Julie Christensen  0:09
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  0:36
Welcome to another podcast with national APSE. Today, we're going to chat with Hasan Davis, who we are very lucky to have as one of our keynotes for the national conference that will be taking place on the week of June 15. It's going to be virtually done again this year, which is lovely because we can have more people join that might not necessarily be able to travel in other cases. So I'm very excited to have Hassan with us here today. And I actually had the honor of seeing him Gosh, sad. I think it was like three years ago, maybe four, had an in person conference in New York, where he was the keynote. And just recently, he actually did a keynote presentation for the New York APSE chapter again, but virtually. So I know some of you probably have heard from him in the past. I know we're going to talk about a couple of things that he's doing coming up as well. But Hasan, Do you mind introducing yourself?

Hasan Davis  1:38
Glad to Hi, everybody, my name is Hasan Davis coming to you live from the great city of paint, lick Kentucky. And it is as big as it sounds always tell people but a great, great community. I am a I don't know, I always have a hard time trying to figure out what I am, I run an organization called Hasan Davis solutions, working primarily as a consultant advisor, and speak around issues of education and access inclusion in particular, working with self advocates, and advocacy groups that work with young people experiencing disability, the justice system and any other number of challenges to their ability to be amazing in the world. I'm the former commissioner of juvenile justice for the state of Kentucky, I have served in a number of capacities across child welfare systems, and support and advising and, and all that stuff. So that's a quick, quick thing. Yeah.

Erica Belois-Pacer  2:39
Quick overview of your 300 different...

No, I know you're very busy. And oh my goodness, I'm sure you're probably even more sought out currently. So I guess one of my first questions Hassan was on you know, why? Why does it
matter, especially right now to talk about race and disability and employment? You know, what are your feelings on that? Obviously, we feel it's important, but just your perspective on that would be great.

Hasan Davis 3:09
Yeah. Well, I think that the totality of that, that conversation is my my story, my backstory, growing up as a young man, African American youth experiencing, you know, not just ADHD and dyslexia, but but visual hearing impairment, you know, experiencing the traumas a lot of young people do with parents who divorce after domestic violence with home insecurity and food insecurity. It was just like this toxic cocktail of failure waiting to be drank in so many ways. And, and my ability to navigate all of those things. You know, a lot of the data I use when I do presentations, is that that talks about, you know, each of these corollaries that really impact a young person. And the more of them you have the the greater likelihood you're going to be deeply impacted. And limited. In your your scope and aspirations and access to the world. I was lucky enough to have an amazing creative mother who found ways around systems that were adamant that that I wasn't valuable, and, and other system players who, who chose not to accept their role just as caretakers until they could pass me on, who really inspired me to believe that I had a right to be great in spite of all the data around me. And those things really have shaped my lived experience, and then really created the space that I walk in as, as a professional as an expert in injustice, in particular, and around being self advocates and strong advocates for young people being capable of doing Anything with the right supports. And so really, that early experience, in so many ways, created the path that I started to walk even when I didn't know that I was I was heading this direction.

Erica Belois-Pacer 5:16
And actually, I was gonna ask you who kind of I know that it's been probably a long journey, you know, to get where you are currently. I was curious. When did you start doing, you know, public speaking and really talking about advocacy in this area?

Hasan Davis 5:35
Well, public speaking, I've probably been doing my whole life, because that was how I, how I survived. You know, I remember, as early as Middle School, there would be the book reports that were due and, and the frantic nervousness, realizing there's no way I'm going to be able to read a book. And so I would rush into school on the Monday, you know, after the weekend, and quickly start to interview all of the brilliant kids that always read and ask them the amazing questions that that young people don't get. And they always, you know, so I was I was naturally drawn to building rapport and relationship. And so I would, I would talk to Susie, and she would tell, well, I think that book represented these things, then I would go to Johnson, Did you really think that he's no, I think the author was trying to solve these great conversations with my peers, who were absolutely afraid to speak out. And as soon as the bell rang, I'd say I would like to give my oral report. And I would get up. And I would do my five minute extemporaneous report on the book, showing that I understood all of the things that I gathered in the last 20 minutes with my, with my friends. So that really was that was that was myself, knowing that most sane children are like, I'm not getting in front of group. And so I knew that
was the way that I could always be present. People would always say, Well, I saw him here, I heard him I knew he was here. And so that became a big part of just the lens I had to to hold to know that I could stay in in places that I wasn’t supposed to be. And as I got older, and actually got into theater, and some more formal ways of crafting the skills that I had, I realized that it really was something that I was good at. And yeah, there’s I started,

