

Employment First Podcasts

Tips from the experts. News from the field. Success stories.



[Oregon Employment First supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to work in community jobs. Learn more at iworkwesucceed.org.]

Julie Huber: Hi, and welcome to the Employment First podcast. I'm Julie Huber with the Office of Developmental Disability Services. Today I'm really lucky to have Gabrielle Guedon, Executive Director of the Oregon Self-Advocacy Coalition dropping in to chat with us about the coalition and all the great work it does. Sometimes you'll hear us refer to the coalition as OSAC. So welcome Gaby. We're so excited to have you here today and chatting with us with all the great work that you and OSAC do. Can you tell me a little bit about your role with the coalition?

Gabrielle Guedon: I run the Oregon Self-Advocacy Coalition. I do everything from helping people do presentations, doing advocacy. We also do policy work. We have four committees that self-advocates, can join, from healthcare to employment to legislative, and a really new exciting one which is housing.

Julie Huber: Wow. Can you tell me a little bit about your employment committee and the work you do there?

Gabrielle Guedon: At the employment committee we do a lot of different projects. We just, got finished up with a employment provider guide which we're really excited about. It's been a couple years. This employment provider guide will help people be able to choose, the employment provider they want and how they want their services to be ran.

Julie Huber: Wonderful. It sounds very helpful. Can you tell us a little bit about, what OSAC does, and I wanna say before you answer this, that OSAC is really unique across the country. There are a lot of self-advocacy groups and that's wonderful, but I think it's really unique that OSAC is its own non-profit and you are the executive director of that non-profit. So can

you tell us a little bit about what OSAC has delved into and, and, how you guys advocate?

Gabrielle Guedon: So OSAC, is very extensive. We do everything from policy work to doing projects and presentations throughout the nation. We do, a lot of our work is actually in-state though. We do a lot of different projects from toolkit to employment provider guide. We have our own peer-to-peer program, and we're actually soon gonna be coming out with new programs that all, I know that the community will really enjoy. Um, we are still working on it so I can't talk too much about it, but we also do a lot of talking with senators and representatives to make sure policies are being met for people with disabilities. We have a lot, a lot, also have a lot of allies in the community that we work together to reach goals.

Julie Huber: Recently you gave some very powerful testimony in front of the Oregon State Legislature. I wondered if you'd talk to us a little bit about them, why it was so important to you to, give your testimony to that committee?

Gabrielle Guedon: It was really important because I actually am someone with a disability. I had intellectual and developmental disability as well as a medical condition. I was told twice I was too disabled to work, and to be able to give this testimony to end sub minimum wage was really important, because I feel that everybody who, with or without a disability, has a right to be able to make a living wage so they can live their lives to the fullest and be independent.

Julie Huber: Can you talk to us a little bit about what you would say to someone, and maybe through a family too when they've been told that they're quote-unquote, " too disabled to work"?

Gabrielle Guedon: I never believe someone's too, too disabled to work. It's just finding out what they like to do and, what they're passionate about. Passion is behind everybody's work, and so making sure that person, no matter if it's anything from being a greater, being executive director like myself, or being able to work wherever they want with the skills they have, they can do it. We just need to find out what's their passion and, what they like to do and what positions would fit them.

Julie Huber: Can you talk a little bit about, your passionate shelter workshop to your current position and how that worked?

Gabrielle Guedon: So when I was, told I was too disabled to work I ended up in a shelter workshop. A shelter workshop is where people get, paid pennies for product. From there, I was able to go back to voc rehab for a third time and finally found a voc rehab, person that would actually listen to me, and she was able to give me a job in the community. I was lucky enough to work at Lexi Dog in Portland, Oregon in the Pearl District, and then I, Community Vision had this position they were wanting to create for employment **** specialist, and I was able to actually go and, build relationships with HR departments and community members to be able to help other people get jobs in the community, like I got the chance myself, and then I was able to, interview for this position with my background. After, also when I was working, I was also volunteering for OSAC and so I had knowledge and was able to interview and get this position.

Julie Huber: Can you, I know there's a lot of people, and, and this is everyone in the world, you, when you look for a job or, when you advance in your career, sometimes we end up doing things we never imagined, and, can you talk a little bit about stepping into role and the learning process, how that's come along, because you do so many things, including testifying in front of, the legislature, which so many people have never done, um, and really advancing policy and OSAC's message. So how has, how have you grown into that?

Gabrielle Guedon: I actually, surprisingly, I got to support from my members of OSAC. The people I actually work for are the ones that really gave me the strength and cheered me on the whole time. I also had our funder, the Oregon Council on Developmental Disability, who have been my biggest allies. They have supported me. They've gave me training and advice on different aspects of my job and supported me through the journey. I also have my allies, like Julie, and other people that have also cheered me on and as well.

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first and third Tuesday of each month. Experts from the youth transition program, pre-employment transition services and the Oregon Department of Education are featured in this podcast, along with educators and students. Tune in.]

Julie Huber: How do you think things have changed now, that we're in the real, that employment versus growing so much in the state. How do you think things have changed from the past?

Gabrielle Guedon: I think that, and the, we still have a ways to go, but I think with, the *Lane v. Brown* lawsuit we've been able to change and actually give more people chances to have the jobs that they want and to live the lives they want. I think that, Voc Rehab is starting to work better together, but as a community we can make the employment journey for people with disabilities, better.

Julie Huber: And we just talked a little bit about ****, that, you just, and my understanding is, is it's about helping people make good choices, and one of the messages I've always really enjoyed from you, and think it's spot-on, is that people need to speak up, and that sometimes it's really hard. Can you talk a little bit about how to overcome that fear so you find your voice and use your voice?

