“We do our job, and we do it well. The fact that we are autistic doesn’t keep us from doing that, as long as we have the understanding and support.”

–Maria, junior test analyst

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Dear friends,

Building Our Future is a very apt theme for our 2016 Annual Report. Thanks to the amazing progress we have made these past few years, our sights are set on tomorrow. Not only will Aspiritech continue to provide gainful and meaningful employment to a growing number of individuals on the autism spectrum, but also, as the first company of our kind in North America, we will continue to lead the way for others equally dedicated to creating brighter futures for neurodiverse individuals.

It seems like it was only yesterday that we were three individuals pursuing a dream in the founder’s basement—and to think we now have a team of 54 employees on the spectrum in our own office space! Believe it or not, it wasn’t all that long ago that we faced a world unable to acknowledge the needs of adults with ASD, much less appreciate their strengths and great potential to contribute to and participate in the workforce.

Now, as one of the founding members of Neurowrx, a global alliance focused on accelerating the employment of autistic individuals in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), we are working collaboratively with like-minded companies from across the world to grow the field on an international level. And our Board of Directors will once again be embarking on strategic planning in 2017 to ensure that we continue to build on the strong foundation described in this Annual Report.

Some of our most rewarding experiences at Aspiritech come by way of testimonials from our QA analysts. For example, on a very chilly day last December, we received a note that really warmed our hearts:

“I am beyond words! So very grateful for everything you’ve done for us as employees ... I have never known an organization big or small that continually shows as much compassion for its people as the one you have built. The level of autonomy you allow us shows an immense trust and gives such a feeling of empowerment as I’ve never seen or felt at a workplace. Impossibly, Aspiritech is a job that makes me feel SAFE at work ... I am forever grateful to be a part of it.”

We are forever grateful to you for your critical support of our mission. Thank you for helping us to create a safe place where autistic individuals can thrive.

Beverly Shapiro
Chair, Board of Directors

Brenda Weitzberg
Executive Director

“Before I came to Aspiritech, I was worried I wasn’t going to be able to find a job, and I didn’t want to live with my parents unemployed forever.”

—Courtney, QA analyst
“It’s the first job that I’ve had that really plays to my strengths. I’ve never felt as fully appreciated before. I don’t feel like I could be in trouble at any minute. It feels safe to work here. I didn’t even know that was possible”

–Michael, QA analyst

Aspiritech provides a path for high functioning individuals on the autism spectrum to realize their potential through gainful employment.

What does this mean? It means we connect the unique talents of individuals with autism—talents such as laser-like focus, attention to detail, strong visual processing skills, superior ability to spot irregularities, superlative technical skills, and lack of boredom with highly repetitive tasks—with clients seeking this level of expertise. Our employees provide quality assurance (QA) services in regression testing, data migration, test design, compatibility testing, data analysis, user acceptance testing, automation, design consistency, hardware testing, and many more areas.

But Aspiritech is more than a connector. It’s a place where employees find meaningful work. It’s a place where social quirks are embraced. It’s a place where independence flourishes and challenges are overcome.

We’ve come a long way since our founding in 2008. We look forward to seeing what the coming years bring.

2008
Aspiritech incorporated

2009
The company’s pilot program, a hands-on software testing training program, launches

2010
First test engineers hired

2011
New services offered; autism specialist hired

2012
New industries join as clients; business development director hired

2013
Aspiritech continues to thrive

2014
Client revenue doubles compared to prior year

2015
New office and service offerings; client revenue exceeds $500,000

2016
TURN THE PAGE
Aspiritech continues to build on its success, brick by brick. We are proud to contribute to local, national, and even international conversations on autism and employment, but it all starts right here at home. In fact, our home doubled in size this year to better accommodate our growing team and new projects. After all, it’s our employees who push us to be better day after day. Check out the highlights below to learn more about our dedication to our staff, our clients, and our community in 2016.

2016 Highlights

- Nearly doubled the number of staff on the autism spectrum from 27 in January 2016 to 50 in December 2016
- New hired a social worker in December
- Became a founding board member of a new Canadian-based global alliance, Neurowrx, whose goal is to accelerate the employment of adults on the autism spectrum into STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) careers
- On average, 35 percent of our staff on the autism spectrum now work full time, including four salaried project leads
- Changed Giving Tuesday to Grateful Tuesday in recognition of our generous supporters
- Autism specialists worked with Rachel Loftin, PhD, AARTS program at Rush University, to design an enhanced staff supervision and support system
- Surpassed our budget goals by generating more than $1.2 million in client revenue and more than $1.5 million in total revenue
- Received gifts from the wedding guests of a local couple who asked that donations be made to Aspiritech and three other organizations in lieu of a traditional registry
- Acquired a 2013 Honda Odyssey van from an anonymous donor
- Brought on a senior QA manager with 20 years’ worth of experience in July
- Introduced free group training in November; participants receive a stipend to attend and 75-80 percent are typically hired
- Held a mini staff retreat focused on teambuilding skills at Heller Nature Center
- Hired a social worker in December
- Provided a 2013 Honda Odyssey van from an anonymous donor
- Acquired a 2013 Honda Odyssey van from an anonymous donor
- Visits from a dozen nonprofits, universities and service organizations throughout the year
- Featured on ABC Channel 7, as well as in the Pioneer Press/Chicago Tribune, Chicago Woman magazine, and other media outlets, throughout the year

