

APSE Conversations with the National Board: Emily Munson

June 28, 2021

<https://apse.org/apse-conversations-emily-munson/>

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

Good morning or afternoon depending on when you're listening to this session of APSE's podcast. Over the next few weeks, we will be introducing our newly elected board members to the national board. So we're excited that we have some new folks joining us with lots of great ideas and one of the new members is Emily Munson. So welcome today. Emily, do you mind introducing yourself?

Emily Munson 1:04

Sure. I'm glad to be here. My name is Emily Munson, as you said, and I am a senior attorney at Indiana Disability Rights Leges Indiana's protection and advocacy organization.

Erica Belois-Pacer 1:25

Excellent. And I know I got to see you present. Gosh, when we actually had the in person conference back in St. Louis. So I know. I learned a lot during your session, and I'm sure do you present it a lot of different things?

Emily Munson 1:40

Um, yeah, yeah, it's been a little bit different. With COVID-19, I was bummed that I was going to present at a national conference back in June of last year for the National Disability Rights Network. But that got cancelled. But at the same time, I'm excited about the way that virtual platforms have made big conferences more accessible to all folks, whether they have disabilities or not. And getting to be a participant at the APSE, the conference that just happened a few weeks ago, was fantastic. That was a really neat platform.

Erica Belois-Pacer 2:33

Thanks. We thought so. And we had hoped that, you know, the participants would think so as well. Strangely enough, we use the same group, Matchbox that we did last year. But I think like you said, with COVID, and everything. I think companies and platforms are changing, just you know, every every month to update the accessibility and just options for people so that you

know, it's more user friendly across the board. Which is good. So Emily, I'm curious, why did you decide to run for the national board?

Emily Munson 3:12

So employment was my main legal practice area at Indiana disability rights for about five years. So I became very familiar with the vocational rehabilitation program, which I might refer to as VR. I'm assuming lots of listeners are familiar with that acronym. And I was handling ABA Title One cases, and really got involved advocating for Employment First in Indiana. Another thing that we worked on it IDR was a project where I went, I and the advocates that I work with, together visited around three quarters of the 14 c certificate holders in the Save Indiana and we were able to talk to the folks working there, as well as staff and management in those facilities. And we heard lots of people with disabilities saying that they wished that they could try competitive integrated employment, but either they didn't think they could keep their benefits, which I knew was kind of misleading and misunderstanding. I myself am a person with spinal muscular atrophy type two so a fairly severe physical disability, I need activity assistance with all activities of daily living yet, even though I make, you know, about \$65,000 a year, as a state employee, that's public knowledge, I'm still able to use it as I was still able to maintain, you know, those critical Medicaid benefits by participating in Indiana's biom program. So I knew that the benefits component really should not be an issue for these folks. And the other thing that I heard was that several of them had guardians who were afraid or unwilling to let them try competitive integrated employment, or relatedly, that the certificate holder, whom they were working for, impose limits, like until somebody could get to 75% of an arbitrary productivity level, they would not be referred to the VR program. So that was very frustrating for me, hearing about people were misinformed and stuck.

So I became involved in Indiana's Employment First initiatives. I got to meet a really, we're fortunate in Indiana to have a very strong APSE chapter with lots of very active advocates and allies. So it was that that really got me into employment first. And then, now, I, my job has morphed. I don't do the employment litigation anymore. But I'm in charge of ideas can have policy initiatives in organizing those 70. I'm looking at employment, not necessarily on such an individual case level, but a more systemic level, and looking at systemic interventions for expanding opportunities for competitive integrated employment. And to Indiana APSE members, Pat Rogen and Susie Rooney who both of whom I believe, were on the national APSE, the board in the past what everyone can do in our little Advocacy Network, know that APSE, he was accepting nominations. They encouraged us to apply. I asked them to write me My recommendation, which they very graciously did. And the rest is Oh, wow.

Erica Belois-Pacer 8:09

No, that's Yeah, I wasn't sure how that came about. So that is interesting. I was actually going to ask you if you're involved with your state chapter, which I think you kind of answered but I'm, I'm assuming that you are active with that only the Employment First group in Indiana but also with the state chapter of APSE.

