

People First Chapter Handbook & Toolkit



Mission: To promote self-advocacy by speaking and acting on behalf of the rights and responsibilities of all people with developmental disabilities."

Welcome to People First!

People First is part of a growing movement of self advocacy groups throughout the United States and the world. By joining together in groups, people with developmental disabilities are learning to speak for themselves and share ideas, friendship and information. The People First New Jersey Chapter Handbook will provide information to help you organize and run a self-advocacy group.

This handbook is an outgrowth of the original People First Blueprint and the Officer Handbook written by People First of Oregon members. The people in Oregon who started People First here in the states, knew that individuals with developmental disabilities wanted to get together to learn to be self advocates and they worked to develop a process to see that happen. What is amazing is how much the information in those original documents is still as relevant today as it was when it was first written. The process has stood the test of time. People First belongs to the members and People First works!

Starting a People First chapter is a lot of hard work. It takes time and patience and a sense of humor. It can also be very rewarding. We offer the suggestions in this handbook to help your group get started. Additional information and resources are also available on our web site at www.njcdd.org. Good luck - and welcome to People First.

People First New Jersey

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PEOPLE FIRST

CHAPTER HANDBOOK



SECTION

WHAT IS PEOPLE FIRST?

*"We want others to know that we are people first,
and our disabilities come second"*

We Are People First!

The History of People First and Self-Advocacy

The People First Philosophy

WHAT IS PEOPLE FIRST?



WE ARE PEOPLE FIRST!

We are individuals with developmental disabilities joining together to learn how to speak for ourselves. We want others to know that we are people first and our disabilities come second.

We form chapters at the places where we work or live. We have local chapters in our communities, and those chapters join together to make state chapters. People First is networking with other states and advocacy groups.

We live in many types of settings, our own apartments, our parent's homes, group homes, and with foster families. We go to school, we work in community businesses, we have supported employment services, and we work in sheltered workshops.

We serve on state and local Boards of Disability-Service Organizations. We sit various local boards and State Developmental Disability Councils. We have served on Independent Living Councils and we serve on local advisory committees and employment councils.

DO WE REALLY WANT TO SPEAK FOR OURSELVES?

YES! We believe that if we can learn to talk at our meetings and among ourselves, we can learn to talk to anyone about things that are important to us. We talk to our parents, our service providers, our caseworkers, to city councils and mayors. We talk to legislators and legislative committees, to governors and even the President. Even though it may be hard to understand us sometimes, people listen to us because they know that we know what we are talking about.

WHAT ARE OUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES?

People first members stand up for their rights. But we have also learned that we have to be responsible and act responsibly to exercise our rights. And we know that we may need some help in being responsible. We help other members when they are having problems to help them solve problems in a responsible way.

WHAT CAN WE TEACH THE COMMUNITY IN WHICH WE LIVE?

We can teach the community that we can do things that they never thought we could. We are teaching communities that we can learn, and that we know what is going on around us. We can vote, ride the buses by ourselves, get married and do many of the things they do. We can teach the community to respect us because we are responsible. We participate on DD Councils, Board of The Arc, and Transit Boards. We develop service projects to the communities we live in.

WHAT DO WE WANT?

People First members want to be treated with dignity and respect. We want the right to make our own decisions. We want to be in control of any plans that have to do with us. We want to be recognized as a primary advocacy group for people with developmental disabilities.

People First members want to live in a safe environment. We want an accessible environment. We want more chances to live where we want. We want low cost housing. We want our privacy.

People First members don't want to live in poverty. We want more jobs in community businesses. We want to be paid a fair wage when we work. People First members want transportation to get where we want to go. We want 24 hour bus service. We want full medical and health benefits.

WHAT DO WE OFFER?

People First offers support, a united voice and advocacy to its members. We offer information and help develop service projects in the communities in which we live. We offer information and assistance to those wanting to start new chapters. We offer participation on Developmental Disability Councils, Boards of The Arc, Transit Boards and other boards in our community.

WHERE CAN YOU FIND PEOPLE FIRST?

There are People First chapters and other self-advocacy groups all over the United States and in many other countries as well. An entry on many web sites can help you find a chapter in your own area.

HOW DO YOU START A PEOPLE FIRST CHAPTER?

The People First New Jersey Chapter Handbook offers information to help you start a People First chapter. If you need additional information please visit our web site at www.njcdd.org or you can contact us directly at (609) 292-3745.

THE HISTORY OF PEOPLE FIRST AND SELF-ADVOCACY

People First is part of the self-advocacy movement. The movement began in Sweden in 1968 when a Swedish parent's organization for children with developmental disabilities held a meeting. The organization had the motto, "We speak for them," meaning parents speaking for their children. The people at the meeting decided they wanted to speak for themselves and made a list of changes they wanted made to their services. Over the next five years meetings like this took place in England and Canada.

