Welcome back, this is another podcast with national APSE and we are very excited today to have Marianne Durrant with us. She is in New York. So I actually know Marianne from my previous job, she actually used to be my boss, which is exciting. And you know, we had a great time doing different things in the state of New York APSE and doing trainings across the state, or her position has shifted a little as well. And a lot of the requests that we've been getting in terms of professional development ideas and needs has been around business engagement. So I thought that Marianne would be a great person to bring on our podcast for today to talk a little bit about what she has done in terms of connecting with businesses in her area. And, you know, building those partnerships, so very involved from today. And do you mind introducing yourself and just give me a little background on what you do?

Sure. Thanks, Erica. Yeah, I like Erica, said, I am Marianne Durrant, I work for an organization based in Rochester, but also with a satellite office in Buffalo, New York, and the director of the employment Alliance, which is the Employment Services Division at Heritage Christian services. I started our Heritage, our employment services department, oh, gosh, we got to be going on close to 15 years ago, it was track. And that was a really exciting opportunity for me, you know, we before that offered more residential and day program supports. And we’re really excited to jump into the world of employment, because we really just saw it as a service for people with disabilities that was mission right for us, and also provided a service to our community members

And Marianne, I guess, you know, because I worked with you on and I was not used to the sheltered workshop situation. On I know, the way you started is a little different. So when I’m talking with people across the country, a lot of times it’s working to make that transition from a sheltered workshop situation on to really have a more of the competitive integrated employment situation. So I feel like did you feel like you were kind of ahead of the game, because you didn't have to make that transition?

I did, to be honest with you. When we got started, I really thought it was important to learn a lot from people in our community who were doing similar work, and learn about the things that were working well, but also learn about the things that were challenging for them. So I do feel
like I was a bit ahead of the game. So I was lucky enough to have some mentors in the field, who really helped me understand competitive integrated employment as just that. And so we started with employment, we did not have a community pre voc program. So we were really looking at supporting people right off the bat who attended, they have programs and moving into employment. And it worked in partnership with our state funders to provide the right supports for that. But But definitely, I think I was ahead of the game. Because I didn’t have to work through some of the challenges. And I also believe that, you know, people with disabilities working in our community should just look like what it looks like for us. Right. So it felt right to me. And so I think that’s, that really got to start in the right direction.

Erica Belois-Pacer  4:10
I think another, you know, nice thing is, you have somewhat of a background in business. So I think the roadway you were thinking was more a little bit along a business, you know, model, but I also know that you put a lot of time into develop different relationships. I know that I was hoping you could talk a little bit about rain. Since Are you still the president or

Marianne Durrant  4:34
I am.

Erica Belois-Pacer  4:35
Oh, yay.

So I just think you know, you've done a lot of great things bringing people together. Do you mind telling her listeners a little bit about what you do with rain?

Marianne Durrant  4:44
Sure. So yeah, I really believe that much of our success is because we developed and started with a model that place value on relationships with our business community. So when Erica referenced when you reference rain, it's the Rochester area and MIT network. And, you know, when when I became introduced to working in employment and starting our department, the value of connecting with colleagues and other organizations who do similar work, I can't speak enough about the importance. So rain is a coalition of other organizations that provide employment services to people with barriers to employment, including disabilities. But I do say barriers for employment. Because we have seen some evolution over the years, I'm years ago, when I was a member of rain and attending and learning and networking. A lot of the organizations focus specifically on people in intellectual disability developmental disability world. But we have grown and expanded that. So people with additional kind of disability categories or other barriers to employment has started joining the network. And we meet on a monthly basis. And while all of us in our community might be seen as competitors, because we're all doing similar work for, you know, the people we support, we really like to, to work collaboratively as much as possible. And I’ve been able to learn and grow tremendously from the rain group. You know, every month when we meet, we have opportunity to share what's going on in our organizations with regards to kind of vocational events. Because there’s nothing to say that the person we’re supporting at my agency may not benefit from something
happening at another agency. And we also share leads, which, you know, from what I hear from colleagues around the country, when I've talked with them is not always done, and not always smiled upon. But the way I've always looked at that as if I'm working with a business, and they have a job opening in a particular field, and I don't have a job candidate that we're supporting who's a good fit, I'm still meeting their need by introducing another agency and someone they support to that situation. So it's worked out well, for businesses. And I think it's, it's just a great collaboration. So we're helping each other with finding jobs for people that might have some unique situations. And then we're also working on professional development. So we all know that within our agencies, you know, we all look at professional development and education differently, but I can't stress enough the importance. And so we tap into each other's creativity and expertise around different topics, so we can help each other learn and grow and improve the employment outcomes for the people we're supporting.

