If one's ability to recognise and respond to their own feelings and sensations is not well developed, how can this person develop self-awareness? [...]

So my hypothesis here is that interoception must be one of the main components to be developed—not just for autistic individuals but for everyone. Why? Because without this ability, there's no knowledge of the self, and without knowledge of the self, the chances of being happy or achieving fulfillment are practically nonexistent. Here, you might think you don't want to be happy or fulfilled and just want to get through your days. Even in that case, your life and interactions would potentially still be much easier if you developed interoception skills.

To develop interoception and self awareness, you can try engaging fully with the activities that you're doing—not only externally, but also internally. By doing that, you block out all other noise that is not relevant to the moment, allowing you to get a better sense of what's happening within. From that point, you can begin naming the sensations and establishing patterns - you can also start a journal and write about your perceptions.

**INTEROCEPTION NEEDS INTROSPECTION,
AND INTROSPECTION NEEDS INTEROCEPTION.**

GUSTAVO LAZARIN

**These are just personal reflections and not professional advice. All persons are different.*

STORIES FROM THE SPECTRUM

WILLIAM OLIVER

Hello again everyone. This has so far been an enjoyable new year. We have now moved to our new office in Smithfield, and it is very good, considerably easier to get around and work than in the old office. I had a good Christmas, and I hope that my colleagues enjoyed their Christmas time as well. I received a Christmas present from one of my colleagues just before the Christmas break. This present was the Stephen King novel Salem's Lot.

It will be a good read, and I am very grateful for the gift. I am at least two thirds of the way through my current Stephen King novel Under the Dome. The story regarding the dome is becoming increasingly mystical in its nature. It is currently unclear in the story as to whether the force that has created and is maintaining the dome is either supernatural or extra-terrestrial or even both.

There is also an increasingly struggle of political power in the town with one side (the villains) concerned with security and domination and the other side (the heroes) concerned with justice and solidarity. Although, both sides want to survive as individual people and as a town and so they cooperate with each other for now.

Another gift I received was the book In the Name of the Rose. It is a story about a murder mystery in an Abbey in the Middle Ages. It involves topics such as the struggle for power and symbiotic relationship between politics and religion. It deals with fanaticism and institutional corruption. It also involves class oppression under the old feudal system and lastly it deals with the value of knowledge in a society plagued by ignorance reinforced by the status quo. I have not read this story yet, but I am aware of the basic story points due to learning about from other people over the years. I usually try to stay away from politics these days, but I am aware of certain developments and attitudes towards Autism and autistic people that have been taking place in the United States and currently getting stranger and harsher.

Whilst I am aware that such similar attitudes that are found in this country are not as widespread as in America, I am a little concerned that what is happening over there will start to spread more forcefully over to our society. I hope that this does not happen as bad here as it may over there. On a lighter note, we have some new volunteers joining our team.

I look forward to getting to know them better over the next few months and possibly longer. That is all for the time being. I will update you all on both my and Aspire's developments in the summer newsletter. Bye for now.

STORIES FROM THE SPECTRUM

ROSS KILBRIDE

The course I am doing is in Ballsbridge College, it is in relation to Business and Enterprise Skills, of which I am doing in order to learn about setting up my own business, selling greeting cards, which is also why I got involved with Aspire Designs, since they were essentially doing the same thing.

In my course, there are several different classes that we do together, two groups of classes are with my class for one set of topics, the other two groups are with me and my class, for another set of topics. I have learned a lot, and have contributed a lot, to my classes, and I think all my teachers, and at least most of my classmates, really quite like me.

I am involved with the Student Council as well, and we have come up with some good ideas and initiatives for the project. I do a class called Enterprise Skills, which is an extra curricular activity, though my class and I need to do it for our grade, but it's fine because I really like that class, and am good at it.

I also received 'Excellent' in my Mid-Year assessment. I feel like I am basically the Quarterback of my college, and I do a lot for other people, but I also get a lot out of it myself. I do modules, such as Marketing, and Advertisement.

I have made some decent friends, and have a good rapport with the college, and especially my Vice Principal. I would recommend Ballsbridge College to quite a lot of people.



