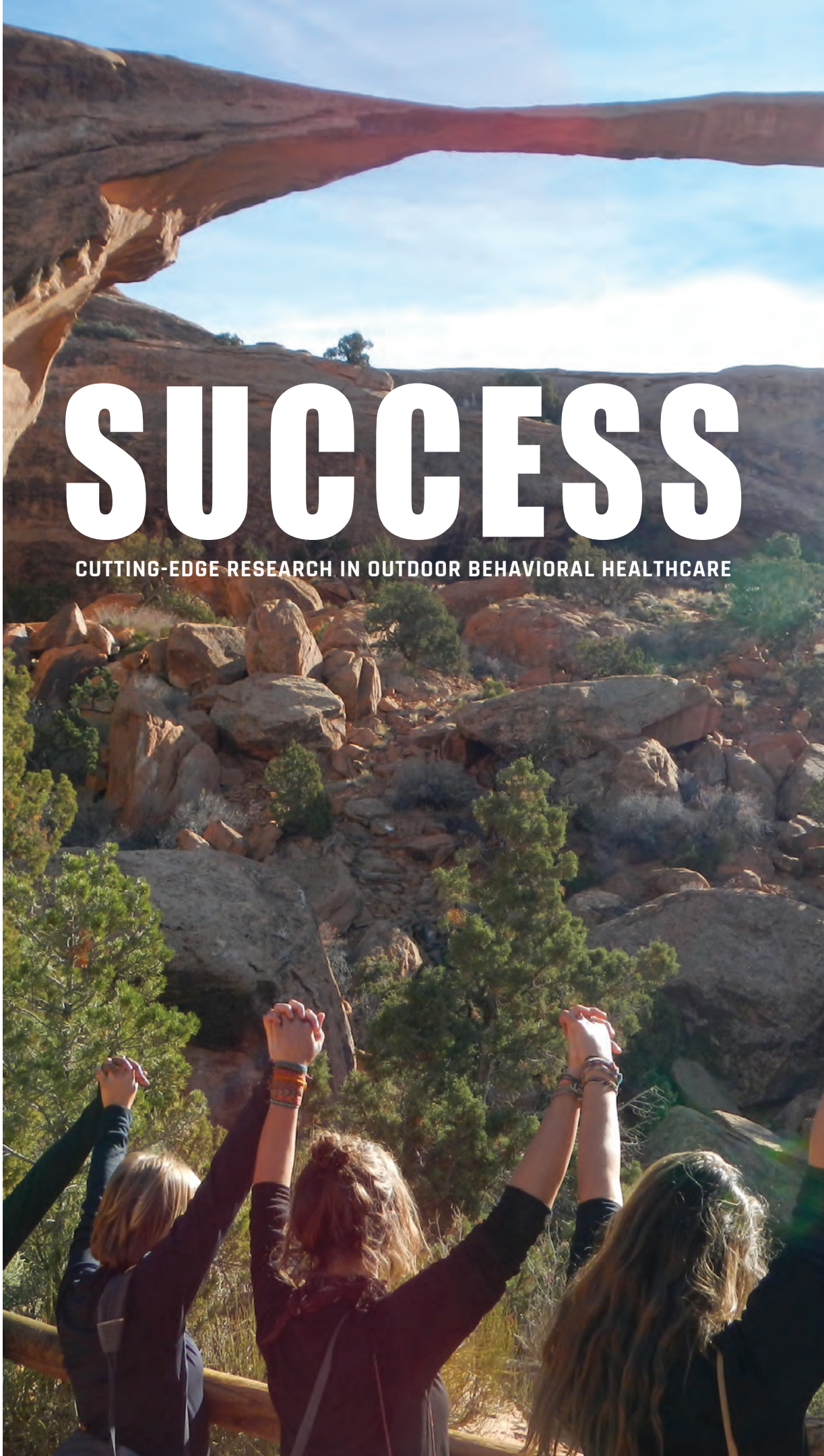
Aspyro

WILDERNESS ADVENTURE THERAPY



SUCCESS

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SUCCESS MAGAZINE

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A FRESH START

HI,

we're glad you found us.

Since 2005, The Aspiro Group has been conducting research in the area of wilderness adventure therapy. It has been our mission to implement innovative solutions for families that create meaningful, lasting change. Our intention in this publication is to illustrate the groundbreaking research that asks the question:

"Why does Aspiro work?"

The answer is in the results.

The Aspiro Group was created to help adolescents, young adults, and their families through challenges that can occur when various behavioral, psychological, or developmental issues are present. As a result, we operate our program from a clinically sophisticated and research-based model. Everything we do is intentionally designed to assist students and their families in creating lasting changes. We understand that every student is capable and unique, and that each student deserves treatment specifically tailored for them to flourish.