Gabrielle Guedon: I, I feel that, um, to speak up sometimes it's not even speaking. Some people actually, I started out with writing what I wanted to say and then reading it or handing it to somebody. So speaking up, it's speaking in any way that's comfortable to you and standing up for your rights. Even if you're just telling, somebody that you know that's speaking for you, that's how you can have your voice. I, um, just, 5 years ago I didn't have as big of a voice, and with the support and being able to use those techniques I was able to start, saying what I wanted and was able to get a job.

Julie Huber: Can you talk a little bit about, I was thinking about this today when I was preparing for this interview. You're a manager, you're an executive director of a, of an organization, and with that requires management skills and diplomacy, and having seen you in many venues, talking to many people from directors to, legislatures, to advocates, to policymakers, I've noticed that you're a great diplomat. Um, can you talk a

little bit about how you communicate your message and how you work that diplomacy in there?

Gabrielle Guedon: It took me a while to actually gain that skill. It was really just experimenting with how I said things and, really talking to other people that have done it, getting feedback on, what they saw. I also, um, was able, you have to take the emotion out of the communication sometimes with people because you wanna give them the information, but you don't wanna have, kinda bog down the conversation with the emotion. So being able to give them the knowledge that you have, without, you know, kinda diving into the personal, aspect of it. I do, a lot of times speak up and, tell my member's stories when they don't feel comfortable doing them. So being able to say, this is, this is what's going on, and this is how we can change the community, to better the lives of people.

Julie Huber: Can you talk about the, the value of being independent? I think so many times people, think of job coaching, and I'm an old job coach so I'll, I'll say that right now. Sometimes when we job coach we think we need to be very, very present people need to know that we're there. Employers need to know that we're there. Um, but we all have different kinds of supports, but usually they're not visible, they're in the background because that promotes independence. Can you talk a little bit about, your journey and independence and how you like to be supported?

Gabrielle Guedon: So my journey has been rocky. I've been, lucky to have a job coach through Dirks. Her name's Sarah, and she has been able to help me through the process, and she does everything from assisting me with work stress, saying this is some techniques to handle this. She helped me learn new programs, and is able to stay in the background, and it's not always like her being present while I'm doing my work. It's, teaching me behind the scenes so I can do it myself at the end of the day, and so the importance of independence and not having someone always there is giving the chance to stand up for yourself and doing it yourself, but having the training helps you be able to do it.

Julie Huber: What would you say to, um, to people in field, service coordinators or providers who are working with people, especially people who may be really reluctant to look at employment, to have had bad

experiences in the past. How do you think we can best support people to at least consider employment?

Gabrielle Guedon: I would really encourage them to talk to them about joining an advocacy group, um, even if it's not the Oregon Self-Advocacy Coalition, because when you join an advocacy group and you talk about different situations with other people you're able to problem-solve and say, I've done this, you can do it too, and I'm here to stand by your side. We also hold a peer-to-peer, mentoring program, and it's still active in Central Oregon. They've taken it on for themselves, but, um, really encouraging them to do the peer mentor aspect too, and also giving all the knowledge possible to the people so they can choose what they wanna do and seeing stories and talking to people who have been successful at jobs.

Julie Huber: That's great. I'm really glad you went there because that's really what I wanted just, to end with, and talk about how to get involved with OSAC.

Gabrielle Guedon: So you can, go on our Facebook page and contact us at any time. We have our contact information on there. You can also message us. You can call us if you need assistance. You can have someone call us and we will talk to you and talk through the process over the phone. We also have email, and we also have a web page itself, so there's many ways to get involved with us. A lot of brokerages, we've also passed out brochures, so look for some brochures in your local areas, and if you know of a place that doesn't have the brochures, let us know and we'll make sure to get them out there as soon as possible.

Julie Huber: Am I remembering correctly, Gaby, is your website www.askosac.org?

Gabrielle Guedon: Yes.

Julie Huber: Is that right? And you talked about a lot of committees that you're doing. I think –

Gabrielle Guedon: Yes.

Julie Huber: – you said you have a committee on housing, employment. What else?

Gabrielle Guedon: Housing employment, healthcare, and we also have a legislative committee, where we talk and make goals for OSAC to go to the legislators, which are senators and representatives, and be able to advocate your story, and we can support you to do that as well.

Julie Huber: And what I'm hearing you say is all you need to do is pick up the phone or send an email, get on a Facebook page, and you can get involved with OSAC?

Gabrielle Guedon: Yes.

Julie Huber: Are there any closing thoughts you'd like to leave us with, about OSAC, about employment?

Gabrielle Guedon: We're strength behind numbers. The more voices we have the stronger we get, and the more stories we can have, and at the end of the day, we wanna hear your employment stories, and we also wanna support you in your life, with your goals from housing, any aspect of your life. , get in touch with us and we'll be able to work with you to help your voice be heard.

Julie Huber: Well I wanna thank you today so much, Gaby, for joining us. I think you've given a lot of great information about the coalition, and even though you weren't able to share with us on your future projects, it sounds like they're pretty exciting, and we look for a lot of great things to come from OSAC. Again, thank you so much for your time today and being with us.

Gabrielle Guedon: Thank you.

[You or someone in your family experience an intellectual or developmental disability and want to learn more about Oregon's employment services for people with disabilities, tune in to the Oregon Employment First podcast on the first and third Tuesday of each month. Hear about employment success stories and learn from experts and people working in the field about what is happening in

Oregon to support people with developmental disabilities to work in community jobs.]

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