STORIES FROM THE SPECTRUM

ROSS KILBRIDE

Our Aspire Ireland 30th Anniversary

For 30 years, Aspire has been committed to making a difference in the community, for people on the Autistic Spectrum, their friends, spouses, and families. It has given people, such as myself, the opportunity to participate, and also work, in a laid-back, lenient environment.

I've started working here more so in the past year, but I've been participating for the past 12, and have always felt like a very valuable asset to the company, and advocate for it, and some of its past projects to be revived, such as the Drama (which is essentially what we have done this year).

I have met many wonderful people here, over the years, and have gone to, and spoken at, some of our prior conferences. I am proud of the work that I have done, and that we, collectively, have done.

I hope to take everything we have learned, bring it into the future, and make Aspire something that everyone can get something out of, whether that is the people on the Spectrum themselves, or their friends, families, teachers, employers, whomever is someone close to them. Let's keep going, but first, a glass of Chardonnay for us-and to you all.



STORIES FROM THE SPECTRUM

ROSS KILBRIDE

Every day
We make a change.
We change our futures
Even when life is strange.
When the chips are down
And we're feeling low
When we feel alone
We have our office, we can go.
Sometimes, we're scared, but we're greeted with a smile
I want this company to always go the extra mile.
We get to be who we really are
We get to show our real selves, our fears,
and our scars.
We push on however, in spite of fear
But you and I both know we've got a good place here.
There's always a nice cup of coffee to be had
Even though, my slight ADHD always leaves it cold.
Sometimes, we get caught up in a chat
Also with the customers, of who, our cards gets sold.
Conflicts can arise, like rising waves
But they can calm down, and we're once again,
ready to behave.
There's always a patience and kindness however
I think we will always work together
And I think we've proved, we will last forever.

STORIES FROM THE SPECTRUM

SAOIRSE DOYLE

My name is Saoirse Doyle and I would like to say a few things about how my time at ASPIRE came to be, my favourite hobbies and the influence my art style has along with some details about the upcoming 30th anniversary.

Throughout my time, I made loads of friends, including my boss Louise, my co-workers William, Thomas, Gustavo, Steven, Eoin, Sarah and Nisha. I love making cards and posters for ASPIRE and for people to write on cards and send them to others.

To go along with the cards, I create little characters like “Anna the kite girl” and phrases to go along with the cards that I make. My favourite hobbies are drawing, writing stories and playing videogames on my Nintendo Switch. The games I'd play are “Princess Peach Showtime!” and “cooking mama cook star”. My art style is influenced by Quentin Blake, Raymond Briggs and Hayao Miyazaki.

In fact, his adaptation of “KiKi's delivery service” is what inspired me a lot and therefore changed my life forever.

With the 30th anniversary of ASPIRE on the way, there will be barbecues galore and so much celebrating that's about to be done.

And so, from all of us to all of you, have a cracking easter everybody!



ASPIRE
The Autism Spectrum Association of Ireland

A registered charity consisting of an award-winning social enterprise and residential service

Social Groups
Market Stall
Info Service
Autism Talks

Thank you for supporting us!

www.aspireireland.ie
CHV11438



VOLUNTEERING WITH ASPIRE DESIGNS

BY ALUISIO SANTOS

On my first day as a volunteer at Teen Meetups, I think I did well. I was a bit shy when meeting the group, but very happy at the same time.

I was also a bit nervous about how everything would work, but during the process, I started to feel more comfortable paying attention to the children's behaviour and guiding everyone safely. My intention was to give them my attention, listen to what they had to share, and stimulate their reflections with some key questions.

I was worried about not remembering their names, so next time I will be more prepared. I have a list with all their names and will memorise it before I go, so I will be more familiar.

Regarding the attention I gave them, I focused on trying to understand their behaviours and needs. I tried to approach each child individually, without forcing, being patient and allowing them to come to me.

The first child was very friendly, communicative, and spontaneous. His worldview is curious; he believes that war is a human condition and is interested in the technology involved. He has a deep admiration for aircraft, tanks and cars.

He also mentioned that, according to his schoolmates, the group dictates which names are good or pretty. If someone is bullied because of their name, it means it is not a good name. I found this thought interesting and asked him about the idea of everyone being able to choose their own names when they reach a certain age. He thought it would be cool.