"It's been pretty awesome. I started out not liking it all and then I've kind grown to it and I kind of discovered who I really am. Just doing all these activities I didn't think I could do before. Like rock climbing. Mountain biking. Stuff like that."

Aspiro Student

OUR STORY

PIONEERS IN THE FIELD

Aspiro was founded in 2005 by a group of clinicians, industry leaders, and experts in residential and wilderness treatment programs.

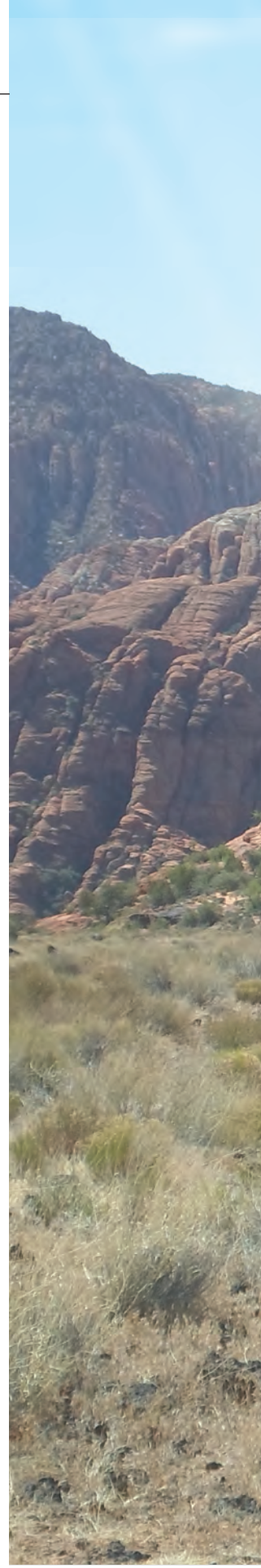
These pioneers had a hunch that adding adventure to program activities would provide unique assessment and treatment opportunities. Aspiro stepped forward into new territory by designing therapeutic adventure programming, intentionally broadening the scope of wilderness therapy treatment options.

Our program is uniquely based on a three-pillar system of wilderness, adventure, and therapy. By facilitating our program in the context of sequenced adventure activities, our students invest quickly in the therapeutic process, experience diverse environments, grow as individuals, and create life-long changes.

Wilderness: A student enrolled at Aspiro spends their time in the incredible environments that Utah has to offer. Our students see some of the most beautiful and unique landscapes in the world, while taking time away from the complicated and distracting life of today's adolescent or young adult.

Adventure: We chose adventure because it is effective. Adventure therapy is a revolutionary and dynamic way to break through boundaries, build awareness, challenge negative beliefs, and establish healthier behavioral patterns. Students at Aspiro have opportunities to ski, snowshoe, rock climb, mountain bike, canyoneer, backpack and more!

Therapy: Students at Aspiro receive personalized care, assessment and support guided by our program's clinically sophisticated and research driven model. Our therapeutic professionals are passionate about improving the lives of their students, building transferable skills, and creating lasting change. Aspiro is also founded on a core family systems treatment approach: our clinical staff have weekly conference sessions with parents and work to build strong support systems. In addition, on-site, interactive family seminars are facilitated mid-program.



"You just learn a lot about yourself. Your [personal] nature. Something about [the wilderness] really opens your mind. You realize some things you didn't realize; certain behaviors that need to be changed in order for you to have a better life..."

RESEARCH DRIVEN RESULTS

WE SOUGHT OUT EXPERTS

From the beginning, Aspiro has sought out experts to help us improve our program and analyze effectiveness. We are active members of the Outdoor Behavioral Healthcare Council and the National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs, organizations that uphold professional best practices and ethical, researched-based standards.

Aspiro also formed a partnership with Dr. Mark Widmer, a tenured professor of therapeutic recreation at Brigham Young University, in 2006. Dr. Widmer has conducted research in the area of Wilderness and Adventure Therapy for 18 years and publishes his findings in multiple peer reviewed journals. He has numerous ongoing research projects with leading therapeutic outdoor programs. Many of these studies were pioneered and funded by Aspiro, a demonstration of our commitment to program development.

Dr. Widmer and Aspiro's research partnership is producing some of the most important and interesting results in the field of wilderness and adventure therapy. Research produced by this partnership has been foundational in our deeper understanding of the wilderness adventure therapy model and our ability to effectively implement it in treatment.

Over the last several years, each of our therapists, field guides, and students have been involved in our research efforts. With each new finding, we are able to adjust programming to improve therapeutic interventions and ultimately our outcomes.

