

# APSE Conversations: TX APSE with Britni Miles, Part 2

March 8, 2021

<https://apse.org/apse-conversations-tx-apse-with-britni-miles-part-2/>

Julie Christensen 0:10

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Erica Belois-Pacer 0:36

Hello, I'm Erica here from national apse. And we are happy to have Britni back with us today for part two, talking about her experience, going through the process of starting a new chapter in the state of Texas. So when we left off a little while ago, I had been talking to Britni about a paper that they had published in the state. So I think we're gonna kick it right off and start in and kind of what came about after the paper was published, and maybe some things that are still continuing along the lines. So Brittany, welcome back. Hope you're doing well this afternoon. And I will pass it over to you to talk a little bit about what happened after you publish the paper.

Britni Miles 1:24

Great. Thank you so much again, Erica, for having me. And for part two, so I can finish the story. Yeah, I'm really proud of Texas APSE. As I mentioned, in part one, the the policy committee is just on fire. And they've been doing some wonderful work. And especially this last year of 2020, they were able to accomplish some amazing things and really build bridges between other professionals and other agencies such as Health and Human Services Commission, which is our Medicaid waiver provider in the state of Texas. And then also Texas Workforce Commission, which is our vocational rehabilitation agency. And so the two papers, we actually published two papers last year, the first one was directed to Texas Workforce Commission. And it was just the timing was right, where sadly, because of COVID and because of some some barriers put in place for service providers in the state of Texas 50% of contracted employment service providers in the state of Texas have have ended their contracts or are no longer in business with Texas Workforce Commission and, and just 2020 added fuel to that fire to where twC needed to start listening to providers to understand the work that they do and create a system that really caters to outcomes for people with significant disabilities and Texas apse, you know, feeling that groundswell of support. The policy committee really wanted to capture what provided for feeling across the state and and get some not only the problems but also propose some solutions. And so we wrote eight paper, oh, maybe it was even longer. We wrote a significant position paper to Texas Workforce Commission that had about seven different policy

items that we felt needed to be looked at adjusted. And the two that were most significant was the program that's utilized for people with the most significant disabilities. Typically, people with IDD those that would be eligible for Medicaid waiver services that program it through VR, vocational rehabilitation is called supported employment. And it's also the program that Tw C has that it just has the most amount of bureaucracy and paperwork and red tape. And so the two major positions that we took in the PwC policy position paper, were we need to revamp re envision supported employment. So it leads to better outcomes for people with IDD across the state of Texas. And the other was we need to focus on provider health and sustainability. So can we look at the rates and getting a rate increased? providers hadn't gotten a rate increase in over 10 years in the state of Texas and so Wow, yeah. Yeah. And no wonder right that 50% of providers have ceased their contracts that and what that means for the people we serve across the state is tech is huge. And there's already problems with rural areas not getting services. And so what used to be maybe five providers, that PwC could contract to do the on the ground support of job placement and job coaching, maybe now in those rural areas, they had no options. And which is sad.

Erica Belois-Pacer 5:26

just said, it makes sense, though. I mean, if you're running a business, you have to be able to pay your employees. Right and yours, even with the cost of living, you have to imagine, it must have been significantly low,

Britni Miles 5:40

significantly underpaid. And we also had the most amount of paperwork, right. And if people listening this this podcast know that absi, as an organization has put out, you know, standard practices and best practices in the industry. And we know that doing more paperwork doesn't necessarily lead to more jobs for people with disabilities and our supported employment assessment. And that was part of the project or part of the program for support employment as a whole, in other states was about when we compared nationally, on average, about two to three pages. And in Texas, currently, it's a 40 page document. And that was actually being cut back from from, I think, upwards to 60 pages just a year ago. So it's just the the burdens that are placed on providers are not there intended to make sure that they're doing their job. They're following policy and procedure. But if they're not leading to better outcomes, and so we were, we raised these points in our supporter, or excuse me, our policy committees position paper to Texas Workforce Commission, and it resulted in some sit down meetings with their brand new Director of Policy, we had about six, sit down meetings where we went point by point with the paper and really felt heard and valued. And that led to partnering with with Texas Workforce Commission, we did not want to be seen as an adversary, we wanted to be seen as a resource. And I think we're well on our way. They even asked our policy committee to create recommendations for a facilitator to implement strategic redesign for their supported employment program. So we were able to give them a shortlist of names. And then also they even asked us to recruit from across the state, those that are providing supported employment services, if they would like to be on the redesign group. So we're able to give them some really reputable providers from across the state that would help revise this program and, and hopefully lead to better outcomes, and just a little bit better provider health and the state. So