Erica Belois-Pacer  7:38
Absolutely. I know, I'm another big part of your job, you know, in the past, and probably president is also working with going to Chamber of Commerce meetings, on which I think made a big difference. So I don't do you mind talking a little bit about that as well? Yeah, sure.

Marianne Durrant  7:59
Yeah, again, early on, I really embraced the value of relationships with business. And we're lucky enough to find some philanthropic philanthropic organizations who provided us with financial support to join a number of our chambers of commerce in our region. And, you know, one of the things that I believe that's a little different in employment supports is that we have two customers, right, we certainly are supporting the person with a disability, but we are also supporting our business communities. And so I learned that we have to understand their needs, and we have to speak their language. And we have to understand what is in it for them. It's not all about what we want. It's not just about a job placement, but it's about filling their needs. And one of the things that we one way we can do that is to be in the places where they are, so we're not taking their extra time. They get to see us as a trusted business member of our community. And by developing those relationships, we've had a number of opportunities where, you know, people we've met at a chamber meeting. If we have, you know, need somewhere where we can maybe assess somebody's skills, we can reach out and say, Hey, any chance we could do this, and it's just a great way to develop warm leads, you know, for those supports. When when someone has a unique situation or, you know, geographically there might be some challenges. But, you know, Chamber of Commerce has has certainly opened up doors for us. For for job openings, like I said, for other kind of vocational type supports, like assessments or internships, informational interviews, you know, we've been able to talk with business members from our chambers of commerce to help us with that, through our Rochester Chamber of Commerce, we've been able to engage in some other activities that they're doing, to really just be more involved. and workforce development as a whole in our region. And so I believe that as businesses see us as a nonprofit organization, engaged in that kind of work that benefits them and our community as a whole, it just elevates our status and the trust that they placed in us when we are approaching them, you know, for employment opportunities for people we serve.
Erica Belois-Pacer 10:23
No, I would agree. And a lot of times when I talk about kind of the area that we live in, Varian there, it's diverse, I know that you have people that choose services, both in rural areas, and also in more of an urban setting. So I know, in the past, you had worked with some different manufacturing groups, and I know, there were some collaboratives along that line, have you found that helpful as well, in terms of providing, you know, a variety of resources and connections, not just within, you know, maybe an urban setting in the city, but also within, you know, counties that have a little more trouble with transportation, I suppose.

Marianne Durrant 11:06
Geographical challenges. Yeah. Yeah, certainly, I think that. And so not only chambers of commerce, but, you know, trade specific collaboratives, or rotary groups, you know, coladas groups, any of those kind of groupings of people just provide a really nice way to engage with our communities differently. And you never know what you're going to walk away with. Right. So through one of the trade type organizations, Erica, that you mentioned, we were able to engage with a manufacturing company to create a short video for us. So as we're serving students, through our prep services, who are interested in that particular trade, we have a short video, they can watch which number one introduces them to a field, they may not know a lot about, potentially introduces that business as an employer, as these people, you know, move through a school. And then also, it shows consideration for their time, because the business was willing to do kind of informational interviews or tours, things like that. But the fact that we don't necessarily have to approach them every single time, there's a student interested, I think it showed them that we are trying to be considerate of their time, which really, in turn makes them even more willing to work with us when we have when we make a call and have a specific request. So it makes sense, definitely. And then even like the civic organizations, like, you know, coladas and Rotary Clubs, things like that. These are people who are engaged in their community. And so while I'm, in my experience, some of those members may be retired, some are still working. But these are people who know people. These are people who may have children, or siblings with disabilities. And so quite often, when we connect with people in those groups, they're able to make introductions for us that have proven helpful in a variety of ways, you know, being subject matter experts to help us with some educational lessons, your things like that. So I can't speak enough to the power of collaborating with businesses and other civic organizations.