Erica Belois-Pacer  7:25
that’s a great strategy, though, I don’t think I would have thought to do that.

Hasan Davis  7:31
It was use what you got, cuz you’re, otherwise you’re just a guy people, you know, the teacher calls on, you know, and you just kind of give that blank look until they call someone else. And I didn’t, I didn’t like being that kid either. So even if I didn’t know, I didn’t have a problem, talking until people were convinced that I did. And so that literally kept me in in places that I was, you know, that people were very clearly trying to get me out of,

Erica Belois-Pacer  8:00
I’m curious about that I was gonna stop you. Can you kind of explain a little more what you mean, about places that you otherwise probably shouldn’t have been? I’m curious about that.

Hasan Davis  8:09
Yeah. Well, I mean, I, for me, I was very ambitious, in, in trying, playing up, I guess they plan to call it sometimes in sports, right, where you, you kind of box in above your weight and, and trying to get into places that, you know, are probably dangerous for you. Because you don’t know, you don’t know. And so, you know, part of that strategy for me was was always volunteering, and stepping into the risk of being, you know, at the edge of an experience. And most times, it paid off, you know, taking that extra chance, and being the one willing to volunteer to try something or to step into a conversation without knowing. And so it really disarmed me from that fear of failure, because failure had been so much of kind of the expectation from me. And so it was either do something amazing or be right where you were so so it, it allowed me to really step into places and take risks and trying things even with classes that I shouldn’t be in or, or in, in engagement of different types. And so, I really, at an early age, and I think the arts really became a very popular powerful part of it because of my mother, who was a teaching artist and an amazing artists shame. My father were just this amazing team. And so it gave me the courage to step into conversations that usually people are shying away from because they know they don’t belong. And the courage to as I said, as an actor, you know, one of the things within improv is you know, fake it till you make it acting, acting as if we call it right you act as if you belong there. You act as if you know the story. You act as if you understand what’s going on. And I was, I was really good at that. And so it would, it would very often be well into whatever work it was, before the teacher or administrator, somebody realized that I really had no clue. But by that time, we were kind of invested in each other. And they were invested in, in helping me succeed, because I showed up with this energy and this courage to try. And and so that really became the earmark of of my experience, you know, kind of stepping
into these places and saying, Yeah, I'll give that a shot. Why not? I can only fail. And our know how to do that. So

Erica Belois-Pacer  10:40
no, that's, that's great. does sound like the arts were definitely a big thing was your mom, an art teacher, or

Hasan Davis  10:48
see mom, my mother is a, as a writer, and a poet. So she was a teaching artist. In fact, she was kind of that, that front, that front line of what we call, you know, teaching artists, art educators, now she was kind of part of that, that, that whole generation that crafted that and, and was just amazing at it, you know, and, and so the tools that she used, traveling across the country working in places, she also used at home, to give me a different lens to see my own experience and my, my challenges through and to tell the world who I was, instead of the world telling me who I was,

Erica Belois-Pacer  11:29
That makes sense um. So speaking of writing, I know that you have a number of books that you've written as well, would you mind just kind of highlighting some of the stuff they've you've written recently?

