

APSE Conversations with the National Board: Matthew Shapiro

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<https://apse.org/apse-conversations-matthew-shapiro/>

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 0:37

Good afternoon, everyone. This is Erica Belois Pacer, the professional development director with national APSE. And we are having a series over the next few weeks to welcome our new national board members to the team. So today, I have Matthew Shapiro with me, and he's going to talk to us a little bit about his background, and you know why he wanted to be part of the APSE national board and all that fun stuff. So, Matt, I never know should I call you Matthew or Matt?

Matthew Shapiro 1:09

I answer to both? So it's, it's quite alright.

Erica Belois-Pacer 1:12

Okay, so no preference, but do you mind introducing yourself and kind of letting folks know what, what you've done in the past while you're currently doing anything else you'd like to share?

Yeah, sure. So uh, Hi, everybody. My name is Matthew Shapiro. Actually, it's it's always funny, the Shapiro Shapiro argument. We always say in my family, it was the power of a Jewish mother. And she said, she wanted my family to be known as Shapiro. So it's actually a hard I. But very, very, very excited to be with all of you today and be part of the now part of the National APSE Board I am currently currently I run my own disability consulting business called six wheels consulting, where we help businesses, schools, nonprofits, really any kind of entity, think about how to be more inclusive and aware of how to support people with disabilities, beyond just being ADA compliant, because something can be ADA compliant, but still not be fully inclusive and usable for people with disabilities. I got my start with APSE through the Virginia APSE chapter, probably five years ago, now, I am the registered lobbyist for the Virginia APSE chapter. And, you know, obviously, we lobby on behalf of Employment First issues in the state of, or in the Commonwealth, I should say, the Commonwealth of Virginia. So that's where I dipped my toe into the APSE world. And ever since then, I have been getting more and more

involved with the National work, the National does, and, you know, would sit on many policy committee calls and or serve on tons of different webinars talking about state level policy and how to how to do advocacy in a correct way. And then that led me to wanting to seek a seat on the national advocacy board. So very excited to, you know, have have now gone through orientation and gone through an amazing, amazing conference that I certainly commend to the whole National APSE team for putting on and it was a seamless, seamless experience, and just ready to really dive into, you know, helping on a national scale. With national APSE.

Awesome. It. I know, I've actually participated, I think in some of the webinars and some of the policy meetings that you've participated in. So I think we're all excited to have you play kind of a bigger part on the national APSE board. So what made you you know, kind of decide to run for the board?

Matthew Shapiro 4:07

Yes, that's a that's a really good question, Erica. So So, as I kind of stated, I've got, I've got my experience with the state level APSE board in Virginia, and I wanted to try and better position myself on the on the national level, you know, I think it's always, for me been a matter of like, how can I grow and continue to understand the Employment First push better. And so, you know, I thought it was kind of the next logical step to try and join the national board to really get kind of an inside perspective on everything skimming, everything that national does, and you know, hopefully Being able to provide a unique perspective of my state level experience and sort of being, you know, traditionally on absi, they are employment service providers and, and, and people who are in the field, whereas, I've always sort of looked at myself as somebody who I would be somebody that would be served by, you know, the work that MC does, and so hoping to be able to provide that perspective, as well as my state level perspective, to help, you know, kind of, kind of move national APSE initiatives forward and hopefully, you know, get some good positive outcomes.

How long have you been working with the Virginia chapter?

I think it's been five years.

Erica Belois-Pacer 5:51

Okay, that's what I was trying to...

I, they're all run together at this point, to be honest with you, because we're always, you know, knee deep in our in our lobbying efforts. And I think it's been five years.

Wow, that's great. Yeah. And I know, the Virginia chapter is definitely lucky to have you. And I feel like each state kind of does a different thing in terms of policy work and lobbying. I don't think I think Virginia and a couple others are chapters that do have paid lobbyists like yourself, right?

Yes, I am. forever grateful to my my amazing chapter leaders in the Virginia chapter. You know, they have definitely seen the value in the lobbying work that we do. And, and, you know, really, that's one of our bigger initiatives that we do as a chapter for them to give me the, the confidence and the ability to do to do great work on the state level. I'm forever grateful for that.

Very nice. Um, so you definitely touched on this before too, as well, just in terms of your work towards Employment First, are there any highlights you might want to touch on in terms of things that you've been doing or have done in the past? Yeah,

