

## CPI *Unrestrained* Transcription

Episode 24: Jesse Hill

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Host: Terry Vittone

Terry: Hello and welcome to *Unrestrained*, the CPI podcast series. This is your host, Terry Vittone, and today my guest is Jesse Hill. He is the special needs driver supervisor for Academy School District 20 in Colorado Springs, Colorado, as well as a CPI Certified Instructor with enhanced certification.

Hello and welcome, Jesse.

Jesse: Hello.

Terry: All right. Today we're going to talk with Jesse about his school district, his role as the special needs driver supervisor, and the role that CPI's *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*® training and techniques play in helping to keep things running peacefully on the buses and in the facility where the buses are maintained and housed.

Here's a bit of background on Jesse. He moved to Colorado Springs in 2002 from his home state of Oklahoma to attend school. Also in that year, Jesse started work with the district as a driver. In the years that followed, Jesse worked as a relief driver, trainer, and router. He completed his B.A. in elementary education in 2008 and became the special needs driver supervisor in 2012.

He earned his initial CPI Instructor certification in 2013 and his enhanced certification in July of 2015 at CPI's Instructor Conference in New Orleans. Outside of work, Jesse serves in a local church as minister, elder, and teacher. He especially enjoys outdoor activities like camping, hunting, and fishing, as well as spending time with family.

So then, Jesse, let's begin.

Jesse: All right.

Terry: First I'll ask you to tell folks about the Academy School District 20, some overall remarks about the size of the district, number of routes driven in a day, and any other information you think will make ASD 20 more clear in the minds of our listeners.

Jesse: Okay. Well, District 20 has a combined 36 schools that we transport to, 21 elementary schools, 8 middle schools, and then 7 high schools. And then we also have a couple of specialty schools that we transport outside of our district. In that we have 76. At Academy School District 20 we have 76 general education buses that run routes, 47 special needs routes, that we have 44 paraprofessionals on there.

We transport approximately 10,000 students a day in a year. The total that is actually eligible riders is 10,900. We have a total of 26,000 students in our district.

Terry: So on any given day, the average number of bodies you're going to be transporting is 10,000.

Jesse: Yes.



Terry: Wow, that's large. Now you mentioned the administrative riders on the buses. I'm not sure everyone understands what those are. You mentioned them in passing.

Jesse: The paraprofessionals on the bus?

Terry: Right.

Jesse: Yeah, they serve as a bus monitor. They kind of take care of the students on the special needs end of the route. We have guidelines that we put on those. Whether they have seizures, behavior issues, it kind of dictates how we assign those.

Terry: I see. So I'm sorry to cut you off about going on about the district in general. So you transport 10,000 a day. There's how many? Twenty-some?

Jesse: Around 26,000 students in our district.

Terry: Wow.

Jesse: And on any given day, we'll drive 9400 miles between all of our buses.

Terry: That's a lot of logistics to keep in place!

Jesse: Yes, it is!

Terry: No doubt about it. So in your role as a driver supervisor, can you start with a typical day, how it might begin?

Jesse: Sure. My role, I am the driver supervisor for the special needs drivers.

Terry: How about some more information about the size of the special needs crowd there?

Jesse: Yeah. We have 386 special needs students that we transport every day on 47 different buses. Again, with the 44 paraprofessionals or bus monitors that ride on there.

Terry: I see.

Jesse: Go ahead.

Terry: So the day begins; you've got these 47 different drivers driving around all those students, and 44 paraprofessionals. So how does the day start for you? Just with a kind of a check-in on who has made it, who hasn't?

Jesse: Yeah. My typical day will start when I'll stand out in the hallway and greet everybody as they come through. We just kind of watch the time clock, making sure that everybody is here and accounted for, that we don't have somebody that doesn't show up. And punch the time card so that, you know of course, we don't have kids standing on a corner waiting for a bus that's not going to show up.

Terry: Sure.