Emily Munson 8:31

Yeah, I'm in right now. The I'm working with the state epsi chapter on drafting legislation to update Indiana's Medicaid buy in program, which is called med works. And then at the same time, Indiana's Governor's Council for people with disabilities, which is our state's DD Council, has co sponsored an initiative that Pat and Susie developed called work to include they gave Susie gave a presentation about it at the conference that just happened. And work to include is focusing right now on trying to get the state to actually put teeth and money behind the Employment First legislation that we have. Right now. We have well, we're working towards trying to get an office of Employment First and perhaps and the executive order and other measures to get the state to become a model employer for people with disabilities and there are lots of offshoots of to include regionally because it's very much a grassroots organization organized and supported very heavily by Pat and Susy, as they have a lot of expertise in this area. But Pat and Suzy have also really worked to listen to people with disabilities and and have them co lead. Where work to include is going in, for example, one of the kind of local groups in Indianapolis, the little work group has gotten with the state personnel department at the state of Indiana to have kind of a sounding board for state personnel and employees with disabilities in the state to talk about how to amend the job application process and make other improvements that would lend themselves to supporting Indiana as a model employer.

Erica Belois-Pacer 11:17

Wow, that is pretty amazing. You're right. I did hear Susie do her session. I forgot to make that connection. But Wow, you are doing a lot of work in Indiana. That is for sure.

Unknown Speaker 11:31

How long?

Emily Munson 11:33

Sorry. They're just gonna say, Oh, no, I was just sorry. Go ahead, Emily.

It's kind of interesting, or states kind of Mio is Indiana, a state that works. So one of our big priorities is making sure that Indiana is a state where everyone can work.

Erica Belois-Pacer 12:05

Okay, I love that. I did not know that was the state motto. Yep. I that is key. A state where everyone Where? Maybe you can change it?

Emily Munson 12:14

I don't think I don't think it's our official motto. But it's adopted by? Oh, I don't know some bureaucratic agency, and it's on all of our state computers.

Erica Belois-Pacer 12:30

That's great. Oh, goodness. Wow. Well, I think you are definitely a huge asset to the national board. Given all your experience and what you're doing currently. I'm for the upcoming year with national APSE, are there any specific goals or things that you're hoping to work on in terms of, you know, Employment First, or just opportunities for others?

Emily Munson 12:54

I think there is a pretty steep learning curve that I'm going to have to get through probably in the next six months or so. just catching up on all things, National absi and getting a better grasp of where things currently stand, you know, fiscally, policy wise and all that. I was very excited to hear that APSE he is moving forward with a diversity initiative. I will say that one of the things that was difficult for me at the St. Louis APSE, the conference that you mentioned at the beginning of the podcast was some accessibility barriers.

For example, like tables were jammed so closely together, that one would have to go like through the very perimeter to sit if they were in a wheelchair, which made networking hard. Some of the breakout sessions were so jam packed full that people were standing in front of me who was seated or seven times to get by I was getting knocked with backpacks on that kind of thing. So I think that one thing I'm looking forward to is sharing my my lived experience as a person with a disability to try and make the make improvements to our initiatives, so that they are more accommodating to people with disabilities and other marginalized groups that might be participating or wanting to participate can be in the periphery right now.

Erica Belois-Pacer 15:14

Nope, I would agree. I think that is definitely a need across the board. And especially when you're going to different hotels and different convention centers, I think some do a nice job. Others I think are still learning. So having your perspective is definitely key to making improvement. So everybody feels included. I hadn't thought about the networking part. But that makes total sense to Emily, just in terms of maneuvering through crowds. And if there's tables, that must have been very frustrating.

Emily Munson 15:49

Yeah, it's not just something that happened at that conference, I think it's a barrier that job seekers in wheelchairs often face, because a lot of these networking events are painted standing room only, or they're done with minimal seating, that generally is at bar height. So being down at butt level, isn't that really conducive to getting to talk with other folks or even having other folks Be aware that you are in the room with them?

Erica Belois-Pacer 16:31

Right, oh,

Emily Munson 16:32

I definitely am interested in you know, thinking up and brainstorming, ways to make networking more accessible in and of itself as kind of one of those very critical activities that job seekers need to engage in?

Erica Belois-Pacer 16:58

Yeah, absolutely. I know, I'm thinking about job fairs and just other interview opportunities. And you're right. Not being at the same level is definitely a hindrance. Well, hopefully with our

next next conference, that will be in Denver, I'm sure you'll have lots of ideas for us when we had there in June, in person, like you had said before, you know, we're hoping to have a virtual component as well, because I think that is key to including more people. You know, not everybody can travel across the country, for example, to or, you know, stay in a hotel for that many nights.

