

SERENA ALAILY

La Grange
CEO, Aspire

Are there any new developments at Aspire over the past year that you'd like to share with the community?

This past year has been filled with incredible growth. One of the things I'm most excited about is the launch of our social club, giving young adults with disabilities the opportunity to come together to build friendships, share experiences and truly feel the joy of belonging. For so many, it's not just about activities—it's about connection, growing confidence and being seen. We also celebrated the renovation of our Worcester Community Home: a fully-accessible home designed with independence and dignity at its core. I'll never forget standing at the ribbon-cutting alongside legislators, neighbors and Aspire families. Together, we weren't just opening a building—we were opening doors to a future where every person has a safe, welcoming place to call home. Both of these milestones remind us that progress is about people. It's about creating spaces—where everyone belongs and possibility knows no bounds.

I see that Aspire has developed a new employment training program.

Could you briefly describe that program, including your goals for it?

Aspire's employment training program tackles two challenges at once: high unemployment for people with disabilities and high turnover for businesses. In partnership with distribution companies like Wesco, Parts Town, KeHE, Canteen and Holman, trainees spend ten weeks in a simulated warehouse, then move into paid internships—at no cost to employers. Businesses get to see their talent in action, risk-free, while trainees arrive on the job confident and prepared—it's a win-win. And we're not stopping with the warehouse industry; the next frontier is food and beverage—another industry where retention is tough and talent is needed. We're inviting food and beverage leaders to give us just 30 minutes to share their biggest hiring challenges. Together, we can spark solutions that build stronger companies and stronger communities.

How do you balance your executive role at a large non-profit organization with being a mom?

I once had a mentor say to me, "You are a better mother, because you are a leader, and you are a better leader because you are a mother." Over the years, I've found those words to be profoundly true. Leadership, much like motherhood, calls for patience, empathy and the ability to coach others through challenges—whether it's guiding a team through a difficult transition at work or helping a child navigate life's ups and downs. The skills cross over in ways that strengthen both roles. Of course, balance doesn't always come easily. There are days when the calendar feels impossible—doctor visits, school e-mails and evening work events that clash with my kids' schedules. The truth is, it can be chaotic, but I've learned that giving myself grace is essential. Things don't have to be perfect, and leaning on my team, my family or my friends is not only acceptable, it's powerful. At the end of the day, being both a mother and a leader have taught me resilience, humility and the beauty of relying on others. And in that blend of chaos and grace, I've found strength.

