Stars are Aligning
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“I spent 10 years unemployed. I’d always run up against the same roadblocks. I finally realized things about myself and this led to my getting an autism diagnosis about four years ago at age 39. Aspiritech has the support I needed to succeed. They work with my life experiences and put my strengths and skill sets to use. It’s been really fantastic.”

—Chris H., Job Coach
Dear Friends,

Welcome to our 2019 Annual Report, “Stars are Aligning.” We couldn’t be more thrilled to share this update on our 11th year and offer a few sneak peaks at what’s to come. Stars are indeed aligning at Aspiritech as we set the foundation for our second decade thanks to the talents of our staff, the commitment of our clients, and the support of our donors.

Aspiritech has always dreamed big. We are not merely a standalone company but one at the forefront of the neurodiversity in technology movement—advocating for the unique strengths of autistic adults alongside the need for support and understanding across the lifespan. Since 2008, we have pushed for innovative autism employment initiatives through state-of-the-art software quality assurance and software testing services. We are a global pioneer in autism advocacy, acceptance, and meaningful employment for neurodivergent adults.

Our mission drives us forward each day. Whether it’s seeing a new employee receive his or her first paycheck, celebrating the conclusion of a major client project, connecting with other organizations seeking to hire adults on the autism spectrum, or offering social opportunities to autistic adults in the wider community through our Stepping Up & Out program, it’s both the small and big “wins” that keep us going.

In 2019, we hit several important milestones. The number of staff members who are neurodivergent now numbers 115, out of 130 total. Compensation for neurodivergent staff reached $2.9 million this year. Client revenue soared to new heights at $5.4 million. Meanwhile, philanthropic contributions continue to support our critical social services, including the ACE FUND, an emergency fund for staff in need.

The stars are aligning for another incredible year. As always, we couldn’t accomplish any of this without our friends and supporters. Thank you for continuing to be our shooting stars, brightening the constellation of the neurodivergent community!

David Rappaport
Chair, Board of Directors

Brenda Weitzberg
Executive Director
“Aspiritech for me was a lifesaver. I was at a dead end in my life before I was hired, and the company gave me a way to move forward and live a useful life with help for all my challenges.”

—Alan S., QA Analyst
MISSION AND BACKGROUND

Aspiritech empowers individuals on the autism spectrum to fulfill their potential through meaningful employment combined with social opportunity.

About 85 percent of adults on the autism spectrum are unemployed or underemployed. But it doesn’t have to be this way. Many neurodivergent individuals possess unique talents, such as intense focus, attention to detail, strong visual processing abilities, superlative technical expertise, and lack of boredom with repetitive tasks. We’ve found that these are the precise talents that make our employees ideally suited to providing software quality assurance (SQA) services.

Companies rely on our neurodiverse team to perform regression testing, data migration, test design, compatibility testing, design consistency, and other SQA services. Our clients trust us with critical work that directly impacts their bottom line.

Aspiritech is proud to deliver best-in-class deliverables while helping to fill a critical employment gap. The end result? Extremely satisfied clients and professionally fulfilled staff.

As the first social enterprise of its kind in North America, we take our leadership role seriously and strive to be a resource and model for other companies. For example, we are a member of the Autism @ Work Employer Roundtable. Learn more about our industry leadership on page 12.
Aspiritech is also a “home away from home” for many of our employees. Our employees tell us, time and time again, that Aspiritech is unlike any other employer. “I can be myself here” is a common refrain. “This is the first time I’ve made friends at work” is another. Aspiritech is a place where social quirks are embraced, not hidden. It’s a place where independence flourishes, self-esteem grows, and challenges are overcome.

Aspiritech’s business model excels because we match the unique strengths and interests of autistic adults with jobs in the SQA field, while also providing support for individual needs in the areas of organization/executive functioning, social skills, and emotional regulation.

Through programs such as Stepping Up & Out, the Women’s Empowerment Group, and the ACE FUND, Aspiritech provides social, emotional, and professional scaffolding to ensure our neurodivergent employees succeed inside and outside the workplace (see page 11).

**CORE PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES**

- Vocational training in software quality assurance and data analysis
- Job coaching and supports
- Well-paid employment with benefits
- Social opportunities and community get-togethers through Stepping Up & Out
- Grants to neurodivergent staff in need through the ACE FUND
- Information and referral services
“Aspiritech gives me the support I need that other businesses cannot or won’t provide. I have worked here for 10 years now, the longest and happiest I have been at any job.”

—Katie L., Administrative Assistant
Twelve years ago, Brenda and Moshe Weitzberg decided to start a business that would provide gainful employment for adults with autism. They were inspired by their son, a university graduate with Asperger’s syndrome, who struggled to find job opportunities commensurate with his skills and education. From Aspiritech’s humble beginnings at the Weitzbergs’ kitchen table, the company has grown and flourished beyond the founders’ greatest imaginings.