FAMILY FOCUSED

PROGRAM DESIGNED WITH FAMILIES IN MIND

Aspiro focuses on families in addition to the individual student enrolled for residential care. Letter writing is utilized to promote thoughtful communication, and designed such that family members can each take accountability, give and receive feedback, and strengthen relationships. Families also connect with our clinical staff on a weekly basis via phone to better understand their child's needs. Later in a student's stay, parents and guardians are invited to join us in Utah for a two day interactive, educational experience: The Parent Seminar.

Families are one of the most important sources of feedback for our program. As such, we hire independent experts to gather and review data from parents. For example, when families were concerned about academic opportunities and felt we were not doing enough to encourage growth in this area, Aspiro re-designed the academic curriculum, allowing adolescent students to earn high school credits while attending our program.

ASPIRO MODEL OF CHANGE

RESEARCH BACKED - PROVEN RESULTS

Aspiro is designed around research results and evidence based practice. This means our core treatment model and the specific interventions we implement have been tested through careful research published in scholarly journals. Each of our therapists use clinical best practices to individualize treatment for students and families in our care.

In order to help families understand the services provided by Aspiro, we have developed the "Aspiro Model of Change." Aspiro's programs and services, listed in the left box below, describe the interventions provided to every student and family. Each of these components contribute synergistically to the effectiveness of the program. The center box identifies intermediate outcomes the program promotes. Lastly, the right box lists the long-term outcomes the program is designed achieve.

SELF-EFFICACY THEORY

I CAN DO HARD THINGS!

If you were to join an Aspiro group for the day, you might hear a student exclaim: "I can do hard things!" after riding a difficult section of trail or making it down a blue run for the first time on skis. This is the adventure model and self-efficacy theory in action. Self-efficacy is the extent or strength of someone's belief in their ability to complete tasks and reach goals. It is important because it changes the way someone views challenge, and how they let success and failure influence their views of themselves. Moreover, it has wide-reaching implication in mental health, academic performance, and social satisfaction.

THERE ARE A FEW KEY FACTORS THAT AFFECT SELF-EFFICACY:

1. Experience of mastery - Imagine going from never having seen climbing gear to successfully climbing a difficult route. Students at Aspiro have experiences of mastery, successfully accomplishing hard tasks that are called "OMEs" or Overwhelming Mastery Experiences.

2. Vicarious experience – "Well, if she can do it, maybe I can, too!" Because of our rolling admissions model, students starting at Aspiro have peer role models who are successfully completing the program and have grown immensely throughout the process. They also benefit from strong role models in the form of field staff.

3. Social Persuasion – Students at Aspiro live in a positive peer culture with field and clinical staff who target students individually for affirmation and encouragement. Guides and students also encourage one another to attempt things that they might otherwise avoid for fear of failure.

Our field staff are intensively trained in helping students transfer their newfound belief in their own potential for success back into different domains of life. After completing a new and difficult climb, students often believe that opening up about their struggles with parents is not so scary anymore.

I WANT TO DO HARD THINGS!

One of the main theoretical backbones to the Aspiro's model is self-determination theory.

