

ASPIRE WINS \$9.2 MILLION GRANT TO REVOLUTIONIZE JOB TRAINING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Chicagoland Nonprofit, Aspire, Empowers People with Disabilities While Addressing Business Labor Challenges

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Aspire, a Chicagoland nonprofit empowering people with disabilities, has received a \$9.2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). The grant supports a bold new job training model designed to tackle both unemployment for people with disabilities and labor shortages for businesses. Training for the first target industry will be in warehousing and distribution with other sectors to follow.

"Aspire rejects outdated charity models," said Serena Alaily, Aspire's Chief Executive Officer. "Our approach benefits young adults with disabilities through meaningful employment while helping businesses access a dependable, untapped talent pool that improves retention and productivity. We are grateful RSA saw the immense value of this model—for individuals, businesses, and the economy."

Solving Workforce Challenges While Transforming Lives

With unemployment nearly double for people with disabilities compared to those without, Aspire's program bridges the gap. The initiative includes ten weeks of hands-on job training in a simulated warehouse environment, classroom learning, and job-shadowing experiences with partners like Wesco, Parts Town, KeHE, and Holman. The simulated work environment was made possible through the generous support from partners and supporting organizations: equipment and team member time from Parts Town and Wesco, financial support from KeHE to help fund the build-out, and software donations from Infios. This is followed by an eight-week paid internship, funded by the grant, allowing businesses to ensure a good fit before hiring permanently. Trainees develop critical skills and gain the confidence to thrive, while businesses



Serena Alaily, CEO of Aspire

benefit from a pre-trained, disciplined, and motivated workforce.

"We're proud to partner with Aspire to help build a stronger, more inclusive workforce," said Wilfred Rivera, Wesco Vice President, U.S. Operations. "Their mission aligns with our values, and we've seen firsthand how impactful workforce development can be – empowering individuals and strengthening communities. It's been a truly rewarding experience for everyone involved."

"I've always wanted a job, but I didn't know what kind," says Chaz Barnes, Aspire graduate and Wesco intern. "Now I feel like I'm finding out what I'm good at. Getting this internship at Wesco makes me feel proud. It makes me excited to think about what could come next."

"At Parts Town, community and innovation are core values — and partnering with Aspire is an innovative way to strengthen our team with talented, dedicated individuals," said Larry Hartley, Parts Town OEM

Optimizer (aka SVP of Manufacturer Supply Chain). "This partnership isn't just about creating opportunities within our community; it's about recognizing the talents and contributions of people with disabilities, rather than focusing on limitations. The data is clear, and we believe in it — team members with disabilities often bring higher retention, better quality, stronger productivity, and safer work records. Supporting this program directly aligns with our company vision and strengthens our business with reliable, motivated team members. We believe in Aspire's mission so deeply that we proudly invested in their on-site training center to help build a pipeline of outstanding talent for the future."

Research shows the significant advantages of hiring talent with disabilities. Companies employing people with disabilities report:

- 50 per cent lower turnover rates
- 33 per cent fewer safety incidents
- 25 per cent higher productivity levels



Aspire trainees get hands-on experience in a simulated warehouse environment



Aspire trainees receive specialized instruction from experienced instructors



We're proving that hiring young adults with disabilities is both good for business and the right thing to do."

Serena Alaily, Aspire's Chief Executive Officer

By equipping trainees to succeed from day one, Aspire's program addresses labor shortages while changing lives. "We train and pre-screen candidates, so businesses don't have to," explained Alaily. "For the next five years, we can provide companies with three to four highly skilled 'try-on' employees annually—all on Aspire's payroll at no cost to them, thanks to this grant."

A Win-Win for Businesses and Communities

Aspire's success in the warehouse and distribution industry

is just the beginning. The organization is seeking Chicagoland business leaders ready to adopt talent pipelines for high-repetition, high-turnover roles.

"With labor markets tighter than ever, now is the time to explore alternatives," said Alaily. "We want to partner with companies to expand this model into new industries and create a lasting impact."

Driving Change Nationwide

Aspire's program breaks away from outdated charity models, shifting toward more collaboration between nonprofits and businesses for bigger benefits to people, companies, and entire communities. The organization plans to replicate its model across industries and inspire similar programs nationwide.

"We're proving that hiring young adults with disabilities is both good for business and the right thing to do," said Alaily.

Ready to learn more, visit <https://aspirechicago.com/programs/aspire-employment-training-program-distribution/> or email Randolph Pitzer at rpitzer@pitzerrelations.com.

About Aspire

At Aspire, we show the world what together really means. Since 1960, we have never wavered from this one shared purpose: To be an ally to people with disabilities, working together to pursue greater possibilities—and create better communities in the process. Supporting the Chicagoland area and Southern Wisconsin, we invite you to build boundlessly inclusive communities with us. Find out more at <https://aspirechicago.com/>.

About Wesco

Wesco International (NYSE: WCC) builds, connects, powers and protects the world. Headquartered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Wesco is a FORTUNE 500® company with approximately \$22 billion in annual sales in 2024 and a leading provider of business-to-business distribution, logistics services and supply chain solutions. Wesco offers a best-in-class product and services portfolio of Electrical and Electronic Solutions, Communications and Security

Solutions, and Utility and Broadband Solutions. The Company employs approximately 20,000 people, partners with the industry's premier suppliers, and serves thousands of customers around the world. With millions of products, end-to-end supply chain services, and leading digital capabilities, Wesco provides innovative solutions to meet customer needs across commercial and industrial businesses, contractors, educational institutions, government agencies, technology companies, telecommunications providers, and utilities. Wesco operates more than 700 sites, including distribution centers, fulfillment centers, and sales offices in approximately 50 countries, providing a local presence for customers and a global network to serve multi-location businesses and global corporations.

About Parts Town

Parts Town is the leading, technology innovation-driven distributor of genuine OEM (original equipment manufacturer) foodservice, residential appliance and HVAC equipment repair parts. When there's a hiccup with any piece of equipment, Parts Town is ready to jump in and help with the most in-stock parts on the planet, innovative technology, and an unmatched customer experience. Customized solutions benefit equipment service technicians of all kinds, as well as chain and independent restaurants, schools, health care facilities and hospitality providers. By partnering with the top manufacturers of foodservice, residential appliance and HVAC replacement parts, Parts Town improves the supply chain, increases sales of genuine OEM parts and keeps every customer's business running like clockwork. Parts Town also partners with equipment and supplies dealers of all sizes to offer a one-stop-shop through its Parts Town marketplace. For more information, visit <https://www.partstown.com/>.

Randolph Pitzer

Pitzer Relations

+1 630-210-1631

[email us here](#)

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