

APSE Conversations with the National Board: Pamela Grider-Cross

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<https://apse.org/apse-conversations-with-the-national-board-pamela-grider-cross/>

Julie Christensen 0:10

Hi, this is Julie Christensen with APSE. We're excited to launch the APSE Employment First employment for all podcast as a new way to connect with you. This podcast is a way to provide updates, real time advocacy alerts, and information related to all things Employment First, be sure to subscribe so you don't miss an episode. And thanks for listening.

Erica Belois-Pacer 0:39

Welcome to another, another session and getting to know our new board members. So today I have Pamela Cross with me and welcome to the board. Pamela, we're very excited. Pamela comes to us from Arkansas. And she was actually very involved with her state chapter before she ran and won to be a member of the National Board. So I am not going to talk a lot I want Pamela to talk more. So people do you mind introducing yourself to our listen to listeners?

Pamela Grider-Cross 1:15

No, not at all. Erica, thank you for having me this morning. I am Pamela Grider Cross. I am the newly elected chair for the executive board. I'm excited. Member! Not a chair, member.

Erica Belois-Pacer 1:34

It is confusing. There's so many roles with all the different committees and everything. So Pamela, before you came to national APSE, can you kind of talk a little bit about what you did with your state chapter in Arkansas.

Pamela Grider-Cross 1:48

I served as the state chapter president for about 10 years. And during that tenure, we had to first redevelop our stand as an APSE group for the state of Arkansas. We now under this time period, we've had several changes, as far as making sure we could tackle competitive in great integrated employment. We have been tackling Employment First.

Under our umbrella for Employment First, we have now had the state to agree to have them as our first vendor who would hire individuals for competitive employment. So Department of Human Services and under that umbrella was the division of developmentally delayed services DDS waiver, they've heard several individuals from providers and with competitive wages, and we're we're so excited. under that umbrella. We started a store called the blue umbrella. And it was developed so that each person with disabilities and talents could come in and market and sell what they created. And so that story is based on and supported through those individuals.

And we shop just like you would at JC Penney's or dealerships, and the proceeds go back to the individuals who are supporting by putting in their products. Yeah, that's really cool. Yeah. And, and that was, by way of DDS waiver, and I want to give a shout out to two people that was so instrumental in that. And that was Sharon Mohammed, and her boss, which was Regina Davenport. And I also want to give a shout out to Arkansas rehabilitation services, who also waived in and assist it with it and our governor who gave permission. So we have been pretty blessed in those areas. Now, we do have 14 C, that every state is probably still struggling with.

So we are still trying to be advantageous in the importance of Employment First, and making sure that there's more than one option on the table. So during my 10 years those are some of the things that we have fought for, and and have gained you we've had some losses but we also have had some gain.

Erica Belois-Pacer 5:03

That's, that's amazing. I was gonna ask you when you're not doing all things APSE because I, like I said, and like you just explained you were obviously very busy at the state level, what is your, your day job? Like? Could you tell us a little bit about what you do.

Pamela Grider-Cross 5:20

I am an owner and operator CEO of my own company, and that is Central Arkansas Disability Services. We do all things disability, we our whole population is disability. So we opened our doors initially for employment, we did believe in competitive employment, and that everyone should have the right to have a robust life that they live for themselves and competitive wages. And so we've always for the last 20 years been on that train, and making sure that that momentum continues, and that we can break those barriers, barriers and close those gaps between employers and the employee of person of disability. We also do what we call transition. transition is pre employment transition, dealing with high school aged individuals who we're trying to help them to secure an idea of what life is going to look like after high school, and then equip them with certain talents and information and knowledge that could carry them on in the community, so that they can be more self efficient. We also work with what we call developmentally delayed services, working with waiver, and waiver is my baby, I love it to pieces, it is where we are able to take individuals from institutions or any institutionalized situation, and bring them into the community and help them get their own house and, and help them build their home. And then we actually take care of them while they're living in the community. Some people need more hours than others, and some need 365 coverage. And that's what we do to help build and partner with them on their life in the community and how they want to live it.

The last thing that we do is advocating for individuals for their social security disability. We have a young man that takes on that, that role. He had been working with social security for about 12 or 13 years. And we now have him working with us. And he's able to help us get through the red tape. And so we're pretty busy.

Erica Belois-Pacer 7:59

Yeah, no, I think it's great that you have someone right on staff that's able to do that, with the benefits counseling. I know that can be a struggle, you know, with other folks if they don't have someone right there to assist them. Pamela, how did you end up in this field?

Pamela Grider-Cross 8:15

I actually started with Ticket to Work, which I failed to mention, Ticket to Work wasn't was open to us where we could partner with social security, and to assist individuals in going to work. And so I had heard the advertisement. And so I called I just picked up the phone, I'm working a whole nother job somewhere else, and picked up the phone and went, hey, what is that all about? And once I got the knowledge, and I was already working with Arkansas rehabilitation services, before I started working for myself as an employment specialist, and so I had a heart in the background of putting employers and employees together and I loved it. But once I captured the population of disability that I knew nothing about. And I started going to classes and learning and I was just I was just engrossed with it. And so by the time I turn around, I'm degreed in it and I'm ready to rock and roll and, and that's how we got started, you know, just word of mouth and, and being interested, and making sure that I can help marginalized areas that are not receiving the support that they should be receiving. And I wanted to be that person to champion to make sure that we can break those barriers.