Erica Belois-Pacer 13:09
Yep, I forgot all about some of the meetings you've had and presentations you've done with, like the Rotary Clubs, and I think lions probably you've done as well. So now I hear you need to make those connections. Absolutely. Um, so I, Marianne, before we head off today, I guess, is there any other advice that you can give to our listeners and, you know, ways to make business connections? And, you know, maybe where you see yourself moving forward? After, hopefully COVID is improved a bit?

Marianne Durrant 13:43
Sure. So I think, you know, I think it's important, you know, I realized that sometimes it's hard to make the time to focus on developing business relationships. And I've seen ourselves kind of have some ups and downs when we stopped focusing on it, because we're busy, and we're focused on the task at hand. But looking back over the long haul, it is an investment of time that is well spent, I would encourage you to look creatively and talk with their funding partners about how that can be supported, whether it be state funded or through, like I said, philanthropic foundations, who might be able to support that. You we actually had a foundation funds a position for us for a whole year that was all about business relationship management. And so we were able to have a staff for a year, spend their time introducing us to organizations and businesses, and trying to understand their needs. And I think that's what's key is understanding of their needs. It's not all about me. And it makes sense as far as where we're going. It's just more and more and more frequent. How do we continue to engage with businesses, how do we get introductions to businesses that you know might be a little more difficult to reach? Those are some of the things that we're going to be looking at doing as we move forward.

Erica Belois-Pacer  15:06
So there's more variety in terms of options you have, which I, I know personally that you do a great job. It's not. I don't look into the same businesses over and over again, for opportunities. It's looking for things that actually match what the person who chooses supports wants to do,

Marianne Durrant  15:23
which Yeah, yeah, it's really, Erica, we look at our data about where people are working, it really excites me that we don't have a lot of repeat, job placements, for lack of a better word. And typically, if we have people working at the same business, it is in a different location, like a restaurant that has multiple locations, or different departments, we don't tend to have people working in the same place, because we absolutely look at people's individual interests. And that just makes sense, from a business perspective as well. None of us want to do the exact same thing. So

Erica Belois-Pacer  16:01
know, exactly, just like everybody else. So yeah, thanks, again, Marianne. And I know that our listeners will gain some, you know, knowledge and information and things that they might be able to do within their own communities. But I again, I think it's the importance of making those connections, putting yourself out there, and you know, being creative. So thank you very much. Is there anything else you want to say before we head off?

Marianne Durrant  16:28
No, thank you all and be well.

Erica Belois-Pacer  16:30
Absolutely. So from national APSE, just look for our upcoming podcasts. That will be in April, we'll be sitting down to chat with two of our keynotes for the National Conference. Hassan
Davis and Jim Warne, and actually I believe Marianne that Hassan will be doing a session for the New York conference as well.

Marianne Durrant  16:52
Yeah! So I'll put a plug for that Erica. Come to the NY APSE conference.

Erica Belois-Pacer  16:59
Yeah, absolutely. They have a lot of great things that will be going on. And you know, we try to post different opportunities across the country, on our Facebook page, I LinkedIn, we put out things on Twitter. So check out all those amazing things that are going on and thanks for joining us today.

Transcribed by https://otter.ai