

# APSE Conversations: Kevin Dierks with Therap

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<https://apse.org/apse-conversations-kevin-dierks-with-therap/>

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, and welcome to another podcast episode from National APSE. We've been focusing on our upcoming conference that will be starting June 14. And we've been talking with a variety of folks that are presenting and sponsoring. So today we are very lucky to have Jim Warne with us and He is one of our keynote speakers. So Jim, welcome to the podcast. I'm excited that you were able to join us. And I'm actually going to have Jim kind of introduce himself a bit because he'll do a much better job than I will. So Jim, do you mind introducing yourself?

Jim Warne 1:13

Oh, not at all. And thank you so much for having me this morning from San Diego. I know it's in the afternoon for you on the east coast. But as we were discussing, it's kind of a transitional time for all of us in America with the new CDC guidelines, some of the positive reports we're getting from COVID-19 and being able to start travel and get some normalcy back. But again, we need to be very careful because many of the disability community are those quote unquote at risk communities that's including my family members and myself. So still be careful and courteous, but we're we're moving in the right direction. And for absi illuminates. I really like your vision, your focus for this year, because as we transition into the new normal, what will be illuminating for us in the world of disability and employment and my name is Jim Warren. My Lakota name is to shunga account with Chuck de and that's Oglala Lakota language. And in America, most people know my tribe as the Sioux Nation. I prefer what we call ourselves for 1000s of years, which is the Oglala Lakota nation. And so it's a great pleasure to be here. I represent and wear many hats. And I think we'll probably discuss some of those hats that were during our discussion today. So thank you for having me. And I really look forward to the APSE, the annual conference.

Erica Belois-Pacer 2:48

Thanks, Jim. Absolutely, yeah, I you have been very busy. With a number of projects that I would love to touch on some of the stuff that you're involved with, in the past, and even right now, I think you have a lot going on with documentaries, as well. Thanks for clarifying, just, you know, terms that people tend to use. And we reached out to Jim, because he had actually done

a presentation at one of our conferences a couple years ago. And it was really well received. And like you said, we're trying to, you know, highlight different populations and different folks that might be under represented within our country. And you, he were a great reference, and lots of people asked if we could reach out to you. So I know you are doing many projects. Is there anything you would like to touch on in the past that kind of brought you into, you know, doing trainings for folks with disabilities, as it, you know, relates to either Native Americans or indigenous people in kind of how you got involved?

Jim Warne 3:59

Yeah, I took an interesting path. I'll do a kind of a quick overview of my various forks in the road on my way to disability advocacy and mentorship. But my career started actually as a professional athlete. So I was drafted by the Cincinnati Bengals out of Arizona state where I received my undergrad. And the NFL usually stands for not for long, in this case, not for this Lakota, if you will, I bounced around for teams and two years. So it was a wonderful experience. Yet the short professional experience I did get to play in NFL Europe and arena football was my summer job during my graduate studies at San Diego State University. So professional football did provide me you know, the ability to get to college degrees. And so I'm very thankful to be able to pursue my dream and professional athletics. I didn't get to the level that I wanted, but it allowed me to ensure I had other aspects covered through Education. So thank you mom and dad for really saying, you know, focusing on get that education as I pursue my dream and professional athletics, which obviously paid off in the long term. And then Personally, my dad had ms for 37 years. And so he worked the majority of those years. And as the MS is a progressive disability, so I saw him have more and more physical limitations as a result of Ms. Yet, I also saw, you know, a very strong person. With that perseverance and resiliency to go to work every day, you'd have to get up extra early in order to get ready, just getting from the bed to the bathroom and the process and the assistive technologies that we applied in our home before ADA and assistive technology was actually even a term. So I grew up as an advocate for disability without actually knowing what advocacy was either. So that was a unique experience for me and a valuable experience because I saw what true strength was with my dad, you know, living with MS and overcoming the disabilities that come with a progressive disease. So that gave me a wonderful kind of passion for work. So that's why I kind of after professional athletics, I'm getting my master's at San Diego State. I stayed there and worked for 22 years, creating the Center for American Indian rehabilitation and education, why I focused on tribal vocational rehabilitation programs. So that was a wonderful experience providing tribal members that are out there serving our communities on reservations throughout the country. And many of them got their certificates with the pet air program, the post employment training American Indian rehabilitation, and with that certificate, they were able to transfer into master's programs and complete their master's degrees. So that was very fulfilling for me as an educator to see native people get their master's degrees in their chosen field, which happened to impact people with disabilities. So that was a wonderful experience. I tried to retire in 2015, to get into filmmaking. And that was wonderful, because, you know, I have three films out now. And I've been very fortunate and having get burning Awards and nominations, my latest film is up for three sports Emmys next week. So next Tuesday is a big day for me as a filmmaker. And I'm hoping the project wins one or all three Emmys, not only for personal gratification, but