Jesse: And so, I greet them and then after greeting them I kind of move into that supervisory role of



checking time sheets from the day before and answering any questions from parents that might call in, bus drivers that would come in and have—

Terry: So what time in the morning is this that you're checking them coming in?

Jesse: Well, I get here at 6:30 in the morning.

Terry: I see.

Jesse: Our first route runs about 5:45 a.m. They start their day. I get in at 6:30.

Terry: I see. All right. So then, after the drivers are out there and you know that the routes are all in place, you go and begin with paperwork?

Jesse: Yep. Yeah, start with the paperwork, looking at the time sheets from the day before, seeing if I need to do any tweaking to routes. If I have any complaints, I deal with those as they come in, just making sure that we're taking care of our students.

Terry: What are some of the most common or pressing issues that drivers might experience in their jobs? Or call you about?

Jesse: A lot of the drivers that will come in and talk to me, we have a lot of behavioral students within our district and a lot of those drivers will come in and talk to me about "How can I manage this unique behavior?" of maybe a student with autism, or a student that is just out of control on a daily basis, mad at the world, if you will. So we kind of work through those processes and try to help them to understand a little bit more about what's really going on in the minds of these kids sometimes.

Terry: Can you give me a recent example of what kind of issue that might be?

Jesse: Sure. Just recently I've got a young man that got on a school bus, refused to be seated. The driver and the paraprofessional came to my office. They shared with me, asked me for some help. We kind of started trouble-shooting about what we could do for that. I actually went to the school that day to check on them, to see exactly what was going on, to see firsthand.

Come to find out, his medication is wearing off. He did not want to be seated. He was climbing up and over the seats, you know, just a dangerous situation.

Terry: Sure.

Jesse: Grabbing hold of kids, just out of control.

Terry: I see.

Jesse: We looked at the situation, and we look at each situation uniquely. Our first and foremost thing here in Academy District 20 is that we want to teach these kids how to sit properly on a bus and how to ride that bus correctly. We did end up putting this young man into a safety vest in order to keep him seated, because as soon as the bus would start to take off, up he would come.

Terry: I see. So what was the follow-up? I mean, the follow-up must have been with the parents to determine that the medication was inadequate.



Jesse: Yeah. And you know, they are working with the school on that right now.

Terry: I see.

Jesse: And talking with the school, just talking with them, they're in that process of how to regulate his medicine to where it's a full day and not just part of the day.

Terry: So would you guys consider a safety vest a kind of restraint then?

Jesse: It is. It is somewhat of a restraint. It keeps them seated in their seat. They still have some maneuverability. But the big thing is they just can't stand up and wander. They can still lean forward and look out the window.

Terry: Right. So you find that tends to be a corrective for that sort of behavior then, that the child can live with for the duration that they're on the bus at least.

Jesse: Yeah, absolutely. One of the things we really try to work with is once the student kind of gets into a routine, sometimes we can even remove that safety vest, I want to say, more as a reward that they're being good. They're sitting on the bus. They're learning those rules. And they will actually—some of those kids will never return to a safety vest. It just takes that time to get them to understand.

Terry: I see. How to behave to avoid the restraint.

Jesse: Yeah! Yeah!

Terry: Right. Right. No doubt.

Jesse: Yeah, absolutely.

Terry: All right. Now could you talk about how the CPI training first came into the district?

Jesse: Okay. Well, we've had CPI here in District 20 for a number of years. Unfortunately, the first 10 years that I worked here, I was never trained in CPI.

Terry: Is that right?

Jesse: And they kind of, I guess if you will, picked and chose the individuals that they wanted to go through. We got a new director, Ms. Cindy Hardin, and she felt that it was so important to have that CPI, that understanding, to help people to identify the anxiety level of students. Not only students, but of course parents and peers, to understand what that anxiety level is and how to stop it before it goes into a physical intervention.

