

APSE Conversations with the National Board: Cindy Burns

September 29, 2021

URL: <https://apse.org/apse-conversations-with-the-national-board-cindy-burns/>

Julie Christensen 0:16

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Erica Belois-Pacer 0:44

Good morning or afternoon depending on when you're listening, welcome to another episode from national APSE, introducing our newly appointed board members. So today, I'm lucky to have Cindy Burns with me. We were just talking about how she lives in Savannah, but I'm going to actually let her introduce herself and let her talk a little bit about her background. So Cindy thanks for being with us. Do you mind introducing yourself and kind of let people know what you do.

Cindy Burns 1:15

Absolutely. And thank you, Erica for having me and I'm so excited to be part of the APSE board. I got started, and the pretty much say disability movement, as a young person. My mother was a foster parent, and she ended up adopting people with significant disabilities during the time of the institutions being closed down. So, about 15 years old, I was introduced to really my first person with a disability, but kind of grew up in the, in the whole disability world, or a sibling failing number. And so fast forward 45 years, sharing my age a little bit now have the opportunity to travel and to really see the difference that the world has made because of places like APSE, and people that are really promoting the abilities of people with disabilities because I now work for Project SEARCH national and working with Project SEARCH around and start programs for individuals that possibly even could have been in institutions, way back in the 80s and 90s. When they were being closed down because you know people now, it's just come so far. And so that's really my passion now is to really be able to see a difference that one person can make by just giving opportunities and I think that's what FCAPSE stands for. Everybody has the right to work.

Unknown Speaker 2:47

Absolutely. And it's nice to have your perspective that you feel like it's come so far, sometimes I think we get stuck in, you know, doing the same thing over and over again perhaps or just feeling kind of discouraged, so it's it's nice that you have that perspective and I'm thinking with your project search experience it's nice to actually see that up close and personal. So,

Cindy Burns 3:09

yes, I spent several years. My first job outside of high school, and my first job working with individuals with disabilities within the classroom. And so that's where I started so and then I went from there. And that's when classrooms are still very much segregated we run the back of the hallways, and then switching to after being in the classroom I went to work for vocational rehabilitation services. We really started doing employment, that's when the big rehab hack happened, and so it's been kind of cool to watch from being in a segregated classroom to community based instructions. Working at VR and helping people get jobs as baggers and cable wipers and Mattila attendance and stuff, and nail to have to see the same individuals that, that I would have worked with from all of this to now be able to work making probably more money than when I worked for CRP than some of the staff that I hired, and so it's really been such a gift to work with the some of the exact same individuals through that whole process.

Erica Belois-Pacer 4:20

No, that's great. That is definitely a wonderful perspective, Cindy, were you a teacher when you worked in the schools?

Cindy Burns 4:28

Um, no I was actually a paraprofessional. At the time I was not like I said it's my first step and my mom helped me get a job there and they were like really Cindy isn't, are you sure this is what you want to do and I said well I might as well just give it a shot as a very naive 20 year old. Might as well give it a shot and so then I was able to kind of go through the roof, you know, kind of plumb through it. Over the last 40, 35, 40 years.

Erica Belois-Pacer 4:54

No I think that's great. My mom was a paraprofessional too and I used to be a special education teacher so I had a lot of paraprofessionals, teaching assistants, you know, depending on the term used and my goodness, they just made my life a lot easier, and really made an impact on the students that they worked with so that's great. Um, so I'm curious, have you been involved with APSE and state level, or in other capacities in the past. Yes,

Cindy Burns 5:26

I am still active on my local board here in Georgia. I started just by attending conferences and then as time went on I got active with the board. And then I realized that I wanted even more and CO board members suggested that our run was nominated naturally for the national board, because I really do feel like we are so much better together right and I know that's a very cliché right now, but we need to kind of stand as one voice and I think that's what APSE really does is it, it not only trains that you know the legislation movements and all in one is strong, but you know, you hear often. And two is stronger but with three you can't be broken right, and so I love that, with that too we come together as an individual but also as a national voice for people with disabilities.

Erica Belois-Pacer 6:23

I would absolutely agree with that and I feel like I'm just having people with kind of like mindsets or common goals even if it's not exactly the same as yours, makes a huge difference in terms of pulling together. So how long have you been with Georgia State chapter?

Cindy Burns 6:44

Well, over 20 years off and on different roles in My last job on the left, the left my last job after 25 years, to join Project SEARCH national. And so I was on the board are involved and GA APSE that whole time. But on the board level. Again I've, I've had different seasons where I was able to be more active depending on the position.