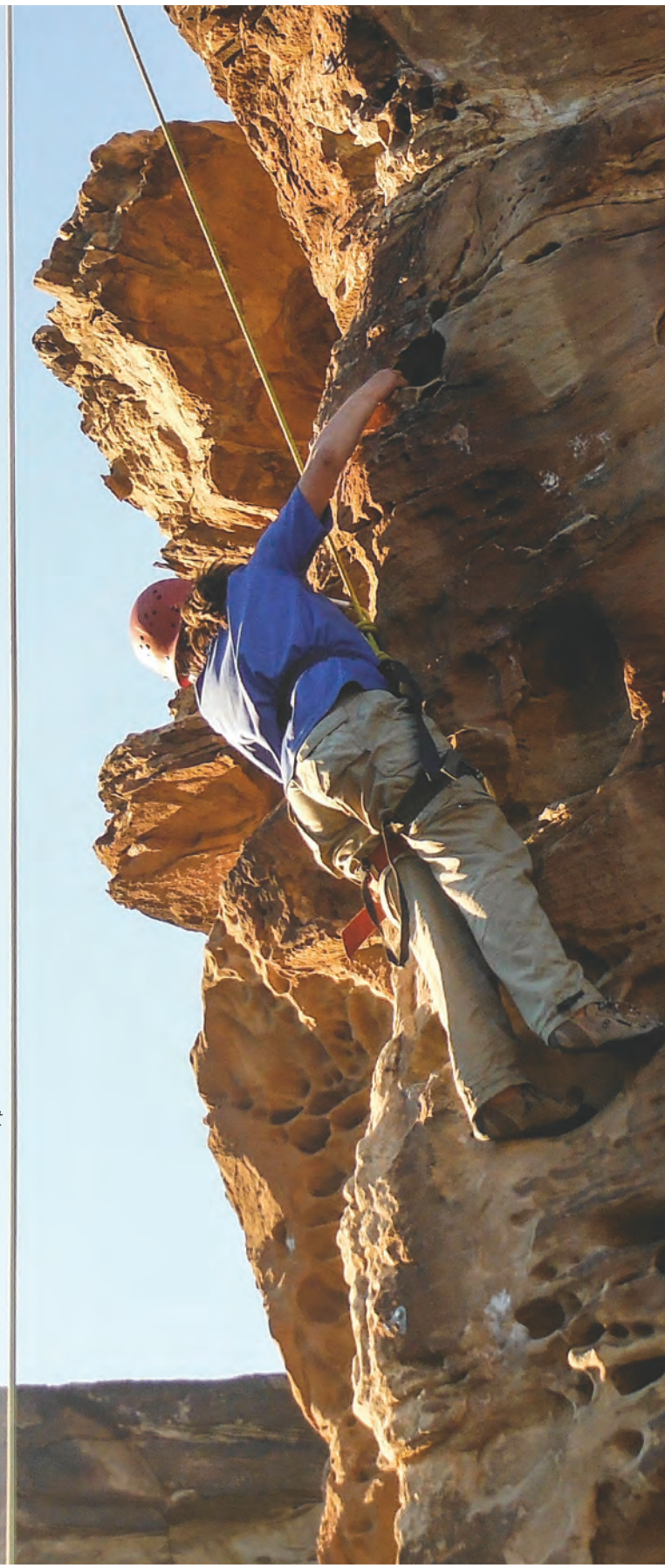
Beginning in the 1970s, research on self-determination evolved from studies comparing intrinsic and extrinsic motives, and from a growing understanding of the role intrinsic motivation plays in an individual's behavior. Intrinsic motivation is associated with things like social connection and personal growth, and ultimately with psychological health.

At its core, self-determination theory states that:

1. Humans are inherently proactive with their potential and mastering their inner forces (such as drives and emotions) – ***that is, people want change!***
2. Humans have inherent tendency toward growth, development and integrated functioning – ***that is, people want positive change!***
3. Optimal development and actions are inherent in humans but they don't happen automatically – ***that is, people need support for change.***

Simply put: humans have an innate desire to change positively, but it does not happen accidentally. There needs to be an environment that supports positive growth. Aspiro seeks to create an environment where your child's innate desire to grow can flourish, and where they can become intrinsically motivated to find health and happiness. This can translate to home, where an adolescent or young adult has a more effective inner compass directing their decisions and behavior.

> Some things like, the first week I was here, I couldn't really do. I couldn't really climb up the rock wall and stuff like that. Throughout the course of the weeks, I was doing harder and harder things. As I do rock climbing over and over again, I seem to get better and better. And, it just, improving my skill and physical, and aspects of me and it's given me a lot of motivation now that I can self-motivate myself to do hard things.



RESEARCH DEMONSTRATES THAT A GROWTH ENVIRONMENT IS CREATED BY A COMBINATION OF THREE DIFFERENT ELEMENTS:

1. **Competence** – "*I want to feel good at things that matter to me.*" The adventure model of the Aspiro program is uniquely suited to supporting students experience competency.

2. **Autonomy** – "*I want to feel like I can make choices about what is important in my life.*" Aspiro operates on a "challenge by choice" philosophy. No student is forced into taking on a challenge. This results in our students feeling ownership of their successes.

3. **Relatedness** – "I want to feel connected and supported." Aspiro finds and emphasizes strengths in each individual student and establishes a positive peer culture in each group.

WHAT IS GRIT?

Grit is a measure of perseverance for long-terms goals and has wide-reaching implications for success and well-being

"Grit is defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously towards challenges maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina. Whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the course."

- Duckworth, a prominent researcher on grit

OF SUCCESS

> Our son is learning to be more resilient and his belief in himself has grown

Why Is It Important?

Individuals with grit have been found to achieve higher levels of education and better GPAs, even when they had lower IQs. Studies also indicate that at high levels of performance – for example cadets at West Point or a student at a national spelling competition – grit was an indicator of success because it was tied to high levels of effort! We want this success for our students and we believe Aspiro helps cultivate grit so that our students continue to persevere and work hard.

What are our Results?

To help understand students progress regarding grit, we ask them to rate: their ability to overcome setbacks and conquer an important challenge, their diligence, ability to set and attain goals, etc. After student's graduate Aspiro, they often report feeling improvements in perseverance and willingness to sustain effort through difficult tasks. Our studies show that on average our students report a 25% increase in grit.