Aspiritech is incorporated. 2008

First test engineers hired. 2010

Business development director hired; Stepping Up & Out launches. 2012

Client revenue doubles over prior year. 2014

Number of neurodivergent staff grows to 50; client revenue exceeds $1,200,000. 2016

Aspiritech opens downtown Chicago office; neurodivergent staff numbers nearly 100. 2018

The company launches its pilot program, a hands-on software testing training program. 2009

New services offered; autism specialist hired. 2011

Aspiritech continues to thrive. 2013

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

Three-year strategic plan launches; client revenue reaches $2.2 million. 2017

Read on...
“As I work with Aspiritech, I feel like it is a wonderful experience. It’s great to have the priority of helping consumers and write up errors and bugs. I also feel like I’m part of a great group, so I treat everyone equally with respect and care.”

—Jamari B., QA Analyst
2019 ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND HIGHLIGHTS

We had an incredible year at Aspiritech filled with personal and professional growth and industry leadership. As we continue to add team members and improve our offerings and services, we look forward to seeing what the future holds in 2020 and beyond.

STAFF UPDATES

- Aspiritech employs more than 130 staff, 115 of whom are neurodivergent.
- 58% of our staff work full time.
- Nearly 90 percent of our leads and job coaches are on the autism spectrum, and most rose up through the ranks.
- Our newly revamped training program is designed to help potential employees excel, even those with little to no prior experience in the software testing field. We now offer monthly trainings (formerly quarterly), which have reduced applicant wait time and increased capacity.

NEW WEBSITE

In August, Aspiritech launched a new website! If you haven’t visited aspiritech.org recently, be sure to check it out. You can make a donation through the website, learn about our client work, follow Aspiritech in the news, and apply for open positions.

WORDS MATTER

This past year, we developed a policy statement on Aspiritech’s corporate use of language around autism. We strive to employ vocabulary that reflects our core values of respect, embrace neurodiversity, focus and perseverance, continuous learning, strive for excellence, and community. For example, we refrain from using high- or low-functioning to describe individuals with autism, and we support language proposed by neurodiversity advocates (such as neurodivergent and neurotypical). Additionally, we are committed to reviewing the policy statement regularly to ensure we are evolving with the needs of the community we serve.
DREAMS GROW HERE GALA

More than 250 friends celebrated Autism Acceptance Month with us at our April 13th gala, Dreams Grow Here. Tickets, sponsorships, a silent auction, and a staff artwork sale generated over $35,000 for our employee support services. In addition to entertainment from the Not for Profit Band and emcee hosting from WGN’s Erin and Demetrius Ivory, the gala also featured an awards ceremony. Bose representatives George Kontopidis, senior manager of systems engineering and software, and Brian Cohen, senior manager, SQA, were pleased to accept Aspiritech’s inaugural Aspire to Inspire Award for Neurodiversity Advocate of the Year.

INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP

• In July, we participated in the Disability:IN National Convention and hosted a supplier booth.

• We joined the Autism @ Work Employer Roundtable and participated in two summits, one held at Microsoft and one hosted by SAP.

• Aspiritech helped organize the first international meeting of Neurowrx, a global alliance of corporations, nonprofits, and individuals working together to provide employment in the STEM field for autistic adults, in London in September.

• Staff presented to several Fortune 500 companies across the U.S. about our mission and services.

• Aspiritech was featured in a New York Times article about innovative companies employing autistic adults.
BEST PRACTICES

• We developed a donor bill of rights that we circulated with our end-of-year letter.

• In collaboration with the Frist Center on Autism at Vanderbilt University, we are undertaking a research project to better understand how the Aspiritech approach works for our employees.

• Aspiritech is participating in the U.S. Government Workforce Development-Social Enterprises of the Future taskforce.

PREPARING FOR OUR FUTURE

• Aspiritech was selected to participate in Goldman Sachs’ 2019 Social Impact Advisory (SIA) program, which offers the skills of investment banking analysts on a pro bono basis, to identify and tackle nonprofit financial management and strategic planning challenges.

• Jones Lang LaSalle (JLL), a global real-estate manager, is working with our staff and an architect on designs for a future Aspiritech home, all pro bono. JLL is also providing discounted brokerage services and assessments of our current and future space needs.
“If you were to tell me two years ago that I would have a meaningful job that makes a difference in society, I would’ve laughed at you. Aspiritech is a great place to work, and it allows me to continue living my life comfortably without worrying about whether I will be able to pay for my living expenses each month. The environment is great and the supports offered are wonderful.”