more exposure of the story of Indian country. So as an Indian advocate, you know, I'm always advocating for native issues along with disability issues. And I see a real parallel between the native culture and the disability culture, as to cultures that are still kind of left out of society, as well as governmental regulatory attention. So it's really to Yeah, both those cultures really need to be paid more attention to. And as a result of my filmmaking as an educator, storyteller advocate, I'm able to reach a larger platform than a university class, I can reach the world through film. So this is a great opportunity, as cliché but being nominated, I feel is already a win, because it's already getting attention and more views from people in the industry. And as a result, last Friday, or Saturday, I was talking with the president of the academy and was being invited to be a judge. So now there's another native voice in judging some of these projects. So that's another personal, wonderful experience that I can do my part, you know, addressing Indian filmmakers and telling our stories, more truthfully than what we've had in the past. So I'm now working at the University of South Dakota creating a circle I was pulled back into academia. As a result of showing my film at a symposium at University of South Dakota center for disabilities. I was contracted to write some grants got a variety of grants funded. I'm fortunately good at grant writing, although I'd rather be writing scripts, I think the storytelling helps me separate my technical writing a little bit and I've had some success there, creating a lot of these Indian programs through grant funds. So it's nice to be able to envision something and create it through your writing and develop it and hire native people to run these programs and see them make it difference for tribal members with disabilities. So the way that they circle is going strong right now in South Dakota. And we're getting a lot of national attention with various organizations that want to improve their services for people with disabilities in Indian country. So sorry, that was a little wordy, but it's been a wonderful experience lately.

Erica Belois-Pacer 10:23

No, I think that's wonderful. Um, I know, when we first spoke, gosh, couple months ago, we talked a little bit about, you know, trainings that you've done kind of like disability with Native Americans, one on one, and one of the things you brought up was that there really isn't a term in your language. That means disability. So, yeah, I found that kind of interesting.

Jim Warne 10:49

Yeah, it's kind of a circumstantial reference, you know, you know, it just happens to be a circumstance not a addressing an ability or a disability. It's just, you know, no one who has Woohoo, can't see, you know, so what is your role in the to sway the community, so everyone's still had a role? Even though there was that quote, unquote, disability.

Erica Belois-Pacer 11:13

Another thing I know, we've talked about, gosh, over the past few months was, um, well, COVID know, Oh, my goodness. Yeah, I know that. Yeah. A lot of it. I thank you for mentioning that, you know, at the beginning, because I think you're right, I think we are seeing, you know, some improvement, but it really does look different within different states and just situations. And I know, you know, quite a few of our breakout sessions are focusing on, you know, the impact of COVID on employment services or employment opportunities. So I was just wondering if Do you

mind speaking a little bit to how COVID has impacted you and you know, a variety of people that you work with?

Jim Warne 11:56

Well, initially, it was very impactful for Indian country as an example, Navajo Nation was the epicenter of the world of COVID, representation and death rate. And that's something that unfortunately, we in Indian country are used to in terms of public health and impacts to our communities and COVID showed showed a bright light on all underserved populations. But in many cases, Indian country is unserved, we don't even meet the criteria of underserved. So that was another very telling reality of COVID. Because many of our communities were hit so hard with five times the death rate than other citizens within that state. So that was something that was very impactful many of our tribal nations and acted their sovereign rights to have COVID checkpoints at the borders so that we could have contact tracing, and protect our elders and community members with disabilities and that risk population. So we were able to at least have some measure of protection for our community. Quite honestly, when I went back to South Dakota to visit for the fox filled chutes, I felt safer on Pine Ridge Reservation than I did in Rapid City, because Pine Ridge enacted a lot of the public health protective measures, and South Dakota as a state did not. So that was a unique experience for me coming from California, having a lot of massless people back in November at the height of the pandemic. So that was something where I saw regionally just the differences that we had with COVID. And so many of our disability programs will have varying levels of the long term now COVID effects they're calling it and the new disabilities that are coming. So I'm glad that many people are addressing it, we add a circle at University of South Dakota are definitely preparing for the new disabilities as a result of the pandemic. But I'm so proud of our tribal nations for implementing our sovereignty. Some of the state governors helped them supported tribes, others did not. But our tribes held strong and protected our communities as best we could with everyone always says we get free health care, but it's funded at 60%. When you have an Indian Health Service funded at 60%, what is the outcome? And that's why we have these disability rates and mortality rates and suicide rates that are just terrible in our communities. Which makes sense. Oh, goodness. Yeah. Um, yeah, I think I've pretty sure you mentioned that. vaccination rates are fairly high, right. Um, within Indian communities. Yeah, fortunately, Well, with that unfortunate reality of being the highest rate of death. There was a new approach to Public Health, particularly with the new administration, making sure that tribal communities were getting more federal attention. So with the new administration, the Navajo Nation was declared a federal emergency area where they got those additional resources to help the already strapped Indian Health Service system that's only funded, as I said, at 60%. So allowing the tribal nations to have those resources so that they themselves could incorporate a system that worked. Now, many of our tribal communities, including Navajo, are shining examples of how to get your community vaccinated doing that public health approach. And yeah, you know, knowing Well, the elders are not saying, hey, just hop on the bus when no bus exists. You know, the whole thing is, you know, our tribes know where our elders our and our people are, just get us those resources, those vaccines, and we will get it to them. And it worked wonderfully. So I'm so glad with the new administration, there was a little more attention to Indian country in regards to public health and vaccine distribution, as well as a lot of public service regarding hesitancy because,