that's what resulted from our first paper and, and it's still being looked at today and worked through and it's, don't get me wrong, like I may come off as someone who's headstrong and has strong visions, but I know that there's hard work ahead, and I and I know that it's gonna take a little while but it like I said, in part one, it's about making friends and really leaning on each other as, as different subject matter experts in the field, because we can't do it alone. And I think now, our chapter is looked at, in a sense as a resource to Texas Workforce Commission as as they, as we really, together implement some changes through a common vision.

Erica Belois-Pacer 9:07

No, I think that's great. And I think that's kind of the only way we can move forward with lots of initiatives. I hear that in many states, obviously, when you can get everybody together on the same page, it's going to be a lot easier to move forward. So that is wonderful.

Britni Miles 9:23

And then our second paper that we published was just right at the end of 2020. And that was hhsc. So Health and Human Services Commission. They are the Medicaid waiver facilitator system in in the state of Texas, and we recognize as the policy committee of Texas actually recognizes that it's the problems don't solely fall on vocational rehabilitation in order to get people good jobs, equitable jobs in this state. They need to have all the resources available to them. And the resource that is for pre employment discovery work is HHSC's Medicaid waiver program, but it's also for long term support after their, their cases closed with VR. And so we knew that they had to work together, but we weren't sure how that was gonna happen. So, we for now we have, we operate pretty separately where our position paper was sent directly to hhsc. You know, mentioning that, you know, you all have very separate goals, VR versus hhsc. And in the, in the sense that one is time limited, and the other is, you know, for the lifetime of the person and their career. But we all have a common vision that people with IDD deserve equitable employment throughout the state. And so, our hhsc paper wasn't as targeted as our Texas Workforce Commission paper where we had, you know, item after item with problem and solution and research and data were our hhsc paper was just like, Hey, guys, you need to be doing something. Because a 17 year waitlist and only two to 4% of those that are even receiving Medicaid waiver services are accessing any sort of employment. I mean, we need to just start, let's let's just start. And so

Erica Belois-Pacer 11:34

probably a smart idea. And I forgot you had mentioned the 17 year waiting list. Yeah, I would agree you need to start somewhere.

Britni Miles 11:44

Right. And so that's gonna be a lot longer play for the policy committee. And we recognize that and so one exciting thing is, although it hasn't resulted in these meetings, and the systems redesign, like Tw C's position, paper has resulted in so far. We decided to kind of shift in and we're in the middle of session right now. So this is Texas axes first ever political session. And and there's a really cool bill on the table that is, is going to be doing the workforce if it gets implemented. And that's state Bill 50, which is like our employment first bill that was passed

eight, almost eight years ago. This is targeted to HHS C's waiver program and to really implement Employment First, so that more people have access to employment services that are on the Medicaid waivers no matter what Medicaid waiver, I need a shout out Linda Levine, VP of Texas APSE. See, she did some phenomenal work to lay the groundwork for discussions today, where he even advocated for every waiver in the state of Texas to even have employment services on it to begin with. So that work was done at the previous iteration of Texas APSE East chapter. And so now we just need to implement it. And part of the problem there too, is the rates for providers are just not competitive in order to get quality services to people that we serve across the state. So it's about raising rates, but really access as well.

Erica Belois-Pacer 13:36

Is it significantly lower than rates for let's say, like residential or community or DaY hab?