Improvement
in grit

WHAT IS SELF CONFIDENCE?

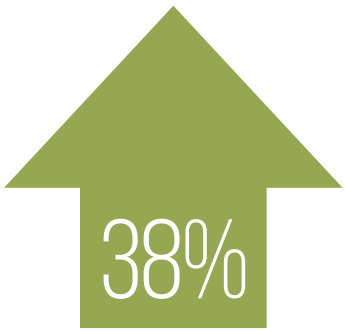
Self-confidence is a feeling of trust in one's abilities, qualities, and judgment. Many Aspiro students struggle with self-confidence. The decisions they have made in the past may not have been healthy and they might be acting in ways that are in conflict with core values, causing a decrease in their self-confidence. Aspiro works to create a healthy awareness of thought patterns that are then translated to self-confidence.

Why Is It Important?

High self-confidence is a predictor of strong social networks, enjoyment of activities and improved physical health. Low self-confidence in adolescents has been associated with such health-compromising behaviors as substance use, early sexual activity, eating problems, and suicidal ideation. We want our students to be self-confident individuals and we continually seek to make sure we are helping them reach this goal.

What are our results?

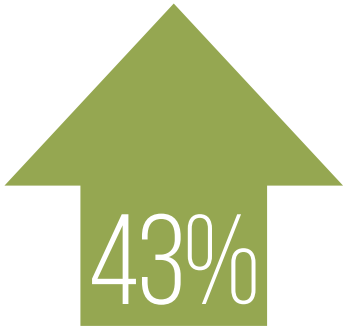
After spending time at Aspiro, students reported an average increase in self confidence of 38%. This increase suggests that our students are better able to trust their own strengths and abilities.



Improvement
in self-confidence

WHAT IS RESPONSIBILITY?

Responsibility is the ability of an individual to be accountable for his or her own actions and mistakes.



Improvement
in responsibility

Aspiro believes that students attending our program, and benefiting from program services, will experience an increase in their ability to be accountable and therefore a rise in responsibility.

Why Is It Important?

Responsible individuals have stronger relationships and improved academic success. Irresponsible, and often impulsive actions, are what might lead a student to attend Aspiro. We help our students begin to be thoughtful about actions and to take responsibility for mistakes in effort to begin moving forward to heal conflicted family systems.

Aspiro's Success

After their time at Aspiro, students report an increase in responsibility, which suggests they are able to take accountability for their actions and work to better their mistakes. Our data indicates a substantial 43% increase on average.

"I've realized that everything is not worth getting upset about, there's a lot of positive things in the world. And I've also learned to take a lot of accountability for the things I do wrong, and not to argue as much with adults and people in charge. I feel like I'm a more responsible person, and more organized with my things, and more in charge of myself, and I can work harder at the things I can do at home."

IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Identity development is an extremely important element of the adolescent and young adult phase of life.

Your child may be confused about discovering their true sense of self and defining their goals. They might be finding identity through unhealthy behaviors and doubly unhealthy social environments. Identity development is an extremely important stage of life for adolescents and young adults. Researchers have suggested that successful identity development has a number of positive impacts including improved interpersonal relationships and education outcomes; whereas those who struggle with identity tend to demonstrate more unhealthy and deviant behaviors.

Dr. Mark Widmer, Aspiro's independent research director, is an expert in illustrating how therapeutic adventure programs can influence identity development. His research in published in 2012 in the Journal of Adolescent Research identified some of the key precursors to identity formation. He has also identified six steps that are necessary to help develop a healthy, personal identity.

TOGETHER WITH ASPIRO, DR. WIDMER WORKED TO DEVELOP A PROGRAM WHERE STUDENTS WOULD BE ABLE TO EXPERIENCE EACH VITAL STEP:

1. **New Experiences –** For many, Aspiro may be the first foray into the wilderness. We are so lucky to operate in the state of Utah, where there is an incredible variety of environmental topography. One week might be spent in the desert, another in the high alpine mountains. Our students have an astonishing diversity of spectacular landscapes to discover.

2. **Challenge –** Our program is designed to challenge our students. Whether it is writing a letter accepting responsibility for past mistakes, gearing up for a new activity, or living in a group peacefully, opportunities for personal challenge are everywhere.

3. **Supportive relationships –** Our students are encouraged to form healthy, supportive relationships with their peers, field staff and therapists. Aspiro operates on the belief that the therapeutic relationship is our strongest agent of change. Numerous studies looking at psychotherapeutic outcomes indicate that this is the single biggest factor in the change process.