historically, unfortunately, Indian country were targets of purposeful pandemics as well as experimentation by governmental health agencies. All these are proven facts. So obviously, there was some distrust, and we had to work through that. But fortunately, now in 2021, there's more native people within the health systems within government so that there is at least coverage for us as Mike. Yes, we have people at the table, because the old saying is, if you're not at the table, you're on the table.

Erica Belois-Pacer 16:50

Oh, dear. I haven't heard that? I would tend to agree.

Jim Warne 16:55

Yes, firstly, now, we have more of us in the systems protect from some of those that may wanted to do the, you know, the inappropriate or unethical experimentation approach? We are actually now, you know, included, and now we're protecting our people.

Erica Belois-Pacer 17:13

Absolutely. And I yeah, I, I think there have been a lot of great examples of reaching out to the community. So I was hoping you would bring that. Oh, yeah. Like you said, bringing things to people that might not be able to get there because there isn't public transportation. I agree. A great example of what other communities could be doing in a variety of places. So yeah, definitely. Good to see that. So I know we're getting long on our time. But I did just want to bring up on. Jim, I know during gosh was in February? I think you were featured on the NFL Network talking about Martin Luther King, am I remembering that correct?

Jim Warne 17:56

Yeah, January, actually, on martin luther king day, it was such an honor to because, you know, he's one of my heroes, and I Have a Dream speech is one of my favorite speeches. And to have my image as part of that speech on that show was quite personally, a great honor. And you know, I still get chills thinking about it. so wonderful.

Thank you. So not only on Thanksgiving Day, last year, which is what up for three Emmys. It re aired on Martin Luther King Day this year. So, you know, got more exposure on another national holiday, so that people could just see Indian country from our perspective, which is refreshing.

Erica Belois-Pacer 18:38

I thought it was very impactful. And I'm sure you'll talk about it, you know, during the conference, we're lucky Jim is going to not only be doing a keynote session, but he's also going to do a breakout, where he can talk with our folks at length, a little more in depth and just provide some more information. So, Jim, thanks for joining us today. I'm really excited for your session at the conference and your participation and all that fun of Is there anything else you want to share with our listeners, before we head off for today?

Jim Warne 19:10

Well, we'll get to see the piece that we did on Thanksgiving. So we'll show that as part of my keynote, so you'll get to see it and, and also, Seventh Generation, my first film is on amazon prime. So shameless plug, check it out. And it's available for free if you're a Prime member. So check it out. And you'll see some of the work that I do and the advocacy that I do for Indian country, and people with disabilities. So again, I'm looking forward to joining the APSE team again, I'm all about empowerment for Indian country. And you know, employment for people with disabilities is all about empowerment. So keep up the good work.

Erica Belois-Pacer 19:52

Well, thank you and we will see you soon.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai> Julie Christensen 0:09

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Erica Belois-Pacer 0:37

Hi, welcome to another podcast episode with national APSE. For the next few weeks, we're going to be highlighting a variety of sponsors associated with our national conference that is coming up on June 15, through 18th, we're very excited to have this virtual opportunity. And we're also very grateful to have some wonderful sponsors that will be participating not only in some breakout sessions, but also as sponsors with their own little options on the platform. So today, I have Kevin, from Therap with me. And we were just going to talk a little bit about what Therap has been doing, you know, moving forward in terms of employment first and really talking about competitive integrated employment for everyone. I know, I've worked with Kevin on a number of projects, they had a lovely national conference earlier this year. And we were just chatting about how actually having some of those virtual options for conferences makes it more accessible for people all over the country. So Kevin, would you mind introducing yourself a little bit and kind of what your role is at Therap?