Terry: So then you were there from 2002 to 2012 before you had the CPI training, until Cindy Hardin said, "It is imperative that everyone receive this training."

Jesse: Exactly.

Terry: Did you find it made a difference right away as you came back in? Did you find the concepts resonating with you?



Jesse: Absolutely. When I became supervisor, she said, "Jesse, I want you trained in CPI. I want you to become an Instructor, to help us to instruct everyone in our district, and everyone in our bus transportation facility." So I said, "Sure enough." So she sent me to Denver and I had Mr. Marvin Sharp, one of your Instructors, and I just thoroughly enjoyed that class.

Terry: Excellent. I know he will be glad to hear that. He's a professional manager now, Marvin is. So I understand, in our pre-interview you mentioned that not only did you train for the paraprofessionals and the drivers, but you guys trained all the way down to the mechanics that work on the fleet.

Jesse: Yes.

Terry: Wow, that's pretty comprehensive, indeed. How often have you trained? I know you went to New Orleans this summer and got the enhanced certification.

Jesse: Uh-huh, and since I've gotten the enhanced certification I've taught four full classes.

Terry: Wow.

Jesse: Now we have four trainers here right now and every person that comes in through our door as an employee will be trained, normally within the first six months of their employment.

Terry: I see.

Jesse: If we can get them trained quickly, it helps alleviate some of that anxiety level that *they* might have when they get onto a bus and a student is starting to act out and they just don't know what to do. It kind of gives them that. So we do train, just on a constant rotation right now. We have about 230 employees in the transportation department itself.

Terry: Right.

Jesse: And from our bookkeeper all the way down to the mechanics, to all supervisors, bus drivers, paraprofessionals, everybody has been certified.

Terry: Excellent.

Jesse: In CPI.

Terry: Hopefully that means a very safe and respectful environment where you work!

Jesse: Yeah, pretty much!

Terry: Right.

Jesse: Pretty much.

Terry: That's good! Now you said you've done four classes since. How many students were in a class?

Jesse: Usually we try to keep it to a limit of around 12 students.



Terry: That's a nice number.

Jesse: Yeah. It kind of gives us that availability to get to know them a little bit.

Terry: Sure. That one-on-one is important. Do you enjoy doing the training?

Jesse: I love doing the training. Anytime I can do any kind of teaching and help people to be successful in their career, that's my goal. That's where I look and say, "Hey, I've either succeeded there or I need to work in this area."

Terry: I think it's great that you have the training on a revolving, or sort of a refresher basis, so that the messages keep getting repeated to people who have to go out and face potentially challenging behavior every day.

Jesse: Absolutely, we do that. We do refreshers annually. Everybody will go through their recertification this year.

Terry: Excellent. So that must be quite an administrative task for you too, keeping track of who needs to be trained, and when, and all those sorts of things.

Jesse: It is.

Terry: All right. And can you give a couple of examples, Jesse, of the impact of CPI training and de-escalation techniques that actually happen on the buses?

Jesse: Yeah.

Terry: For the students, or parents for that matter.

Jesse: Yeah. The biggest, the one time that I remember—and I had to actually do a CPI restraint on a student that was coming after me.

Terry: Oh!

Jesse: He came after me time and time again, and after a little while I just kind of said, "Okay, enough is enough." I put him in a hold and leaned him back and just kind of talked him down. At that point in time, you know, he was very agitated. I could tell that he was agitated when he came on the bus. His anxiety level was already ramped up and he came after me to claw, to hit, to pinch, to bite.

Terry: Right.

Jesse: And after a few times of him trying to get after me, I just kind of got him in that restraint hold and held him back, and just began to talk with him. I saw the de-escalation start to happen. He began to calm down a little bit, and I finally asked him if he was ready to go to his seat and sit down, and we would get him home safely.