Britni Miles 13:45

Well, I can speak today habits, it's pretty, I would say they're congruent with with Day hab. However the way that they've had, they're, they're trying to make it a little bit more enticing, right to go to CIE, as opposed to someone going to Dahab. But what they have, you know, it's about 22 to \$30 a day. So for a six hour program, in in the state of Texas, however, you can have, you know, upwards of 16 individuals served in that same service hour, whereas competitive integrated employment, what's called supported employment in hhsc is 30. It's \$30 an hour for access to do job coaching or discovery work, but that it's one on one so you can kind of do the math where it's still not incentivized for someone to have employment services versus day rehabilitation services. So working on that, and definitely something that Texas APSE would like to see improved. I can't really speak to, you know, the residential support port side of things. But I mean, as DSPs is direct support professionals, everyone, it should be worried about their their sustainability and their job because we do really hard to work really, really hard work and it's not typically rewarded with a paycheck. Well, it is but not not something where you're gonna make money and retire and Fiji or something with

Erica Belois-Pacer 15:26

definitely not unfortunately. Oh, dear.

Britni Miles 15:31

But yeah, so so we're working on on the rates would be helpful, but really just access. I mean, there's not even a part of the conversation at the annual service meetings. And Texas isn't even asking if you're employed. Like they're not even asking if you as a person with IDD have a job or even want access to employment support. So that just needs to start?

Erica Belois-Pacer 15:58

Yeah, no, absolutely. It's definitely a starting point. So Britni, I know, gosh, you've already done a lot. And you haven't even been officially started until very recently. I was just curious, you know, moving forward in this new year, what projects and plans Texas APSE has on the horizon?

Britni Miles 16:21

Yes. So we have an a phenomenal board. And we actually just last month, were able to expand it. Like I mentioned before, we're very intentional about who's on the board, because we want to make sure the entire state is represented as well as all the different voices of Employment First, from VR to service providers to self advocates to family members. Transition youth we're very strategic with who we have on on the board so that there's there's great representation and that members in the state of Texas are feel like they're getting something out of their their membership and that their voice is heard. And so we're expanding the board, which has been great. But I want to give a shout out to our founding board members, like I mentioned earlier, it's been a two year endeavor. And so my friends, right making friends really important. That really helped us get going or is Lucy Fafford. She's the director of University of North Texas wise program. And Noreen giallo, a Gil, former Texas APSE board member from before we lapsed, was really crucial in getting meeting the right people hitting the right friends and philosophically that we were all aligned and Employment First. Debbie Wilkes, a mentor of mine that I know from previous employment, and also as a past Special Education Director and Richardson really strong advocate for people with disabilities. And then also Dr. James Williams down in the Austin area with Blum. consulting, also was a former Texas APSE, a board member and past iterations of the chapter and so great as our secretary treasurer, so amazing. And so the those guys were really the friends that I made that really helped get the chapter going. And then I'll talk a little bit about how our chapter is structured. So I mentioned our policy committee. They are the workhorses super passionate that the chair of our Texas FCC policy committee is Ronnie Joe Frazier, and she herds all the cats, and gets us all on the same page. And make sure that we get our, our work done for the position papers, and make sure that we're meeting and coming up with our goals and staying mission focused. And then Joanna Burnett is our newest chair, because our newest committees, our membership committee, because now that we are officially a chapter, we get membership dues so that we can further your cause. And so we want to make sure that everyone in the state of Texas has access to membership and is getting value out of their membership and we're doing fun things and a lot of those fun things may involve alcohol because that's who I am and how we have fun as a chapter and how we recruit and network. But of course, if we have people that don't drink in the chapter and that that's completely fine to our communications. Chair is Josh Ryf. He is phenomenal. He actually this is his his job in the space is helping disability organizations with their social media campaigns and their communications and newsletters as well. What he does, and he's super smart. We're very fortunate to have Josh.

Erica Belois-Pacer 20:05

So you are very lucky. Yeah, he definitely seems great. All the people you're mentioning, I've been lucky, I've been able to meet them as well. And you're right. They are. They are excellent.