Another boy seemed a bit more reserved but was a good communicator, he enjoys making jokes and making people laugh. He mentioned that his current school is better than the previous one, and it might be worth asking him why.

I am looking forward to the next Meetup and getting to know all the Teens even better





30 Years of Autistic Empowerment



STUDENT SARAH'S

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING TIPS

Executive functioning is a group of cognitive processes which enable our planning and execution of tasks across our daily routines. Executive Functioning difficulties for Autistic individuals can include reduced working memory to complete tasks, reduced ability to flexibly think and reduced ability to inhibit our self-control, reducing our focus and attention, ability to follow steps and manage our emotions.

Notice your own specific individual difficulties or challenges across home, school or at work across your routine, think of it like a traffic light system, green you are managing, amber you are having some difficulties and red you need to stop and implement a strategy to improve this task. Routine and Organisation Strategies Having a good routine can help bring predictability and reduce cognitive load, reducing stress, improving our energy levels and feelings of wellbeing.

Break down all the main tasks of your routine into all the steps to complete each activity - add the times each task take so you know how long each part of your routine takes. This helps organise your time better to prioritise tasks and be more realistic with your schedule. If you find writing boring, use visuals in your schedule like colour coding to distinguish types of tasks e.g. washing/dressing, travel/commuting, social time, school/college. Leave spaces between tasks for rest and breaks.

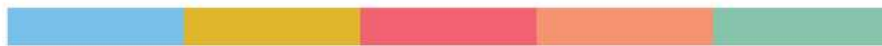
Diaries, organisers and calendars are useful to help note down important dates, deadlines or details in one place helping us to stay organised. Refer to your schedule at the same time daily to help keep on track with tasks to complete for the day. Use notifications and reminders on your phone to ensure you complete urgent tasks. Making time once a week to plan the next week also helps prioritise urgent and important tasks for the following week.

Break down tasks into urgent, important and on the to-do list with urgent and important tasks taking priority leaving to do list tasks for when you have time. Make time with supervisors at work or work experience regularly about task priority to help focus on these urgent/important tasks first. If you don't find the activities enjoyable, try and incorporate a reward after completing these, helping to stay on track! If you are unsure/having difficulties or feeling overwhelmed completing a task, ask your supervisor or a team member for help and get clarity and support.



Collaborations

NOW



www.nowgroup.org

Aspire Designs are delighted to partner up with the NOW Group, a fantastic organisation who, similar to us, provide employment supports and training to neurodivergent young adults

Here's how they can help:

- Get one-to-one support to find and retain a job
- Learn new skills and achieve qualifications that will help you become more independent
- Develop new social skills and meet new friends
- Feel more confident, capable and connected

NOW Employment Support Programme

This is a programme for 16-30 year olds who are neurodivergent or autistic

Participants must be 16+ and not in full time education

What is offered:

One-to-one support

Group Activities

Job Clubs, CV writing and interview preparation

Route travel planning

Accredited qualifications

Individual work placements

Workplace adjustments depending on disability

Get in touch with NOW to find out more by emailing:
trainingandjobs@nowgroup.org

NOW



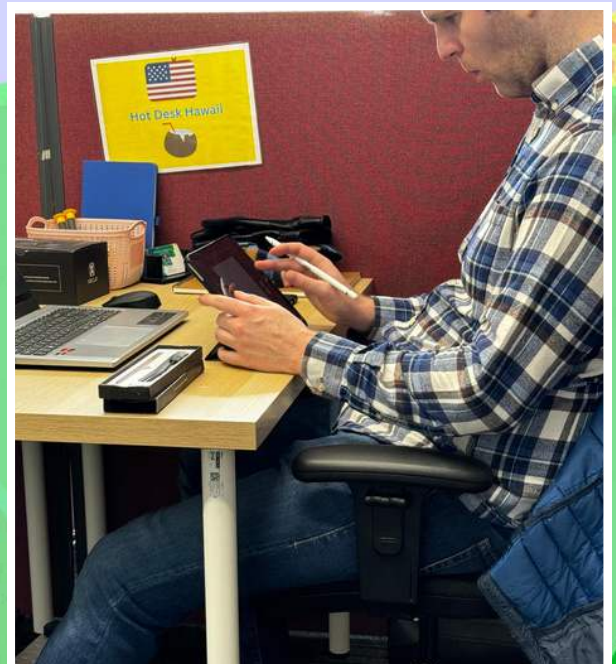
www.nowgroup.org

FRIENDS OF ASPIRE

Thank you to all the incredible individuals and organisations who generously supported Aspire this year. Your kindness and dedication have made a tangible difference in the lives of many. We're also immensely grateful to those who have supported those we have referred to them, for their unwavering commitment and passion for making a positive impact in our community.