Kevin Dierks, Therap Services 1:51

Hi, Erica. Absolutely. Thank you so much for the opportunity to chat with you. And to be a part of your event. And all the things that you guys do, you know, not just at this event, but all year, I truly value, the engagement and the opportunities that there is to, to work with you guys. And to follow along with what you're doing.

So yeah, I'm with Therap. We are an electronic documentation solution. We have focused on Developmental Disabilities initially, and we have expanded into other things that happen in the community where people get services.

Therap's been doing that for she's nearly 20 years now, I think around 18 years, something like that. I'm in my role. I am the Regional Director for the western region, which covers quite a bit of of area from the mountain region. And we don't forget about the states out in the Pacific. So

Hawaii as well, where I actually live. I've been with there for over a decade, I worked in the private sector, providing services for about a decade. And in between those two things I worked in government, where I oversaw quite a bit of things for the state of Hawaii, Developmental Disabilities division, including leading our Employment Initiative at one point. And with their app, all of that pulls together. For me, in that I work with government now I work with providers, and I work being out west, we work a ton in community based services and supports, and are excited to be part of the visible growth of employment services.

Erica Belois-Pacer 3:59

Thanks, Kevin. Um, I know that, you know, when we've worked together in the past, we've talked a lot about the universal employment competencies that APSE updated, gosh, I think about two years ago now, which also align with the acre competencies, which is a really nice overlap. And I know that you've taken some time to, you know, focus on those competencies, and you know, looking to enter them into your platform. Would you mind talking a little bit about that as well?

Kevin Dierks, Therap Services 4:30

Absolutely. So, our, one of our, our kind of main tagline here because we do quite a bit of things in terms of documentation and regulations and things like that, but those have kind of emerged over time. But the our main focus and our priority from the beginning was being person centered and being data driven. So that is our task. Therap person centered, data driven. And what we think is that you need data to come in from the folks at the front line about what they're doing, you need that to come in quickly and in an organized way, and not just scattershot, not a whole bunch of texts, and not just text, things like that. So, in that line, we're always looking for ways to have better measures, write better outcomes.

You know, John did a good job is not that useful. In terms of actual outcomes, it makes everybody feel good. But what we look for is ways that we can continue to maintain high levels of being person centered. So what is specifically the best way is to support john to be successful, but also that the data that we get actually tells us how john is doing how we're doing as an organization, etc. So we built a platform that is designed to do exactly that. The challenge always, in all of that, is to find defined measurable outcomes. Anybody who's been in this field for a long time knows, we've been, you know, struggling to define what a quality life looks like, for many years, and it will always be difficult it is it is fuzzy. What was somebody's dream life is somebody else's nightmare life, so that you need to be person centered, the universal employment competencies, fill in that gap and contribute to that knowledge. And that conversation is such an amazing way, they really start to point of providers towards the kinds of things they should be doing, it's not a hard rule, you know, first do x, then do y, then you'll get z. But it suggests a lot of things that you should be focusing on and the types of things you should be doing that plays into our approach very well, it gives us and our providers, you know, those measures that are so difficult to define it again, it still has to be person centered, you don't just get to cut and paste things in.

And you still have to kind of analyze your organization, analyze the individual and the outcomes and be person centered. But we have found the universal play with competencies are a nice tool to help narrow down what you're measuring to focus in on measurable objectives. So some of the things we've been doing is looking at the competencies, we have flexible data tools, flexible documentation tools, creating some templates, both on the therapists side, and then looking at what providers are doing, and how they're wording those, and really focusing not just on the science of it all, but actually the real world of the provider on the front line. So finding ways to prompt to, to capture data in a way that speaks to what the what the universal plan, what competencies have laid out, and then crunch all that data and really, truly have the potential to, to look at what we've been doing, what outcomes we're getting, and see if we can find some connections along the way that can help organizations be more efficient and and get better outcomes for for the folks they support. Which I think is what everyone?

Erica Belois-Pacer 9:01

Absolutely. Yeah, I think that's what everyone wants to know. That's I would agree. So Kevin, I know typically we would be in person at the Conference. But I've just Yeah, I know. But I think you know, the virtual option is also you know, working fine. I'm curious, what are some of your favorite things that typically take place at an in person conference? Yes. So let's see, I've been to probably more than my share of conferences, to be honest, over the last 30 years, I do love conferences. My personal pleasure.

