

APSE Conversations: Meet Chrissy (NJ)!

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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

Welcome to another podcast episode with National APSE I'm your host for today Erica Belois-Pacer, and I'm the Professional Development Director here at National APSE. And we actually have a lovely guest today that was recommended to us from our actual board president named Margaret. They live in the same state and she had shared all the amazing things that Chrissy has been doing at the state level. So I would like to welcome the chief government affairs officer for the New Jersey Business and Industry Association, Chrissy Boutrous and well, Christy, you can talk a little bit about this after but I know you were recently recognized as one of New Jersey's powerful women, which is very exciting. And I was wondering if you could kind of give us a little background on how you came into this role and what you've done in the past?

Chrissy Buteas

Great. Well, thank you so much for having me. It's a pleasure to join the podcast here today and really want to acknowledge the work of your organization as well as Margaret who is a terrific partner with me and with NJBIA. I have the pleasure of serving as the chief government affairs officer at the organization and a little bit about us. We present the business community in New Jersey as the largest business association in the state representing sole proprietors up to the largest corporations and we are frequently advocating to you know, before our state legislature or executive branch of government on issues that pertain to the business community and have been partnering with a lot of different folks from government, the provider community, advocacy organizations, around how do we increase employment opportunities for those with disabilities. And so there's a lot of work to be done and NJBIA along with a lot of our partners are working collaboratively on different initiatives to make it easier and more accessible to have employment opportunities moving forward.

Erica Belois-Pacer

That's great Christy and I know that a lot of states have similar organizations. I know New York does but it sounds like from what you said, and I know what I've read that you work with a lot of different groups of people so thank you for everything you're doing. I'm curious, though, did you What did you do before you were in this role?

Chrissy Buteas

I had the pleasure of serving as the president and CEO of the homecare and hospice Association of New Jersey, where I was the representative essentially for New Jersey's homecare, healthcare service firms and hospital associations in the state and became very familiar and my hat's off to them for the tremendous services that they provide to those that you know, receive care in the home, which is where a lot of folks want to remain and so our providers literally took care of those with acute needs those with long term needs and also those with disabilities as well. So again, had that health care background for a number of years and part of that was a contract lobbyist in the state of New Jersey as well.

Erica Belois-Pacer

I thought so I wasn't sure how long were you a lobbyist in New Jersey?

Chrissy Buteas

Oh boy. I think it was about six years or so.

Erica Belois-Pacer

Wow, you probably learned a lot during that time. I'm guessing.

Chrissy Buteas

... I learned a lot and still am learning to this day.

Erica Belois-Pacer

I'm very sure. How did you end up being a lobbyist? Did you do something else in that field previously or...

Chrissy Buteas

When I was in college, I participated in various programs and obviously one comes to mind which, you know, I would encourage anyone who's in college to look up and it's at Rutgers University through the Center for American women in politics. It's your new leadership program, and I learned that women were very underrepresented, and various levels of government, obviously in corporate America as well. And I had a particular interest in how do you increase women's representation in elected and appointed office. So I had the pleasure of running for public office and serving for a number of years but I also became very interested in working in it as well and working on campaigns and so all of that I guess, put together I am where I am today and to again, have the pleasure of working with you know, New Jersey's legislative leaders and the governor of our state and all of you know, all of all in between as well and it's been a tremendous opportunity. I'm very very blessed.

Erica Belois-Pacer

Yeah, no, that sounds amazing. I'm just on my local school board. And I know it's tremendous. There is a good you know, it takes a lot of time and a lot I think I realizing how much goes into campaigning for elected positions and just so many topics and you know, background

information you need to know just about everything. So that's wonderful. That's great. So I'm curious if there's anything specific that you could touch on in terms of what you've been working on recently? And your job? I don't know if it related to maybe some things during COVID and also just you know, how you're helping to expand opportunities for people with disabilities in terms of finding employment.

Chrissy Buteas

Sure, I'll talk global and then get a little bit more specific to the employment opportunities for the disabled community, globally, you know, with COVID it's been a really tough time for the business community. Many of our employers were forced to shut down base, you know, her executive order, and now they're trying to reopen so Main Street, you know, was hit very, very hard. Right now. We're in the midst of addressing a severe workforce crisis. And I'm sure I don't have to tell those listening to this podcast that you know, we've been very difficult to find health care workers, particularly those that care for individuals in their homes, your your direct support professionals, nurses, and so we're working very collaboratively with various associations to address this need moving forward, hoping that some of the federal funds go into this critical area. Additionally, more focused on increasing employment opportunities and training for those with disabilities. We have supported legislation that creates career pathways for those with disabilities as well as for and also for those that are caring for those with disability. So a lot of your direct support professionals as well. So a lot of work being done there trying to push legislation that would offer tax credits to companies the higher and again, the global education we have done so we've done several webinars with partners like Margaret, the provider community, our government, and executive branch partners to educate the business community on you know, this is this is how you go about, you know, connecting with your partner agencies. You know, if you have any questions, let us know, you know, there's some common mis conceptions out there and what can we do to address those so we're trying to provide as much information as we can and globally in partnership with our community colleges or provider organizations, the state of New Jersey, just raise awareness in general.

Erica Belois-Pacer

Oh, that's great. Thanks for Yeah, I think a lot of what you just talked about is being played out across our country. So yes, lots of things to be done. And I know we're almost out of time. So I was just curious if you have any advice for listeners today and I talked to Chrissy beforehand we're hoping that we can have her join us in the spring to talk a little bit longer because I know a lot of the things she mentioned there could be a full hour webinar in their own. So Chrissy, before we head off, though, do you have any advice for our listeners just in terms of staying positive, moving forward and just you know, trying to provide more opportunities?

Chrissy Buteas

Absolutely. And I'd love to come back, I would say you know, it has been a challenging time but now is also the time to make your your voices heard. And policymakers are listening more about and seeing I think firsthand a lot of things at least the healthcare community in general has been talking about whether that is the struggles with finding a workforce, and now it has come you know, full circle and here we are in the middle of a pandemic and really feeling that

that pain and also recognizing the critical role that our healthcare providers play. So my advice I would say is keep keep up the good work, keep the message going, because people are paying a lot more attention than they were a couple of years ago, I would say.

Erica Belois-Pacer

I absolutely agree. So I think people are absolutely listening for a variety of reasons. So well thank you again for joining us. And I look forward to seeing you again and talking with you again future.

Chrissy Buteas

Thank you so much. I appreciate the opportunity.

Erica Belois-Pacer

Have a great day.

Chrissy Buteas

You too. Bye bye

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