



Special Needs Resource Centre

Helping children with special needs reach their full potential

Introduction

For 30 years, Aspire has responded to the needs of the community to provide understanding, supportive and knowledgeable services so that families who have children with special needs can reach their full potential. Over those years, we have expanded our programs, developed our own facility, changed our name and continued our leadership in providing quality services. We are continuing to experience increasing demand for services and support. Here is our strategic plan for the next five years.

We began our planning process in 2014 with a Strategic Planning Committee of the Board which included Aspire Board and staff members. We gathered information about Aspire and also local and provincial growth and planning documents. We held focus groups for parents and staff who shared their feedback and dreams with us. We also interviewed fourteen individuals from the community, including government representatives, representatives from school divisions, Central Alberta community service providers, representatives from post-secondary programs and a consulting physician specialist. These individuals, each with a strong interest in serving children with special needs, generously shared perspectives on the field, the future and Aspire. We are so grateful to all of the individuals who helped us better understand Aspire, the community and our future possibilities.

Concept papers themed and summarized the data, and formed the basis for two planning sessions hosted by the Board and facilitated by Gerry Paradis, Ph.D., Executive Projects Leader, Red Deer College. Gerry has extensive planning and community experience and we thank him very much for his invaluable advice and help during the entire strategic planning process. Our Vision and Goals are the product of our planning sessions and are at the heart of our directions for the next five years. Staff have already participated in creating strategies to move the goals forward.

This Strategic Plan represents the best input from our stakeholders and the best thinking of our Board and staff. Thank you to all who participated.

Judy Robins Weir
Chair, Board of Directors

Michelle Sluchinski
Executive Director



Mission

A charitable organization providing hope to children with special needs, the families who love them and the communities that care for them.

Our Values

At Aspire, our values are at the core of everything we do. They are the promise of what to expect from our services and from our staff. We stand behind them and they guide us each and every day.

Professional

Our staff are among some of the best trained in their fields of expertise. We strive to stay on the leading edge of innovative practices to ensure our children always receive the best support we can provide.

Compassionate

We understand what it is like to feel alone and uncertain of where to turn for support and assistance. We respect and honour the journey of each child and family. We approach all aspects of our services with gentleness and care.

Optimistic

Addressing challenges early gives each child we work with the capacity to reach his/her full potential when nurtured in an integrated and supportive environment. It is that potential that fills us with optimism and drives us to success every day.

Integrated

We believe in the importance of considering the 'whole' child, so we offer a fully integrated approach to assessment, intervention, and education. By combining all of our professionals under one roof, the child is relieved of the anxiety of strange people in strange places, and parents are relieved of having to coordinate information and appointments with professionals in different locations.

Vision

Working together to discover full potential

Aspire is recognized as a provincial leader in providing services to children with special needs and their families, including diagnosis and assessment, consultation and therapy, education, development and support. Community partners, government, financial supporters and volunteers recognize the excellence of Aspire's service, characterized by a compassionate family centered practice, an integrated multidisciplinary approach, use of best practices and professional expertise. Aspire demonstrates this leadership by:

- Acting as a development and learning resource for its own staff, community agencies and professionals, and families
- Communicating outcomes of its programs and services
- Advocating for the value of diversity and acceptance in the community

Central Alberta is proud of Aspire and recognizes it as a unique and special organization for children with special needs and their families.

Aspire's service delivery is based in its central location with access to expertise and service for communities in Central Alberta. Assessment and diagnostic services are timely, flexible, and minimize financial, geographic and time barriers to access. The preschool program provides intensive intervention for children from age 2^{1/2} until they transition to kindergarten or Grade 1 in community schools. Assessment and diagnosis, individual professional services, and family education and support services are provided for children up to 12 years and their families. Services continue to grow to meet increasing community demand through creative addition of resources such as space, staff and funds. Aspire has increased its focus on providing assistance for families in accessing community services and supports and making transitions from Aspire to other service providers. Aspire responds to the needs of families and to government directions by adding services and programs in collaboration with other community agencies. Measurement of outcomes and impacts of programs and services helps Aspire to self-monitor, to communicate with the community and funders and to contributing to growth of knowledge.

A strong, diverse, engaged Board of Directors works with the staff of Aspire to make available the resources needed to realize its vision. Fund development is integral to the organization, emphasizing strong, long term government, community and corporate support. Processes are in place to sustain ongoing fundraising, and financial goals reflect a commitment to sustainability. High quality staff ensures the continuing excellence of Aspire's programs and services. Compensation and benefits are competitive and, together with a supportive and challenging work environment, enable attraction and retention of staff.

GOALS

1. Respond to increasing demand for assessment and diagnostic services by improving accessibility to reduce wait times.

Parents, staff and community agencies are all very concerned about wait times for assessment and diagnostic services for children with special needs in Central Alberta. Waiting a long time (8-12 months) for these services, which are the gateway to receiving help, is very difficult for families and allows precious early intervention time to elapse. While Aspire and its funding partners have made changes over the years to respond to demand, more is needed. Providing timely access which minimizes geographic and financial barriers requires the combined effort of Aspire, its government funding partners and the community. Collaboration with other community diagnostic and assessment service providers is an important part of planning an effective, efficient approach. With an increasing population in Alberta, and increasing incidence of autism, we expect the demand for services to continue increasing.

2. Increase assistance for families to navigate and access community services and supports, and to make transitions from Aspire to other service providers.

Parents consistently ask for help to find and access the assistance and support they and their children need to optimize development and quality of life. Staff members in many roles at Aspire help families learn to access the community services they need, and prepare them for transition from Aspire programs and services. Parents continue to report an ongoing struggle and need for additional support. We are committed to working with other agencies and services to meet the needs of families and to empower them to advocate for their children.

3. Act as an expert and supportive resource for families and for community agencies and professionals.

We are recognized and valued in the community for our enduring presence as a center of expertise, and so are committed to the continuing development of our staff. We are also committed to the education of many different kinds of students through providing practical and professional training. We value opportunities to interact with other community professionals to share knowledge and learning, to coordinate approaches and best practices, and to build relationships. We are active in consulting and collaborating with professionals and community agencies to help children and their families achieve their potential. We also provide learning opportunities and resources to directly support children and their families.



GOALS

4. Implement a process to measure and report selected outcomes and impacts of our programs and services.

Our stakeholders are increasingly interested in the outcomes and impacts on children and families. While Aspire reports to the Board, government funders, and community supporters on its services and programs, like most organizations, the reports focus on numbers of children and families served. Measurement of outcomes and impacts focuses on the differences that programs and services make to the child and the family. This kind of information is challenging to identify and collect, but we recognize its value for monitoring and continuing development of our programs and services.

5. Secure sustainable funding to meet our service, strategic and financial goals in partnership with government funders and community and corporate supporters.

We will continue to collaborate with government funders to understand the needs of children and families, and to deliver responsive programs and services to the people of Central Alberta. Our programs must be delivered in a way that is sustainable for Aspire and the community so that we can provide continuity of expertise and access. It is important that we continue to grow our fund development activities by engaging the generous support of corporations and the community. Fund development requires continuing effort and full integration into the organization.



6. Attract and retain high quality staff by providing a challenging and supportive work environment and competitive compensation and benefits.

The quality and commitment of our staff are at the core of our success in meeting the needs of children and their families. We recognize that continued effort is required to provide a positive work environment. Valuing staff also includes providing compensation and benefits that recognize their contribution.

