

# APSE Conversations: CESP With Renee Cencer, MI

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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.

Kari Tietjen 0:37

Hello, and welcome to an APSE Podcast. I am Kari Tietjen, I am the APSE certification director, I manage the CESP, which is the certified employment support professional credential. I'm joined on today's podcast by Renee Cencer who I have been able to work with for the last few years on CESP initiatives. So I'll invite you, Renee to introduce yourself say hey, and we'll jump in just to talk certification today.

Renee Cencer 1:03

Perfect. Thanks, Kari. I'm Renee Cencer. And I am a resident of Traverse City, Michigan, where I work as a CESP employment specialist and I cover a pretty big territory up here in Northern Michigan as we are remote in our in our area. But I started with CESP, just sort of out of fluke, I had won a registration to the state of Michigan APSE conference. So I went to the conference, when I went to that they were promoting CESP. And I thought, well, gosh, that's a great way to kind of add some credentials to what I've had already been doing. And it went from there.

Kari Tietjen 1:48

I didn't realize you had been connected through your APSE chapter.

Renee Cencer 1:51

Yeah, through the CESP.

Kari Tietjen 1:53

So you sat for your credential, and we're working as an employment support professional. in this field. I know you focus more on transition, right?

Renee Cencer 2:01

I do. Yep. I work with students starting preamps, all the way through can be all the way through 26. In the state of Michigan, we service students who have disabilities if they graduated with a certificate of completion and not a diploma. But I also work with students who go to college

who are in the military, all of those types of things. So yeah, I were mostly pre ETS, and then VR with placement.

Kari Tietjen 2:30

That's a great population to work with. And especially you mentioned, those pre ETS services, the pre employment transition services are such an important piece of the employment puzzle. It's important to have professionals out there working with that population. Tell me more about when you earned your credential. How did you get involved with CESP, and I know you've become a strong advocate to in Michigan.

Renee Cencer 2:55

So I looked at my state. And when I first at that time, you could look up CESP on the website to see which states people hold their CESP. And after attending that State Conference, for Michigan, I was really intrigued about having some professionalism go along with what I was already doing. So I went to the website, and I saw that there were only five csps in the state of Michigan, and I just saw, oh my gosh, that's crazy. We really need to have some validity in what we're doing, and bring that to the people who are hard working, doing this job. And so I sat for the exam came back down, it was paper pencil exam, went ahead and took my exam and waited on pins and needles, because it had been a really long time since I had taken a test like that. No, I'm older, and I hadn't sat for any type of tests that way. So it costs a little bit in anxiety. But once I was in there and taking the exam, for something that I love and passionate about, and what I do every day, it just all felt great and fell into line. So that was really nice. And then I got my results and was very excited about that. And when I got my results, I was able to go to my employer and provide that to them, which then gave me a pretty significant bump in pay, as opposed to the other people that I work with that do the same thing and did not take that initiative to get those few letters behind their name. I think the part for me that has been so helpful, is this ever changing this line of work this field that we're in and had I not done my CESP, I would have been very pigeon holed to just start a little area of what's going on. But after opening the doors and being connected to think things through apps, it it just really has given me a lot of resources that now I see such a bigger picture and so many things that are out there and get ideas from other people and share and just be able to have that support. So it is Ben Absolutely. Career changing for me to have that?

Kari Tietjen 5:05

Can you give an example of something that you've learned through it and maybe took back in working with a job seeker? Or someone who is supported on the job?

Renee Cencer 5:16

Through just by having my cesp?

Kari Tietjen 5:18

I mean, yeah. And your connections through APSE?

Renee Cencer 5:21

Yeah, sure. So here's a great, great somebody that I sit with one of her colleagues, Carrie that we sit with who is out on the west coast, we were just chatting in a forum. And actually, it was one of our when we first started our cesp support where we were made, we do our bi monthly chats. And we were talking about something that their area had partnered with some local folks, and I ended up reaching out to those local folks. And it opened a whole new door in getting into our Optimist Club here in my area, which we had never done before. In doing that, I was able to present a panel of students to the Optimist Club full majority of them owned businesses very invested in that. And it ended up in two employment situations for two students out of that, yeah, so it was just really, it's really cool. It was really cool. And that all happened just from one of the conversations that we are very early on conversation. So with that, yeah, there's over at wise, so yeah, worked out really nice.

Kari Tietjen 6:33

That's really cool. I appreciate hearing how the connections lead to employment situations, because obviously, that's what CESP and the professionals that earn the CESP are all about, it's supporting those individuals and businesses to create good job matches, and you were doing that, but CESP, it sounds like has been this extra tool.

Renee Cencer 6:56

Absolutely. And I think that we all just get so focused on what we're doing. And it's really hard and it can become mundane. And you know, you go to your certain same employers, and you have things in your back pocket that joy is going to fall back on. I just feel like it has given me the opportunity to hear and find out so many other resources out there that I'm, let's be honest, at the end of the week, we're pretty fried, right? We have a lot going on a lot of things happening in our brains and keeping our clients straighten who's doing what and what's happening, where and I just think it's so refreshing to get that support and just other ideas, what to bring to a job that can be challenging.