4. **Increased self-confidence –** Research shows that our students report a 38% increase in self-confidence. When faced with success in their abilities, students begin to believe in themselves again. This is not simply improved self-esteem, but rather the result of practical hard work and overcoming challenges.

5. **Fun –** Whether it is giggling about having to eat beans and rice instead of hamburgers, or high-fiving after an epic hike, students at Aspiro have countless opportunities for peak experiences. Though it is hard work, it is undeniably fun. Our students will make memories that last a lifetime.

6. **New Self-Perceptions –** Aspiro does not accept the status quo, we challenge unhealthy patterns and expect self-reflection as part of the therapeutic process. Our students graduate with a more mature sense of self and their role within the family system.

OUR ADVENTURE MODEL

An adventure model offers more opportunity for assessment, skill building and knowledge acquisition. The increased opportunities to learn transferable skills, combined with experiencing success, are necessary steps for healthy identity development, improved self-confidence, and enduring change. Students look forward to new experiences each week and have the opportunity to challenge themselves as the multiple itineraries offer something different. At Aspiro, each of these therapeutic adventure components occur within a context of supportive relationships with field staff, peers, and therapist.

This is how our students experience adventure:

A student goes on a climbing itinerary and is faced with learning how to safely belay, how to tie knots, and identify all the different pieces of equipment. Even wearing a helmet and a harness is a new experience! Over the course of a week a student goes from being a total beginner to successfully climbing multiple routes and safely belaying peers. The next week the student heads north and goes mountain biking in the Wasatch Mountains, maybe after not having ridden a bike in years, or even at all. By the end of the experience, the student is navigating complicated obstacles and riding tough trails with their peers cheering them on! Each week is a new challenge which creates more opportunity for competence, autonomy, and relatedness - the key elements of the self-determination model!

25%

Increase
in identity coherence

The Adventure Model's Impact on Identity:

There have been a number of studies looking at the importance of identity in adolescents. Research shows that adventure recreation is a unique and effective model for impacting identity development. Students at Aspiro report on average a 25% increase identity coherence throughout their time in the program.

SATISFIED PARENTS

Because our program is developed with the entire family in mind, we also seek ongoing feedback from our families.

> "I have the highest praise for Aspiro and all the staff who helped our son and did an amazing job."

One of the primary variables we explore in our research is the data on family satisfaction in specific categories of the program. This information allows us to better understand the needs of our clients and therefore improve on service delivery. The Aspiro program has been fortunate to receive extremely high satisfaction results over a wide range of categories over the years of conducting this research.

So, how do parents rate us?

98% Say their therapist is **HIGHLY COMPETENT**

"Our therapist was the best thing that happened to me and my child. He and his team set us on the correct path."
"Our therapist was amazing! We are so thankful for her insights and time with our son."
"Our therapist was brilliant and changed our family/child dynamics."
"My son has always resisted therapists but loved his therapist!"
"Our therapist was kind, compassionate, professional, just wonderful. We have not experienced such understanding in the UK."

97% Say the program promoted **POSITIVE EMOTIONAL GROWTH**

"This program has given our son a much stronger sense of self, accomplishment, and confidence."
"My son is calmer and more mature as a result of his experience in the wilderness, and his interacton with guides and therapist."
"Our daughter is in such a better place now."
"Our son is learning to be more resilient and his belief in himself has grown!"
"Our son made significant and profound personal and emotional growth during his "awakening" at Aspiro."

97% Rating for **OVERALL SATISFACTION**

"We are so thankful for the Aspiro experience, our therapis, and the entire team. Well done."
"I have recommended it with enthusiasm, without any hesitation or trepidation."
"When can I go! It was an experience of a lifetime for our child."
"I'm happy because I definitely see improvements in my son."
"Our son has started living a full and happy life with Aspiro and has learnt to form good relationships."

92% My therapist provided **HELPFUL ADVICE** for my child's transition.

"Last few sessions with the therapist were helpful to us in navtigating our son's transition to his next location."
"Our therapist took a great deal of care to ensure that our son had an enjoyable and smooth transition."
"Very helpful advice!"
"Our therapist did a nice job easing the transition."

91% My child has developed stronger **LIFE COPING SKILLS**

"Our son is a work in progress, but Aspiro definitely put him on the right path."
"My child had NO life coping skills before Aspiro, now they have great skills, thanks."
"Our son understands now what he needs to do."
"Our child has learned many coping skills."