Kevin Dierks, Therap Services 9:44

And I think anybody who goes there, but I will say in particular, I am a nerd on policies and practices and looking at what people are actually doing.

And So the conferences, particularly the APSE conference gives me a great chance to see what people are actually doing. And listen to some of the leaders that you probably don't in our field that you don't always get to sit down and, and get an hour of their time, thoroughly enjoy that. And, and I wouldn't trade that. And then of course, the networking is also, you know, to me, so valuable, a chance, and especially being over here in Hawaii. And that's been something that's probably even more, you know, scaleable.

It is not always possible to engage with folks on the East Coast or across the country. So having an opportunity to cross and I think vice versa, for folks to hear what what's happened on the other coast, in, in other in other regions, sometimes very different approaches and fundamental approaches. And we're yet to determine you know, what's right or wrong, but to kind of process through some of that and get that information, and then networking. And then of course, just all the good food and other fun things you get to do when you're hanging out with people like minded in a in a common place.

Erica Belois-Pacer 11:18

Absolutely. No, I would agree. There's lots of perks. So before we head off today, I did want to just ask you a little bit about I know that you're participating in one of our breakout sessions, and I know that you collaborated with, you know, a great group of people, like you said,

probably like minded. So I just wondered if you wanted to highlight a little bit about the session that you'll be presenting at the conference?

Kevin Dierks, Therap Services 11:45

Yeah, yeah, I think it's a very valuable one for, for providers, service providers. It was a partnership pulled together by ici to help providers kind of navigate through what can often be kind of a confusing world of electronic documentation. And I think we saw a big switch in 2020. I mean, obviously, I hope folks are realizing that the computers and the internet and things like that are, are probably here to stay at our despite some things that I personally find not that useful about the internet, there are some useful aspects to the Internet, and some of the things that are happening on there. And so this session, I think, if you're a service provider, you should come check it out. And, and learn a little bit about what's happening in the world of electronic documentation.

What it can be doing for you pull back some of the myths, it doesn't do it magically for you, you got to put the work in just like you do with anything else. And by kind of see a broad range of, of kind of high level, what are people doing with this stuff? And what should your your documentation be doing for you?

Erica Belois-Pacer 13:15

Oh, that sounds great. And I think yeah, there's a lot of very experienced folks on the panel from very different perspectives. So I'm excited to watch it, participate. Yeah, and I know, Kevin, did you present last year? I was trying to remember

Kevin Dierks, Therap Services 13:31

I believe so.

Erica Belois-Pacer 13:35

Well, one of my favorite thing is when the breakout sessions are happening is that you can chat with people in the chat box, which, you know, like you said, there's not often times that you get to sit and listen to someone from the field like an expert on specific things. This is even more exciting, because you could actually ask them questions in the chat box as the presentation is going on. So I'm sure that you'll have fun dialoguing with folks during your session.

Kevin Dierks, Therap Services 14:03

So yes, very creative format, I still think fondly of our time in. Was it? Missouri?

Erica Belois-Pacer 14:13

Yeah. St. Louis. St. Louis? Yes. I still think finally at that site, and 2020 was such a blur. I don't know what I think about the last conference, I still think of the Missouri conference. So mead? Well, my last conference before COVID was actually your conference in Denver.

Kevin Dierks, Therap Services 14:30

So vice versa, just barely, that we had no idea what was coming.

Erica Belois-Pacer 14:37

Oh, exactly. Well, Kevin, thanks again for joining me today. And I just, you know, high encourage folks to join us for the National Conference. You know, so you can hear from folks like Kevin, we're excited that it is coming up. And any last thoughts you want to share? Kevin before we head off for today. I think folks just have a great conference.

Kevin Dierks, Therap Services 15:00

Please do at some point in your year, take a pause and see just what the heck Therap is up to, with over 7000 providers and, and nearly half the states in the US using us. You're gonna see more of us and some of the things we're doing with state. Now, you're gonna see us helping states with their employment outcomes and tracking, as well. Everybody is nicely focused on this wonderful outcome of getting someone a job and putting some money in their pocket and getting them out in the world. We're happy to be part of it.

Erica Belois-Pacer 15:39

That's nice, too. Well, thanks again, Kevin. And I hope that everybody has a great rest of their day.

Kevin Dierks, Therap Services 15:44

Thanks, Erica.

Erica Belois-Pacer 15:46

Yep, thanks. Bye.

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