Britni Miles 20:16

Just yet just amazing, amazing people. And so, and then our and one of our newer committees is our professional development. So we haven't as Texas APSE had a an event yet, you know, a lot of states have already have well established conferences, and we haven't held one yet. We've done some events and partnered with the ark. And we've partnered with some

transition conferences, to host webinars, but our committees new and they have such talent, we have such great technical assistance mentors on the board that just are really excited to promote Employment First and professional development. And that's Lucy gafford. And Debbie Wilkes had that that committee, so shout out to every Texas APSE board member, but Special shout outs to the chairs and people who have found it.

Erica Belois-Pacer 21:19

Absolutely. I think it's great partnering with different groups to get started. I mean, I feel like partnering as much as you can is gonna get you further anyway. So I think that's amazing. So Britni, before we get off today, I typically end our podcast sessions asking whoever is presenting or talking with me, I should say, for any fun facts they might be willing to share with our listeners. And I've learned a lot about different people from all over the country. So if you don't mind, are there any fun facts? Who would like to share with our listeners?

Britni Miles 22:02

I bet you have learned a lot of wonderful Fun Facts About people I I listened to Wally's podcast, and he has all the fun facts. I wish I could be wildly but I don't care that much about clothes. But, yeah, fun facts about me. I'm an avid Seattle Seahawks fan. I think most people know that within the first five minutes of meeting me. I am a gooey duck farmer. So I have like I said, I came from the Pacific Northwest and my family actually has a gooey duck farm. If you will don't know what a gooey duck farm is. Just be cautious when you're Google imaging what a gooey duck is. And if you have any questions, my email is TXapse@apse.org. And you can ask me any of the questions you want about gooey ducks and gooey duck for me. Oh, it's good. I am a female who's colorblind, which is scientifically rare. And I love Golden Retrievers.

Erica Belois-Pacer 23:11

Ah, well, those are definitely very interesting facts. I know. We chatted a little bit about a few of those things before. But yeah, I would definitely encourage people to take a look at some of the stuff that Britni just talked about. So again, Britni, I just want to thank you for joining us today. I know that recently I've been able to put you in touch with people from different states that are looking to start chapters. So I'm hoping that in addition to you know, listening to our podcast, we can continue to connect folks across the country if they're interested in you know, starting off a new chapter at the state level for APSE. See, so before we sign off for today, Britni, is there anything else you want to share before we jump off?

Britni Miles 23:59

Yeah, I just want to share if you are interested in joining the party and starting your your chapter, I please reach out to me I'm will have a fun conversation. Yeah, there's work involved. Absolutely. But that shouldn't deter you because like in Texas, it was just drastically needed. And there's a lot of other states that need Employment First visionaries to help lead the state in the right direction. So I'd be happy to offer any sort of advice necessary and or just cheerleading and encouragement. I think if you've heard this podcast, you know, if I have one thing, it's energy, so I would be happy to be your cheerleader to help in that cause and I guess the other thing I before we leave is, Erica if you feel like it would set APSE II up right to delete

the alcohol. Part, please feel free to delete that alcohol statement I made. But I stand by it and lubrication is always leads to really great Employment First discussion.

Erica Belois-Pacer 25:13

No problem. And I think you know, most of our listeners are probably over the age of 21. So I would guess

Britni Miles 25:20

Be Safe Kids.

Erica Belois-Pacer 25:23

Evidently. Well, I hope you have a great day in Texas. I know I'm in New York, and it is snowing yet again.

So more,

Britni Miles 25:34

I'm here at 70.

And we went from negative one to 70. Within a week, it was crazy. And there was hail at some point in between there. I mean, we're just all over the place in Texas.

Erica Belois-Pacer 25:45

Yeah, we typically are in New York, but I don't think that's typical. for you guys. Oh, goodness. Well, thanks again for joining us and I hope everybody, you know, learn something new and tune in for another podcast that will be coming very soon. Thank you.

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