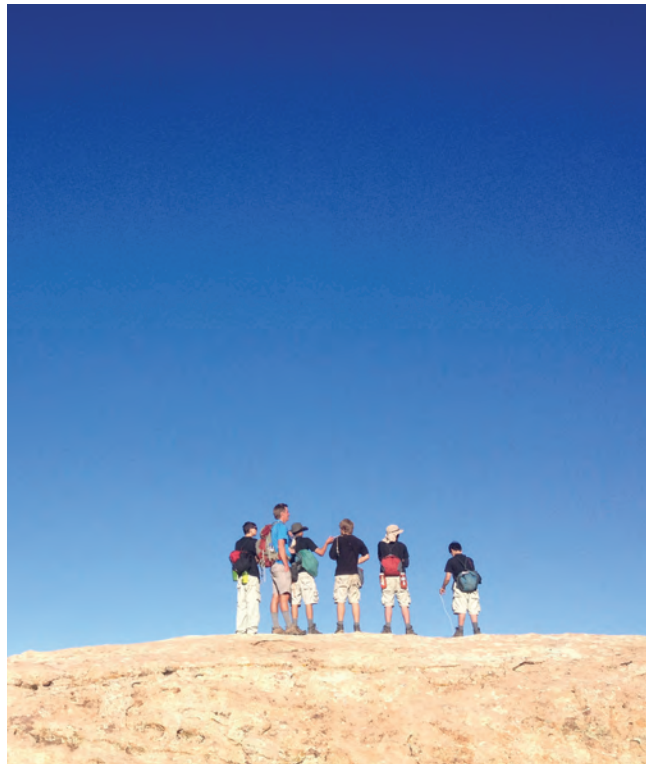
CONNECTING FAMILIES

One of the most meaningful experiences we provide for families is the Family Seminar. The seminar provides a structured, positive reunion that is focused on fostering healthy relationships between students and their families. Though communication and relationships at home might have been challenging, this reunification experience is a necessary step to observe progress. Our goal is to meet families where they are at, while maintaining that each family has a unique set of challenges, often times requiring difference solutions.

Parents often describe the seminar as educational, fun, relaxed, exciting, and emotionally challenging. This event is similar to what students experience and it is an opportunity for the whole family to develop confidence, efficacy, and determination. The Parent Seminar is grounded in the same evidenced based practices that we use as a backbone for our program model.

PERSONALIZED APPROACH, POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Recognizing the range of challenges and difficulties that our students may face, Aspiro has developed therapeutic treatment groups that are tailored to unique communities with intentional evidence based interventions as a foundation. From the moment you begin working with the Aspiro Admissions Team, we take great care to ensure that your child is placed in a group of 4-8 peers that will best meet their needs. Our therapists, along with highly skilled field staff, work together as a consistent treatment team to develop methods, goals, and objectives that create a healthy, effective, and safe group milieu.



OUR UNIQUE COMMUNITIES

Adolescents – Adolescents have a number of age-specific developmental, emotional and behavioral needs. Aspiro has resources for both adolescent boys and girls, ages 13-17. We facilitate multiple single-gendered boys groups and girls groups, which allows us the ability to target specific needs and take a more individualized approach. Each adolescent will face challenges, learn more effective coping strategies, form healthy social connections, and improve upon self-efficacy.

Young Adults – Young adults also have challenges specific to their developmental stage of life. Aspiro accepts students 18+ into our young adult groups. Young adults will learn how to problem solve, manage and assess risk, develop essential social, executive and coping skills, and become accountable for their own life.

Vantage Point – Aspiro's Vantage Point program serves a non-neurotypical population, including students with Level 1 Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other challenges associated with learning, processing, social and executive function deficits. We accept both adolescent and young adults into our Vantage Point program. Because of the specialized needs of this population, we have taken everything that makes Aspiro great and developed a separate program that helps to address this clinically challenging group. Vantage Point students can expect to enhance social and executive function skills, emotional regulation skills, learn self-care, and develop a better awareness of their surroundings.

Here is a brief list of some of the challenges our students face. This list is not meant to be comprehensive, only an example of some of the concerns our highly skilled team has resources to treat in a clinically sophisticated manner.