Kari Tietjen 7:42

Yeah, we've been hosting those CESP conversations both for potential csps once a month, and we have one coming up this week, on the 18th. So if you're interested, we're sending out emails, I'll make sure it's available on App c.org, and our social media for potential csps. Plus, once you earn your credential, we've been hosting those conversations every other week. And I think that's been one of the things I've enjoyed most is seeing the connections that are happening between sharing resources, or ideas of how to approach businesses so that they lead to employment setting. So really cool to hear about that opportunity.

Renee Cencer 8:26

I really enjoy the q&a that we do monthly as well, to help with some of that anxiety, I know that I would have loved to have that as somebody who has been out of school for a long time, and then going to take a test that I put a lot of pressure on myself, our state did not require does not require cpsp for line of work. I just really wanted to do that for myself until I wish there was that availability to just ask questions and be able to feel at ease about it. When I took my test, it would have been great.

Kari Tietjen 9:00

Yeah, I love having CESP's there that can answer the questions of what is the exam process like because like you said, so many people are nervous going in. I was nervous too, when I went and took the exam and didn't know fully if I was ready or had I reviewed the content outline enough had I google searched and read about the ADA enough and you know, all the legislation. So those are great opportunities to ask questions that there are no silly questions. When you're thinking about earning the credential, you need to decide if it's beneficial for you your work. And if it's required in your state, which right many do, what that process looks like so that you can maintain your job and get better at your job too.

Renee Cencer 9:46

I think to such a big difference and there are so many different things out there and different trainings and different coursework you can take the thing that I like the best about CSP is having to recertify so that keeps me fresh on everything that's happening and, and attending more conferences, or different webinars or things that are out there. And that continuum of learning is so beneficial to me. And important, especially working with us. Like there are a lot of buzzwords and a lot of changing, and a lot of things that are always changing and to be able to stay current with that has been absolutely a driving force for me.

Kari Tietjen 10:30

Yeah, I would say that's pretty consistent with what I've heard among CSP's is staying fresh staying current in the field of employment supports. And I think two people would say it gets you more invested into your role. I know as I came in as a job coach, job developer, wasn't really sure what the role was looked like. But my employer had set those expectations of earning the CESP credential within 18 months of hire. So it gave me a great expectation of what to work toward using content, outline the apps universal competencies of what makes a good employment support professional, and how do I keep learning in those areas? So you hit on a few really important pieces there of going to your employer and saying, number one, can I have a raise? You know, I'm now certified. And what does that mean? And how to talk to your employer about it, too, is such an important piece. Well, I'm excited for the q&a. Hopefully a few more people join us from our conversation, Renee. And I want to hear to any interesting or fun facts about you. Erica usually hosts the podcast for APSE, I'm sitting in. And she always asked that question. So if you can think of a fun fact about yourself, please do share.

Renee Cencer 11:51

Oh, my gosh, a fun fact. I don't know. That's really tricky. That's an on the spot. Let me think about that. That's really tricky. Oh, I can tell you, I'll give you a pretty funny little interesting twist to how I even started working with people with disabilities. I started after I had my children and decided that I was going to be a stay at home mom, when they were all back in school, I wanted to work on their schedule. So I went back to work as a lunch lady. And so and that being up, working in the cafeteria started actually my just really passion for getting creative. And to help students I was working in a high school and they had a high school classroom that would come students who were pretty impacted by their disabilities, they would

come and they would have them wash tables, well, it just didn't feel right to me, because I thought, gosh, there's so much more that these students can be doing, we need to just open that door and give them the opportunity. So I went to our school board and I chatted with them about starting a little program within the kitchen. And I said I will take it on, I will be responsible for the students, I'll come up with what they're going to do. And so it changed a lot. We had students running the commercial dishwashers, measuring weighing portioning things out helping with the all the prep in the morning, before we would roll out lunch, we had a student who wanted to work in a retail environment. So at the end of lunch, she would come and work on watching balancing the cash drawers and figuring that out. So that's my little fun fact kind of how it all started.

Kari Tietjen 13:27

You've always been a change maker, I've got that in you like no, there's more we can do here and an expand program. Yeah, there's a little more well, under that belief, and like no, there's there are more tasks that can be done and taught. And this is an opportunity to really use this time wisely. Some people are better prepared for what their future brings them. Very cool. Well, thanks for sharing Renee, and thank you for your time. I really, really appreciate you jumping on the podcast with me. And again, if folks want to subscribe to the podcast, that would be great. Share it with your friends. last push to is if you want to leave reviews, that's always helpful to well, Renee are you off to go job coach job develop?

Renee Cencer 14:17

It was actually just got back from that today. So that was a pretty fun day of job coaching. We have a local ballpark where we have a minor league team here and some students did summer work and they had asked for three of our six students to stay on through the rest of the season. So yeah, it was it's pretty fun. So that'd be working the rest of the ballgames.

So yeah, very cool. Alright. Have a great day. All right. Talk to you soon. Bye.

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