Erica Belois-Pacer 9:41

Oh, that makes sense. I wasn't sure how you started in the field. So that's, that's very interesting. Um, when you were younger, like when you were in high school or elementary school, did you think that you would go into the field working with people with disabilities?

Pamela Grider-Cross 9:58

Erica, I was on a whole nother spectrum you might not believe this. I, I, I was a singer.

Erica Belois-Pacer 10:07

Oh, my gosh!

Pamela Grider-Cross 10:08

My degree was the arts, I had decided I was going to be an actress. Because I was good at it. And I decided I wanted to be an opera singer, because I had a gift. And it had never been cultivated. I had never had training. And so I started over at my college at you University of Little Rock at Little Rock. And started voice lessons and taking drama. And that's where, wow, that's, that's where I was. And then I joined in college, we traveled and inside of that we were traveling different states and different places. And I was singing and, and loving it. And I it was actually my second major my first major was gerontology.

Erica Belois-Pacer 11:05

Wow.

Pamela Grider-Cross 11:06

So it just kind of took it a life of is on. I completed with voice. I was really great at it. I tried out for Juilliard, I got accepted at Juilliard, but I did not go. So went in a whole different direction.

Erica Belois-Pacer 11:22

Definitely, I'm guessing you probably use those skills in a variety of ways. In your current position, though, I mean, just having like stage presence, and yeah, yeah, probably helps a lot. Wow. That is interesting. Um, so I know you've done a ton with Employment First, you know, both through the state chapter in Arkansas. So I guess I'm kind of curious what you're hoping to do on the national board with APSE?

Pamela Grider-Cross 11:55

Well, right now where I am, I came in with a wealth of knowledge, but not knowing you know exactly where my place need to be. So I'm, I'm still learning. But I'm still open to assist on any level. What I'm hoping is that I can be educated enough that I can understand the systematic approach on the national level, and how we're creating the bills and how we are addressing the bills, and how we're getting things passed. I'm hoping that I can receive enough of that information that I can bring back to Arkansas, and put it into action here. We're still have a declaration from the governor of Employment First, but we have not received a law. And so I would like to be able to see how that is put together through our national level. And being able to bring that to our local. What I'm wanting to be able to offer to the national is being available and being workable. And being a team player. I have a lot of concepts as far as internal controls, and being able to create new ideas and how to take the process from local to national and make sure that we're braided together. We're able to work hand in hand and Miro what we do nationally that we can do locally as well, that sounds great on I would have to say that I think a lot of folks on the board the national board are, you know, see a similar thing in terms of their state level with policy and laws that come out. So trying to take what they can learn at the national level and implement that on a state level is definitely helpful on absolutely Well, I can say that you're definitely a team player already. What committees are you on so far? Well, I am co chair for our equality and inclusion and diversity committee. I am on the committee for policy with Miss Julie. And that one is very intimidating.

Erica Belois-Pacer 14:44

There's a lot of people on it.

Pamela Grider-Cross 14:46

Yes, that is extremely intimidating. And I only I'm only on those two, but I'm open. But I want to make sure that I can and be utilized where the need is. So if, you know, we find that Pam needs to be somewhere else to serve I'm open.

Erica Belois-Pacer 15:11

Well, I know it. I think a lot of people do that on the board, I think I'm pretty excited that you're on those two, number one. And I know that you've been super helpful with some of our panels that we've done in terms of professional development, and I'm sure you will be invited to join and help with some other professional development opportunities, considering you've done so

much in your state. So, no, I appreciate it. So before we have off, I do have one other question. Um, I'm curious if you want to share any fun facts about yourself fun facts.

Pamela Grider-Cross 15:49

When my day is full from five o'clock, until I finally lay back down, when I am, what I use is discombobulated. I am a color book designer. I do children's coloring books, adult coloring books, and I color until I am completely in a relaxed state where I'm able to peel off the day.

Erica Belois-Pacer 16:26

I think that's a great strategy. And I think a lot of folks definitely do the same thing. So keep doing it. I think that's a great idea. And you're an opera singer. So who knew?

Pamela Grider-Cross 16:38

I know.

Erica Belois-Pacer 16:40

You'll maybe someday you'll have to perform for us. Well, we do usually have karaoke at our conferences. So you might have to do a performance there.

Pamela Grider-Cross 16:49

That's right.

Erica Belois-Pacer 16:52

Yeah, Julie actually, is a trained singer as well. So maybe you guys could do a duet would be super duper rocket way.

Pamela Grider-Cross 17:02

Now we got Julie's which Julie?

Erica Belois-Pacer 17:05

Julie, the Interim Executive Director.

Pamela Grider-Cross 17:08

Okay. Christensen sound great. Oh, yeah.

Erica Belois-Pacer 17:12

Yeah, absolutely. Well, thank you for joining me today. And I know that you know, as the APSE staff and the APSE board, we're very excited that you have joined us. Excited to have new opportunities and learn from you as well. So thank you.

Pamela Grider-Cross 17:30

Thank you so much, Erica.

Erica Belois-Pacer 17:32

Thank you for listening and have a great day.

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