—Jared B., QA Analyst
An important aspect of Aspiritech’s mission is our support services. Social outings, clubs, leadership training, and an emergency fund help our employees (and, in some cases, members of the general public) to thrive.

Our support staff includes a social worker, an autism specialist, a counselor, and five job coaches.

Support outreach includes:

• Developing and implementing accommodations for staff.
• Holding regular “check in” meetings with analysts.
• Yoga and life fitness sessions at both office locations.
• Lunch sessions on focused topics, such as work-life balance and how to engage in small talk.
• A weekly Women’s Empowerment Group for women and female-identified employees.
• Leadership training opportunities for the QA Leads, led by an autism consultant, provide insight into best practices on managing a neurodiverse team.
• Job coaching for staff.
• Daily stretch/exercise breaks to recharge, midday meditation breaks, and team building activities.
The Stepping Up & Out (SUO) program, which has been generously supported by the Grandy Foundation since its launch in 2012, brings together autistic adults from Aspiritech and the larger community. Through workshops, team building, and fun activities (such as game nights, arts and crafts, and group meals), SUO helps reduce social isolation and improve participants’ social skills.

This was our first full year offering the ACE FUND, and it was clear that there was a dire need for this initiative. The ACE FUND is a restricted fund that employees can access through an application process when facing an emergency or stressful situation. Funded by the generous contributions of community members, the goal of the ACE FUND is to assist, change, and empower staff:

ASSIST with transportation, housing, or short-term unexpected medical, family, and other emergency expenses

CHANGE the quality of life by funding programs or services incorporating fitness, health and wellness, and independent living

EMPOWER through funding continuing education opportunities, advocacy programs, and navigation of resources and benefits

A five-person independent committee composed of two Aspiritech board members and three community members anonymously reviews each application. In 2019, the committee distributed more than $28,000 in emergency grants. Employees used these grants to pay for unexpected medical costs or therapies not covered by insurance, tuition expenses, and rent costs, among other pressing needs.

To learn more about the ACE FUND or to make a contribution, please contact Brenda Weitzberg, executive director, at brenda@aspiritech.org or 312-945-8378 ext. 1.
OUR CLIENTS

Aspiritech takes great pride in providing tremendous service for our clients. In 2019, earned revenue exceeded $5.4 million. This revenue helped cover 50 percent of our mission-related expenses, providing our staff with the support they need to succeed. Client revenue supports the wages and benefit packages of our QA analysts and technical managers (wages alone for staff on the spectrum reached $2.9 million last year), as well as our significant overhead, including rent and technical equipment/systems.

At our gala in April, we were proud to honor longtime client Bose with the very first Aspire to Inspire Award for Neurodiversity Advocate of the Year.

A big thank you to all of our clients for continuing to trust Aspiritech to manage your SQA needs and exceed your expectations!

“The analysts at Aspiritech learned more about our system in a few weeks than some of our own agents who have been working on it for several years.”

—Aspiritech Client

TOP INDUSTRIES SERVED
Banking
Consumer goods/pharmaceuticals
Real estate

TOP THREE SQA SERVICES PROVIDED
Functional UA testing, both manual and automated
Website functional testing
Hardware/software diagnostic testing

NEW CLIENTS IN 2019

ABBVIE
MEDLINE
Basecamp
SourceAmerica
This was our first full year offering the ACE FUND, and it was clear that there was a dire need for this initiative. The ACE FUND is a restricted fund that employees can access through an application process when facing an emergency or stressful situation. Funded by the generous contributions of community members, the goal of the ACE FUND is to assist, change, and empower staff:

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To learn more about the ACE FUND or to make a contribution, please contact Brenda Weitzberg, executive director, at brenda@aspiritech.org or 312-945-8378 ext. 1.
Our supporters make a major impact with each and every gift. While revenue earned from Aspiritech’s software testing and other SQA services covers the costs of running the business, philanthropy supports our socio-emotional programs, initiatives, and staff.

The generosity of Aspiritech’s donors funds our team of social workers, counselors, autism specialists, trainers, and job coaches; creates social opportunities through the Stepping Up & Out program, which is open to staff and other community members with autism; and provides grants to employees in need through the ACE FUND.

Aspiritech extends its heartfelt thanks to the following donors who graciously supported us in 2019.

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“Before coming to Aspiritech, it was very difficult trying to gain employment. It’s hard to find work when no one is willing to let you get your foot in the door. I couldn’t convince employers of my potential since I had never been given a chance to show it. Aspiritech gave me that chance, and it’s been a life changing experience. I have grown so much since coming here, and I’m ready to learn even more!”

—Samantha S., QA Lead