Community Presence

- Astellas Disability Fair booth in February
- 5000 Global Summit 2016 on Autism and IT at AT&T’s headquarters in Dallas on March 4
- Employment Skills for Adults Facing Social Challenges presentation on March 8
- Northwestern University’s Midwest Employment Symposium presentation and resource booth on March 12
- Presentation, panel, and resource fair with Steve Silberman, author of “Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity,” on April 13
- TechWeek 2016 booth on June 23
- Rockin’ the Spirit Fundraiser on Sept. 24
- Disability Employment Summit panel presented by Senator Julie Morrison and the City of Highland Park on Sept. 27
- Presentation to Astellas’ People Living with Disabilities Employee Resource Group in November
- Open House on Dec. 11
- Visits from a dozen nonprofits, universities and service organizations throughout the year
- Featured on ABC Channel 7, as well as in the Pioneer Press/Chicago Tribune, Chicago Woman magazine, and other media outlets, throughout the year
Aspiritech employs individuals who sometimes struggle in social situations. Many adults on the autism spectrum have difficulty making eye contact or reading emotional and verbal cues, which can make job interviews, “water cooler talk,” and other social interactions challenging. Our Stepping Up & Out program tackles social isolation through weekly activities, including game nights, arts and crafts, and community meals.

Stepping Up & Out is open to adults ages 18 and up, and many participants are not employed at Aspiritech. The program is led by part-time weekend coordinator Brian Sundh and full-time program services specialist Robin Kacyn, who says, “I feel incredibly lucky to be involved with such a motivated and vibrant organization. I’ve met such incredibly interesting people and had tremendously cool experiences since I started working here.” Participants show improved communication, self-confidence, social bonding, and self-efficacy, not to mention enhanced personal connections and friendship, emotional support, and reduced isolation.

A Sampling of 2016 Activities

- Puzzles and craft projects
- Pajama party
- Beach outings
- Picnics
- Halloween party
- Chicago Botanic Garden outing
- 5K fundraising walk for Parkinson’s disease
- Memorial Day barbecue and cookout
- Art therapy with Linda Lee Goldman
- Improv on Thursday afternoons with Jason Economus

“I like that I get to socialize with other people on the spectrum in a fairly laid-back atmosphere. I like to play Cards Against Humanity. I like to hang out and talk. I like to eat the delicious food. It’s nice to be able to hang out with people in an informal setting and without any overly high expectations. It’s pretty enjoyable being able to be with other people.”

–Stepping Up & Out participant
The rigorous testing makes it so the end consumer doesn’t have issues. Some end consumers may not be able to describe when things are going wrong, so that is why we are here.”
–Neil, senior QA analyst

Our Clients

In 2016, we contracted with 10 clients in industries ranging from real estate to pharmaceuticals to technology. Our clients rely on us for quality testing that is on time and on budget. They appreciate our professionalism, accuracy, and willingness to go the extra mile. But don’t take it from us. Here’s what a few of our clients said about Aspiritech in 2016.

“With great attention to detail, excellent memory, and incredible precision, Aspiritech’s employees are an ideal partner for quality assurance testing.”
–Zebra Technologies

“Without Aspiritech’s involvement, we would not continue to meet our project deadlines … The Aspiritech team helped us to consolidate service line data into a singular data model and create a standardized naming convention for multiple applications as part of a larger effort to reduce our implementation timeline.”
–Jones Lang LaSalle

“[QA analyst] approaches his tasks with eyes wide open. I don’t think the guy blinks because nothing escapes his view. If you are looking for a needle in a haystack, [he] will find the needle and a nail and a hairpin and everything else in that haystack. When performing a manual regression test, [he] finds issues that existed but were not identified in previous regression passes. [He] is also a team player. When he learns a trick or a tool, he is eager to share it with others on the team.”
–SQAD LLC
NUTS AND BOLTS

2016 Financial Statement

2016 REVENUES AND EXPENSES

2016 REVENUE $1,548,254

- Individuals: $57,707
- Foundations: $148,248
- Businesses: $37,169
- Released from Restricted: $102,784
- Software Testing Revenue: $1,202,330
- Other: $16

2016 EXPENSES $1,310,203

- Program Costs: $1,142,991
- Fundraising: $24,576
- Management/General Costs: $142,636

2016 Surplus $238,051

“For a while, I almost felt this job was too good to be real. What are the odds that a company that hires autistic individuals and does work I like and is close to my house exists?”

– Ian, QA analyst
Aspiritech extends its heartfelt thanks to the following donors who graciously supported us in 2016.

**$140,000**
The Coleman Foundation

**$34,000-$35,000**
Anonymous

**$25,000**
Healthcare Foundation of Highland Park

**$10,000-$15,000**
Alvin H. Baum Family Foundation

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**$5,000-5,500**
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**$2,000-$3,500**
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Louise Pearson and Underwriter's Lab in support of Marc Mar-Yohana's board membership

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**Under $100**
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AmazonSmile

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