so So I mean, obviously, with my with my new role with the board, I'm really excited to kind of understand things on a deeper level. And again, that was really a huge motivator for me as to why I wanted to join the board was for really growth purposes. And like, how could I become a stronger advocate not only on the national level, but then being able to take stuff back to the state level and really try to implement, you know, strong positive Employment First change in the Commonwealth. As far as what we've been able to do. on the state level, for the last two years, we've actually been able to get some of our initiatives done. And through the general Virginia General Assembly, two years ago, there was language in the code of Virginia, that referred to people with disabilities as physically deficient. And so we lobbied to get that it was very, very, very bizarre. And so we lobbied to get that language removed from the code. And we were successful in in that effort. Obviously, we never want to refer to people with disabilities is physically deficient, I am very physically capable, I just happen to have to do things physically different than the way an able bodied person does. And then last year, we took a very big swing. To try and implement a similar program to schedule a on the federal level. I don't know how many of the listeners are sort of familiar with Schedule A. But basically, the way scheduling works is it's a federal government program. Where people with disabilities can get there. Excuse me, I keep you on this. Excuse me, I keep yawning this morning, but it's a it's a federal program where people with disabilities can get their foot in the door with a federal government employment job. And if they can fulfill the job requirements in the job duties after a certain probationary period, that job then becomes a permanent position for that individual with a disability. So they get the federal government, you know, benefits and all of that stuff. And so basically, we've taken that and mirrored that on the state level in Virginia because our employment rate in Virginia for state employees with disabilities, our employment rate for individuals with disabilities as who are our state employees, is astronomically low and since 2017, Virginia has been under a mandate to try and increase the employment of individuals or state employees with disabilities to 5%. And we got data last summer, from our Department of Human Resource Management saying that we were actually under 1%, in terms of reaching that goal. So we were at like point six 8%, or something like that. And, and so we were not doing a very good job. And so, absolutely, we decided to try and implement this schedule a type program on the state level, so that, again, we can, you know, individuals with disabilities can, you know, we're not creating new jobs, we're not, we're not doing like job carve outs are anything, we're we are giving them an easier application process, so that they can fill current government, state agency roles that they're qualified for. And they go in in a probationary timeframe, for no more than no less than six months to no more than a year, prove that they

can fulfill the job requirements in the job duties, you know, get get good. Have good job reviews, and different things like that. And then if they can prove that they can fulfill all the job requirements and get good performance reviews, that job can then roll over into full time employment within that state agency. And so the hope is that, you know, if we, if we have this kind of a program established, we can have another avenue for individuals with disabilities to get employed in, in any and all state agencies in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Matthew Shapiro 11:44

Wow, that is a low number. I wonder if did COVID did COVID have an impact where it may have gone down? Or do you think it just generally is that low?

Erica Belois-Pacer 11:53

Well, so that was before, like, we got that data last summer before COVID really was really, you know, an issue? I don't know. I'm sure its impact, you know, COVID is impacted it in in many ways, you know, we still have a lot of people who are, you know, we're bouncing back, but we still have a lot of people who are, you know, still trying to get back into their employment roles and different things like that. I don't know if anyone's like, tracked that data, you know, during COVID, or now post COVID, although we're not out of the woods completely yet. But I wouldn't, I would not be surprised if that wasn't impacted in some way, shape, or form?

I'm sure. Absolutely. So, Matt, in terms of being part of the national board, are there any specific or just kind of broad goals that you have for the upcoming year that you'd like to work on?

Unknown Speaker 12:43

Yeah. So I mean, again, obviously, I want to try and kind of, again, be that unique perspective of being being on the state level. And I mean, obviously, we have to think about how does all this affect APSE nationally, right. And so being able to, to navigate how, how that will all work. And, and sort of, you know, be again, be able to provide my perspective of being not somebody that sort of in the field, but somebody that could be affected by the services that are provided through Employment First initiatives. And so being able to bring that perspective, I'm also very, very excited to be serving as the new Incoming Chair for the public policy committee. And I hear that that is quite the beast of a committee. So I'm ready to dive into dive into that work and, and understand what's going. What's going on on the federal level, in terms of policy and policy change. And I think that again, will only help as we try to trickle things down to the state level. And then also, I'm very excited to be serving on a new committee that we have, which is the diversity diversity equity inclusion committee, it's also D, I always get it wrong. It's the equity in the e di committee or something. It's not that you would think it would be diversity, equity inclusion, but we call it something different. And that's why I always bind to it. But I'm very excited to be serving on that on that committee as well. To be able to, you know, think about through the lens of diversity, equity inclusion, how we're doing everything that we're doing as a board. And so yeah, just very excited to get to work and and, you know, offer, offer my perspectives and for those that know me, they know I often have lots of opinions and have lots to say so I'm just very excited to be able to offer my expertise.

Erica Belois-Pacer 14:50

Absolutely. And I think we're all excited to um, so before we hop off, Matthew, are there any fun facts or anything you'd like to share with our listeners that they may not know about you.

Oh, I have so many. So I have traveled to one foot in fact is I've traveled to 13 different countries. Some, some I've driven, many I have flown. And some I have been part of cruises, we have found that cruise ships are some of the most accessible forms of transportation. And that has allowed me to see many, many, many cool places in the world. So love that love traveling love seeing new places. I am an avid sports fan. Before I got into doing my my work now that I'm doing, I thought I was going to be a sports writer, and so originally went to school for journalism and was going to was going to get into the crazy world of sports journalism, but then found out that my voice and my my ability to help make change was definitely where I thought my best Lane was, and so shifted my approach to really doing advocacy work. I'm a man of many, many talents. But I'm also ready and very excited to get to work and just very thrilled and honored to be part of the national board.

Well, we're excited to Thanks a lot. At some point, you'll have to tell us about the 13 different countries that you've been to.

Unknown Speaker 16:31

The test is always remembering which ones they were because there's been so many I can never remember them.

Erica Belois-Pacer 16:37

That's a good problem to have. Well, thanks again, Matt, for joining us today. And I think we have lots of exciting things to work on this year. are excited to have you on board and thanks for listening today.

Matthew Shapiro 16:54

Yeah, and Erica, thank you for having me. I'm very excited to be here.

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