His response was "Yeah, sure." And of course, as soon as I sat him down and got my hands off of him, he came right back at me again. So I again put him in the restraint hold and held him for a few moments, and we got some other people over to talk with him, some from the school. They came in and talked with him. And a few moments later he finally just de-escalated enough to where we got him sat down and we



got him buckled into the seat. He was perfectly fine the rest of the ride home. But it was that aspect of just talking with him, and letting him know, letting him talk to us as well.

Terry: Right. So did he act out again?

Jesse: You know, he has on occasion. And I don't know of any other time that anybody has had to put him in a restraint. Now I know the school itself does, because he will try to—

Terry: Does?

Jesse: They'll put him in a restraint—

Terry: I see.

Jesse: —when they're bringing him out to the bus. I've actually had a talk with the school and said, "You know, if he's in that type of shape at that point, maybe he shouldn't be on a bus." This bus actually drives about 30 minutes from home, down the Interstate at 65 miles an hour.

Terry: Right.

Jesse: So we don't need a student who is going to attack the driver.

Terry: Do you make alternative travel plans for students that are especially problematic?

Jesse: You know, we do to an extent. We pay for fuel cards if need be, for a parent to self-transport. If they need that, we'll do that.

Terry: Hopefully the CPI training and the ability to de-escalate will cut that need for people to transport outside of the district to a minimum. I mean, that seems to be the most cost-effective way to do it.

Jesse: And it is. You know, that's one thing that Ms. Hardin really looks at—is she looks at, if we can teach our drivers and our paraprofessionals, our mechanics, anybody that deals with people, if we can teach them to recognize the anxiety level beginning to rise, and how to verbally de-escalate the situation, we're ahead of the game.

Terry: So if they can internalize the crisis management model and be able to recognize the stages, that's kind of the win, right there.

Jesse: Yeah, definitely.

Terry: So that's an example of a de-escalation technique with a student. Now you mentioned in our pre-interview also that you sometimes had to de-escalate parents, and that sometimes that can happen occasionally—you know, not just as a sort of a "Wow, you'll never believe what just happened to me!" kind of thing. So what sort of issues do parents present when they show up?

Jesse: Well, a lot of times a parent that will approach, either come to the transportation department or they may call on the phone. We receive just hundreds of phone calls of parents who are a little bit irate, you know, and they can be out of control—from using foul language to yelling and screaming and calling us all kinds of names.



When that happens, of course our technique is "Okay. Let's use the CPI model here. Let's try to get them to calm down first and foremost." And probably 95% of the time, just by our mannerisms here on the other side, from what we've learned in CPI, just being calm and being reasonable with the individual, it *will* de-escalate them. Then we can have a civilized conversation. Unfortunately, there's those times that you have to say, "When you calm down, I'll be more than happy to talk with you. But until then, I think our conversation is over."

Now we do have, on occasion, we will have a parent come in to talk with us face-to-face. And whether it's a bus driver has done something, cut somebody off, those type of things are normally what we deal with.

Terry: I see. But you find that just remembering that Integrated Experience, and remaining calm yourself, and being directive and supportive, is going to be the best way to turn a cursing parent into a more productive sort of a conversation.

Jesse: Absolutely! We do that all the time, that Integrated Experience, and just really understanding that. That is something that I bring up to my drivers on a continual basis. "Guys, how you respond makes a difference in how they respond. And how they respond makes a difference in how you respond. It goes hand in hand." And if they can grab hold of that, their response is a little bit less judgmental, if you will.

Terry: Right. Easier to stay calm when you have a game plan.

Jesse: Right.

Terry: So how do you regard the effectiveness of CPI training and techniques in de-escalating the challenging behavior? Do you sense a quantitative, qualitative difference in the outcomes since you trained, say back in 2012? Are you noticing less incidents?

Jesse: You know, we do. We don't see a high level of incidents that happen on our buses. With the world that we live in right now, one of our biggest fears is a bus driver who says, "I can't touch a student." They're just scared to death because they're afraid of lawsuits and things like that. We try to explain to them, if they are a danger to you or to themselves, that we have to do something and we want to err on the side of caution and go ahead and do that.