Pobal	RBK Accountants	Dublin City Council
HSE	CourCon/CCL	DWM Cards
Specialisterne	Get a Gardener	Phoenix Radio
Screen Ireland	In Good Co/McKenna	Cartoon Saloon
Tusla	Michael Bowe	Lighthouse Studios
Hiqa	Kilkenny Animated	DWF Foundation
First Aid Supplies	Token Smithfield	W.A.L.K
TTM Training	Sharp Group	IKEA Business Network
AsIAM	Ausome Training	Alex Koster
ADHD Ireland	Employability	The Rediscovery Centre
Dyspraxia Ireland	Irish Cancer Society	Third Space Cafe
Dyslexia Ireland	Botanic Pottery	The Wheel
Inner City Enterprise	Google	AIB
South City Partnership	Yellow Harbour	DBS
Ultra Fusion Group	Carmichael	TU Dublin
Fiona O'Donnell Mindfulness	Snowflakes	Tesco Community Fund
Kennedy Health & Safety Group	Neuropride	Accenture
Middletown Centre for Autism	Ahead	Accenture Song
Innovate Communities Ballymun	Tennis Ireland	EY
Disability Federation of Ireland	Skerries Mills	Wolfe Group
O'Sullivan's Accountants	Chambers Pharmacy	Axis Capital
Killester Basketball Club	Little Fitness	PC Moore & Co Solicitors
Photo Museum Ireland	Spillane World Markets	David Rooney Artist
Market Pharmacy Smithfield	Your Local Pharmacy Ballinteer	Anne Weber
Dublin Northwest Partnership	Excel Recruitment	Irish Barista Academy
Ballymun Job Centre	Wicklow Gift Shop	Outside the Box
Kate Naessens	Northwest Partnership	Irish Social Enterprise Network
Dani Burns	Debbie Whelan	Spade Enterprise Centre
NOW Group		





Testimonials

Being a member of Aspire Designs has allowed me to be able to engage with other people more comfortably.

This applies to both in the office and out at the market stall. It is helpful that I am very fond of the people that I work with, and so this has allowed me to engage with them very well. This has greatly improved my overall confidence.

Working at Aspire Designs has provided me with valuable experiences. I appreciate the chance to collaborate with diverse teams. I'm grateful for the lessons I've learned along the way.

I think the Market Stall is pretty wonderful, it's easy-going and I enjoy talking to and selling to the public.

I have always loved being a part of Aspire, for the past 12 years, and have met so, so many different people through it, and because of it. I have always felt like not only a valued, but a valuable asset to the company, and I think I have done a lot here, but want to do so much more!

I think the Market Stall is really good at not only improving social skills for someone but also learning how to run a business, work with a team and designing your own work to sell. The Office is a great place for us to work on graphic design and plan new ideas for the business and organisation.

Its wonderful to be part of a really pleasant hard working team who truly care about the wellbeing of our residents.

I am particularly fond of the times that I have been at the Market Stall since it allows me to interact with the public better.

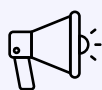
The working environment that I am involved with is, in my opinion, very professional and rewarding.

Key Information



Reply to this email telling us what initiatives you would like us to develop or explore more.

Examples: "I would like you to create a special interest group"



For general inquiries or to fundraise for Aspire, reach out to: **info@aspireireland.ie**



For **DONATIONS**, **[Click Here](#)**

We rely so much on donations from you



Did you miss our Winter Newsletter?

Don't worry, you can read it by **CLICKING HERE**

**ADDITIONAL
RESOURCES**



Website

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SOCIAL MEDIA**



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Government of Ireland



Arna chomhchistiú ag
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government supporting communities

ASPIRE

The Autism Spectrum Association of Ireland



Happy Easter



Back to website!



ASPIRE

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