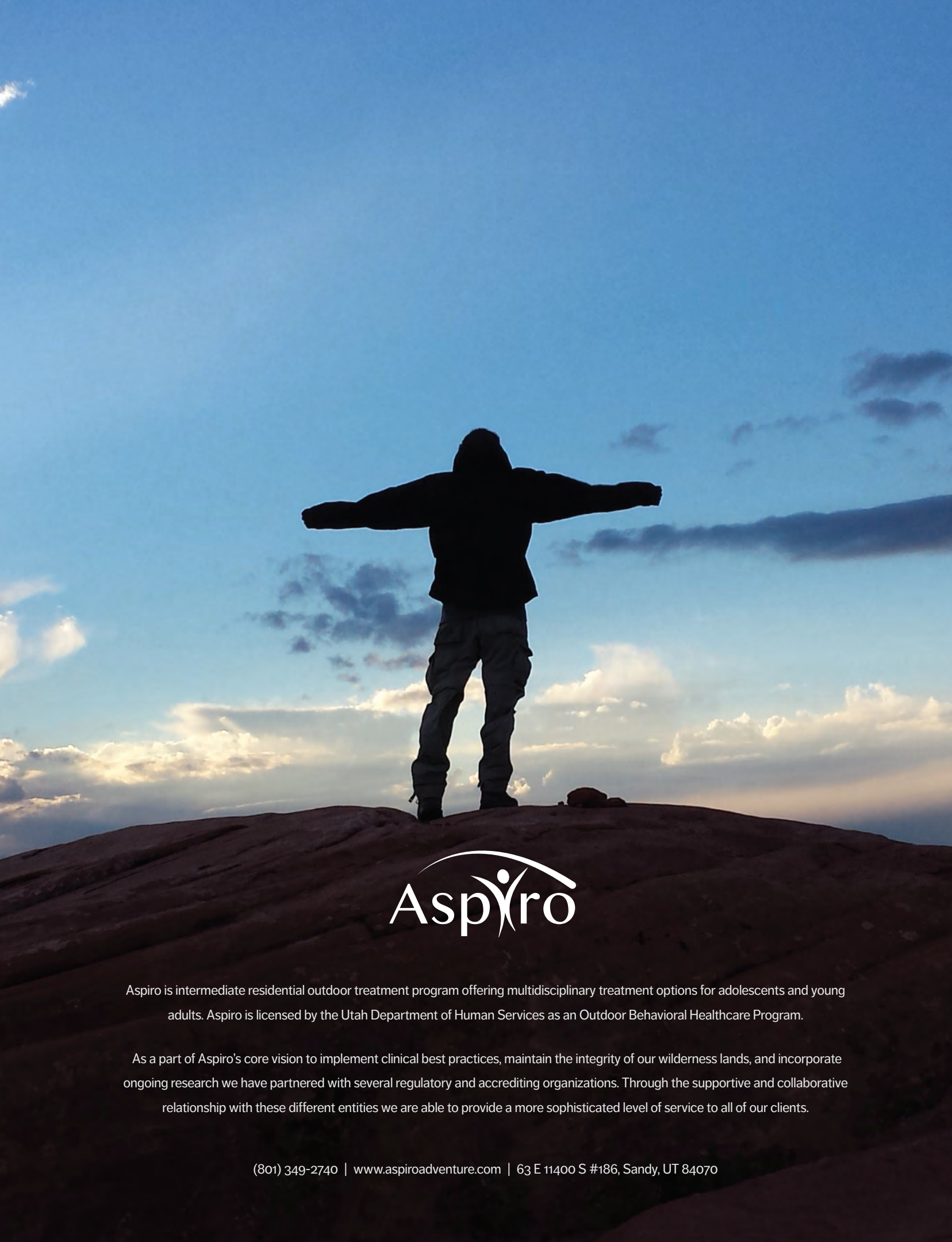
- ADD / ADHD
- Addiction
- Adoption issues
- Anger Issues
- Anxiety
- Aspergers
- At Risk Youth/Risky Behaviors
- Autism
- Behavior Issues
- Body Image Issues
- Divorce Conflict
- Depression
- Drug Abuse
- Eating Disorders
- Female Identity Empowerment
- Lack of Motivation
- Learning Disabilities
- Mood Disorders
- Non-verbal Learning Disorder (NLD)
- Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD)
- Personality disorders
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Relational Issues
- Risky/Harmful Sexual Behaviors
- School Failure
- Self Esteem Issues
- Self Harm
- Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI)
- Troubled Youth

REMEMBER, THERE IS HOPE

As families experience challenges from various behavioral, psychological or developmental issues, effective innovative solutions that create meaningful, lasting change are available at Aspiro.

Through intentionally designed interventions students and their families are assisted in further developing healthy self-determination, self-efficacy, grit, responsibility, and individual identity, and strengthen family relationships necessary to meeting individual and family goals.

If you are looking for help with your family's challenges and the needs of your adolescent or young adult, we hope that you will reach out to discuss more about The Aspiro Group



Aspiro

Aspiro is intermediate residential outdoor treatment program offering multidisciplinary treatment options for adolescents and young adults. Aspiro is licensed by the Utah Department of Human Services as an Outdoor Behavioral Healthcare Program.

As a part of Aspiro's core vision to implement clinical best practices, maintain the integrity of our wilderness lands, and incorporate ongoing research we have partnered with several regulatory and accrediting organizations. Through the supportive and collaborative relationship with these different entities we are able to provide a more sophisticated level of service to all of our clients.

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