The nice part of that is that on our vehicles we have video cameras on every vehicle in our lot. I have to remind them on quite a few occasions that "Guys, there's a video camera there, and if you're being safe and you're doing what you're supposed to be, what you've been trained, in the manner that you've been trained, you will be fine."

Terry: I can still understand why, in this lawsuit sort of—we read about a lot of them in the news, so we're aware of them, why a driver would be reluctant to put their hands on [a student]. But it sounds like with the training and with the video camera, there is complete disclosure of what they've done, that they could lean back on these trainings and techniques and not be so afraid to put their hands on a student.

What age range—

Jesse: We have a lot of young riders, but we do have that mixture of high school and middle school as well. Most generally, our behavioral [issues] come back into that elementary, that kindergarten through fifth grade level. Not so much in the high schools or the middle schools. Just on occasion in the middle schools.

Terry: I see. So a bus then, a special ed bus, might have a mixture of students from first grade all the way



through to a senior in high school.

Jesse: Yeah, ah, at one time, no, because [when] we transport our high school and our middle schools, everybody is separated.

Terry: I see. Okay. So do you sense then, do you sense a difference then, in the outcomes? I mean, you say there's fewer of them, but I guess I've asked you that. It's kind of difficult to answer that, besides saying that there is not a lot of them. But you sense more confidence maybe in your drivers and paraprofessionals?

Jesse: I do. I do. When they go through the training, you know, a lot of times they're reluctant at first to go through the training. Especially the drivers and the paraprofessionals that have been here for a number of years.

Terry: Oh, I bet.

Jesse: You know, and they're kind of like, "Why do we have to do this? More training?" When they finish the class, usually we get the response of "Wow! I never realized this. That I could do this! That I could help this student to succeed a little bit better." Especially on special needs buses.

Terry: Wow.

Jesse: So they grab that training and apply it into their everyday life.

Terry: And with an understanding that it will actually improve the success of the students that they're driving. That's a beautiful realization.

Jesse: Absolutely.

Terry: No doubt. Now you mentioned, in your experience working as a driver supervisor, you know of only a single instance where restraint was required during an incident. Is that with the one you mentioned earlier?

Jesse: That was, yeah. And that was actually, I just happened to be the driver that day. We were short drivers, and I was driving, and I was put on that route, so yeah.

Terry: So you needed to use a control position a couple of times, but ultimately it did help with the driving from then on.

Jesse: It did. And you know, I drove that young man back home and we talked the rest of the way home. I just kind of redirected him down a different avenue and he was perfectly fine all the way home.

Terry: That's great. Well, we thank you for using CPI techniques and for being such an effective trainer. Let me ask you in closing today about what inspires or satisfies you most about the job you do.

Jesse: You know, just knowing that we're transporting these kids back and forth, from home to school, school to home, that we're transporting them successfully, and that we're taking care of the kids. Because that is our first priority. We have a saying here in District 20, in transportation our motto is "Every student, every day." That it's about every student every day.



Terry: Nice.

Jesse: No matter if they have a disability, or if they're just a general ed student, we still want to look at them as they are part of this crowd that we want to get to and from school safely.

Terry: Mm-hmm, and that's a team value that it seems like a lot of people have adhered to.

Jesse: Absolutely!

Terry: Excellent. Well, are there any final thoughts you would like to add, Jesse?

Jesse: You know, the best thing I can say is how CPI has just encouraged me and helped me to be able to share with my drivers and paraprofessionals the importance of that management of these students for their success. So I just say thank you to CPI for all that they do.

Terry: Well said! This is Terry Vittone on *Unrestrained*, the CPI podcast series. My guest today has been Jesse Hill. He's the special needs driver supervisor for Academy School District 20 in Colorado Springs. Thank you, Jesse.

Jesse: Thank you, Terry.