Erica Belois-Pacer 7:12

No, I think that's perfect and I think that means that more people are having opportunities to be on the board and just you know what fits at that time. Sounds great. I know that. Gosh, it's been a very busy time for everybody, you know, across our country. but I'm curious if there's any goals or just things that you're hoping to accomplish with national APSE over the next three years, which you know, I'm glad that people have a longer than one year to be with us because, you know, it takes a while to get things in motion and as you probably know things change all the time so just curious if there's any goals that you have.

Cindy Burns 7:54

Yes, I do. Um, probably the number one is membership and awareness. I don't think that people realize the impact that being part of something bigger than yourself. If we work in silos so often, and I want to I want to go back to something that I think is so strong about Project Search and it's the fact that you partner with other people, even if you don't like what you mentioned a while ago that you don't agree with that you have one common goal. And so what we have we come through with the lens. The schools come together and vocational rehabilitation and car keys, and people with disabilities all come together for one solid mission. And what I'd like to see with our membership is to do the same thing. Anybody interested in employment for people with disability should be part of it, and have a voice coming out in a different lens, so we can be stronger because I can learn so much from people that may not have my same background. I don't know what it's like to have a disability, I don't know what it's like to have the expectations that school puts on me, but what I do know, as that people have individual individuals with intellectual disabilities, or a person with a disability that was my history is intellectual people with disability, who have the opportunity to work with that is their desire. And so, if you have people all, if you, if we always agree on everything, are we going to grow, but I think the people that aren't are not always coming at it with the same lens have so much to offer. If we listen. And so that would be my goal is membership. And, of course, training is very important because I think that some of the old ways from when I started with Java development has changed a lot and that's my heart beat, and really get into the training going for people that may be new in the field, or maybe have been in the field for a while, or doing some outdated practices, and doing, you know, best practices with them.

Erica Belois-Pacer 9:54

Oh, that sounds great. So I know that you are the Southeast Regional delegate. Do you mind just sharing what states you'll be working with?

Cindy Burns 10:05

Well, there may be some changes, but currently. Currently, I'm working with Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Florida. So those are my current state, that we are, you know, I think that we do have to look at things, annually, and say, okay, So what, how can I best serve. And so I think that we're going to look at that and see if there's a way that we can use my gifts and talents, a little bit better for my geographical area.

Erica Belois-Pacer 10:40

Just in case folks were looking to connect with you right now, but like you said, you know, even if it does change in the next few months. I'm sure you would be able to track folks to regional delegate is.

Cindy Burns 10:53

Absolutely and I always enjoy new conversations so I would love for them to reach out to me and I cannot make that connection.

Erica Belois-Pacer 11:01

Thanks. So, before we have off today I usually ask all the folks that are new to the board and other guests if there's any fun facts you would like to share about yourself.

Cindy Burns 11:13

Well, right now without looking at my computer screen, I see three beautiful faces. And so my number one joy in life is being a young, and so I would say that the fun fact is non Greek, but I'm a yaya, to the core, and that's just the Greek word for grandma, so I love adventure. I love being a young grandparent so we can go on adventures and travel. And so I would say that that would be right now as I look in the face I can't think of really anything.

Erica Belois-Pacer 11:49

That's great. And do you have three grandchildren?

Cindy Burns 11:51

I do. I have a five year old attend, she's turning a 10 year old granddaughter that's going to be turning 10 in about a month and then a 12 year old.

Erica Belois-Pacer 12:06

And do they live close by?

Cindy Burns 12:08

Well one lives in Macon, and two of them live in Alabama, close enough for a weekend trip. That's good. Yeah, they had they share my heart for adventure so we'd like to go on beyond that.

Erica Belois-Pacer 12:21

That's great. I know many folks that call their Nanos or grandmas yaya here as well. Yeah, you are not alone. Well thanks for being with us, and if there's anything, any parting words you would like to share?

Cindy Burns 12:40

Well thank you, Erica, and again I just would encourage people to really get, don't just attend APSE events, but really get involved because you can make a difference. And again, that's not to be cliché and just think that we need to work together to really allow individuals that we're serving the opportunities that we were all given.

Erica Belois-Pacer 13:03

That's great. I just want to thank our listeners for joining us today and welcoming Cindy to the board and I know that I'm excited to work with you, moving forward.

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