Hasan Davis  11:42
I'm glad to. So I've written two books in the last few years. The book I wrote, I think, in 2016, when I, when I finally left the Department of Juvenile Justice and had some, some time to really think about it, and how I could contribute to the conversations that I thought were important. The book was called, it's called written off, how one man's journey through poverty, disability and delinquency is transforming the juvenile justice system. And that really became a chance for me to go back and, and apply a critical lens, to my own experience, a lot of things I've talked about how I navigated the world, and to, to come up to come up with the lessons that were in those in those spaces, you know, they were lots of trauma, drama and pain, but lots of amazing lessons. And, and started to unpack that and reliving some of that, which was a difficult journey for me, gave me a lot of the tools that I use now, when I'm working in training, advocates, champions, self advocates. So using, you know, going back and really unpacking and interrogating my own experience for the lessons that I might be able to use for other people and help them see, as they're working with populations, maybe seeing some of my struggles and the things that had to happen to get me through them as an example of what's possible. Or as a young person who might be experiencing some of those same things. The idea that it's not impossible to to move mountains, and and to navigate a world that constantly, you know, reminds you that you're not supposed to be able to. And so that was that that was written off. And then I wrote a children's book a couple years ago, that chronicle the life of a man in New York, New York was the only African American member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. And he was part of the fabled Lewis and Clark Expedition from day one today don't always say, the only difference is that he was enslaved to William Clark. And so for most of the 200 plus years since then, history never thought that his presence mattered. And I actually have a one man
show that I've toured for the last 22 years, that tells the story of York in first person. And so after doing that nationally for 22 years, and you know, serving as York, for the National Bicentennial commemoration of the Lewis and Clark Expedition being York for the nation, telling his story and being making it a part of the history of Lewis and Clark, I decided that it was time that the story be available to young readers. And the one of the things that I know from the data my own experience is that reading in elementary school is a great determiner of future success or failure. And one of the things that I see very often is that young students of color, and young students across the board very rarely experienced stories that center people of color people with different experiences in their main role, So I wanted to provide something that could add to the rich story of who we are, as a nation, at the same time highlight the presence of this amazing individual York as a part of what we consider one of the seminal, you know, events of our nation's founding and creation that that expedition that opened up the entire West, for better or for worse, you know, he was a part of, of that foundational story. And, and this book gave me a chance to introduce him to young audiences, like I have to, you know, adult and, and school age audiences over the last 20 years.

Erica Belois-Pacer  15:37
Wow. And actually, Hasan, I did not know that you had written a children's book, I know, and I did read your other one. But when I'm not working for national APSE, I'm actually on the local school board, or my three kids go to school, and we’re doing a lot of changes and just adding things to the curriculum, so I'm gonna have to check it out. Yeah,

Hasan Davis  15:59
that book is the journey of york

Erica Belois-Pacer  16:00
thanks! So, um, I know that we're getting close to the end of our chat. And I just wondered, before we head off, I'm very excited that you'll be at the conference. And I know you're going to share a lot more than this at the conference. But I just wondered, if there if you have any other things you'd like to share about opportunities for people to interact with you at the conference? I know, we talked a little bit about having a breakout room or, you know, information on your books. So

Hasan Davis  16:30
I do hope that we have the opportunity. You know, in addition to the formal keynote, which I'm excited about, I love creating the story and putting it all together in a way that people can really see the power and the possibility. But I hope we have a chance to, to do some some virtual hang out, just just I love meeting folks who were in the work and as passionate about making sure that opportunity is available as I am and so I'm just really excited to stay in conversation, think APSE, he does an amazing job supporting so many folks who were who are trying to do the very best they can for for populations that other people often ask us, why are you wasting your time? Why are you investing there, and we see the reason we know the importance, and to be able to reflect on that and and fire people up and get them back to the point of believing
that this is the most amazing work they can do for someone else is something I'm really excited about.

Erica Belois-Pacer  17:39
And we're looking forward to that opportunity to Hasan I think that we will have those options. And you know, we talked about having a breakout session as well so that there can be some more of that conversation after the keynote. So again, we're really looking forward to having you on in June. It seemed kind of far away before but now it seems like it's getting closer. So we look forward to it. And thank you again for joining us today.

Hasan Davis  18:05
My pleasure. I look forward to seeing you all soon.

Transcribed by https://otter.ai