Emily Munson 17:42

So, that's, he thinks absolutely right. And I think that is really going to be a key in making the conference more accessible to people with a range of disabilities, having a bifurcated in person or online option. But I will say that, I'm very excited personally, to get to go to Denver and see everybody in person again.

Erica Belois-Pacer 18:16

You and me both.

Emily Munson 18:18

I forgot how much I enjoy you know, being in groups of people, until it actually is kind of back again.

Erica Belois-Pacer 18:24

So well, thank you.

Before we hop off today, Emily, I'm curious if there's any fun facts about yourself that you would be willing to share with our listeners?

Emily Munson 18:38

Um, maybe kind of a weird, quirky thing. Is that my Make a wish was to go to Salem, Massachusetts, for Halloween.

Erica Belois-Pacer 18:56

How far So have you ever been Have you been there? Without Halloween in the past?

Emily Munson 19:01

I had. I had a cousin who lived in Cape Cod. Now he's down in Louisiana. But sometimes in the summer, we would go visit him. And my mom knew that I was into, which is when I was a little girl. And so we on our way to Cape Cod, Southampton, Salem, and that to go see all the spooky stuff?

Erica Belois-Pacer 19:32

Well, it's funny. I actually, I had a cousin who also lived near there and he had his wedding somewhat close to Salem. So we got there a little early and we were able to check it out as well. And it definitely they embrace all the past history and there's lots of tours. Yeah, it was it was the it is a fun place, that's for sure. But I have not been during Halloween either.

Emily Munson 20:00

So well, it was quite the, it was okay going there in the days and leading up to Halloween. But what we didn't realize was the, I don't know if it's the city or the state or what actually shuts down like automobile traffic into Salem on Halloween night. And so I remember, I was supposed to be going to a gala that night. And my aunt was driving a minivan. And this, you know, big Irish cop with a red face. You know, yelled at my aunt. No, you can't get through this way.

And so we went around the bark, and I was like, oh, Aunt Becky, what do we do? And she said, we try again. So we drove back to the man and the police officer. And my aunt said to him, Sir, please come here. And so he walked back over very angry at her. And she said, Sir, just give me a minute. In the back of this car. We have a girl and it is her make a wish to go to Salem for Halloween. And we are trying to get there. And he said, Oh, well, why didn't you say so? And gave us a motorcycle. police escort up to the gallows.

Erica Belois-Pacer 21:34

Oh, how funny. Did you grow up in the northeast?

Emily Munson 21:42

I was born in Connecticut. Moved to Indiana when I was about to. But my my mom is from upstate New York. My dad is from Long Island. So every summer, my mom would take me. And then when my sister was born, me and my sister to New York, on my grandparents farm for at least a month every year.

Erica Belois-Pacer 22:12

Wow. That's awesome. I'm actually I live in upstate New York. I'm curious where the farm are you like near Albany at all? Um, so I grew up in Clinton, which is closer to Albany right now. I live near Rochester. So more Western, but I'm, I'm Yes. I'm very familiar with the state because I get you so you have a very good Center for Independent Living in Rochester.

Emily Munson 22:42

Another fun fact. My sister and I won a video contest that that Center for Independent Living sponsored. But anyway, the farm is in guilderland. Yo, fine over that is. Right. Good. Small.

Erica Belois-Pacer 23:03

Yes, yes, definitely in the capital region, so near Albany. And because it's our capital, we would have to go there for lots of state trading. Yep, we up there quite often. But yes, you are correct. The Rochester independent living center here does a really nice job. And I used to be a special education teacher. And when I started working with schools to train the school staff on options for students after high school with disabilities. That was one of the key places that I you know, reached out to and found out a lot about the different things that they offer and just ways that they can help, which I was pretty impressed for sure.

Emily Munson 23:47

Very cool.

Erica Belois-Pacer 23:49

Yeah.

Well, thanks for joining us today, Emily, and I'm looking forward to working with you over the next few years is part of the national FCC board. And I would agree, I think there probably is, you mentioned a steep learning curve. I'm I don't know how steep for you probably not super steep. But I think because each state is so very different on the national perspective, and I know I found this when I started working for national absi it's very each state is very different. So looking at it broadly, does take a little bit of time to understand and just get used to.

Emily Munson 24:29

Well, it was It was my pleasure and I am definitely looking forward to contributing and, you know, serving our membership where I can.

Erica Belois-Pacer 24:40

Thank you have a great day.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>