In November of 1973 the British Columbia Arc sponsored the first convention for the "mentally handicapped" in North America. The convention had for its theme "May 10

We Have A Choice". Two staff workers and three residents from the Fairview Hospital and Training Center in Salem, Oregon attended this convention. They came back to Oregon excited about the possibility of people with developmental disabilities speaking for themselves and organizing a similar convention.

The Canadian convention had been organized by professionals and the people from Oregon dreamed of a convention that was planned by people with disabilities, with assistance from advisors only when needed.

On January 8, 1974, the People First movement began in Salem, Oregon, with the purpose of organizing a convention where people with developmental disabilities could speak for themselves and share ideas, friendship and information. In the course of planning the convention, the small group of planners decided they needed a name for themselves. A number of suggestions had been made when someone said, "I'm tired of being called retarded - we are people first." The name People First was chosen and the People First self-advocacy movement began.

The first People First Convention was held in Oregon in October 1974 and 560 people attended. From this convention the idea of self-advocacy began to grow and spread. Within five years, Oregon had 1000 People First members, Nebraska, Washington and Kansas had growing memberships and people from 42 other states were asking for assistance to start their own groups.



In 1984 the first International Self Advocacy Leadership Conference was held in Tacoma, Washington. Since then, international conferences have been held in London, England (1988), Toronto, Canada (1993), Anchorage, Alaska (1998) and Northampton, England (2001).

Today, People First and the self-advocacy movement have grown into an international movement in 43 countries, with an estimated 17,000 members or more. In the United States alone, there are estimated to be well over 800 self-advocacy groups. Some of these are supported by local or state organizations, but many others are independent. In some 11

states local groups have banded together and have formed statewide organizations. A national organization, Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered, was formed in September 1991. Many of these groups call themselves People First but others have different names like Speaking for Ourselves, United Together, or Advocates in Action.

Whatever the name, the message is clear:

WE ARE PEOPLE FIRST AND WE CAN SPEAK FOR OURSELVES!



People First is a self-advocacy organization of persons with developmental disabilities based on the following philosophical concepts:

- People First represents a statement by persons that we want to be perceived by others as people who have something to offer and skills to share rather than being seen as persons with handicaps and limitations.
- People First is a self advocacy organization and that means that people learn to speak for themselves.
- People First voting membership is open to all persons who have a developmental disability. Only voting members can be officers.
- People First is a peer group process which, over time, allows persons to learn to talk for themselves, advocate for themselves, listen to others, make choices, listen to peers, make decisions, solve problems, and ultimately develop leadership skills.
- People First is a process which must be paced to insure that every person present has a chance to learn to participate to the best of their ability and learn how to advocate for themselves.
- People First must initially be a blending of advisors or mentors working with people with disabilities in order to provide the modeling and support necessary for the development of self-advocacy and leadership skills.
- People First advisors provide modeling and support by working with individuals with disabilities to neutralize barriers that stand in the way of persons advocating for themselves. Advisors do not lead, control or coerce.
- People First belongs to the people.

PEOPLE FIRST
CHAPTER HANDBOOK



SECTION ii
PEOPLE FIRST CHAPTERS

“People First chapters belong to the members”

Starting a Chapter

Keeping a Chapter Strong

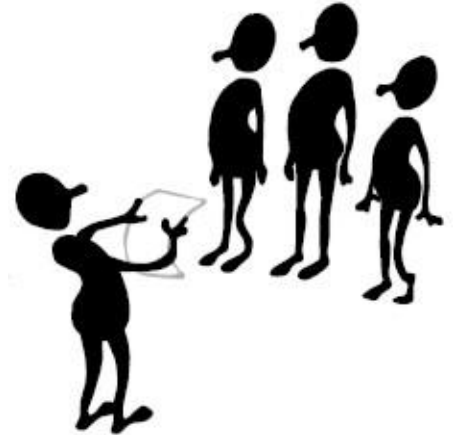
A People First chapter begins when a group of people with developmental disabilities decide to get together to learn to speak for themselves and share ideas, friendship and information. Starting a chapter helps members learn and use a process for working together and getting things done.

PRINCIPLES TO REMEMBER

There are two important principles to remember when starting a People First chapter:

❶ The chapter belongs to the members

The most important thing to remember when starting a People First chapter is to be sure that the members have control and power right from the beginning so that the chapter belongs to the members.



This means that members must be able to decide and determine when and where the group meets, who the advisor is, and what goes on in the meetings.

❷ Starting a chapter takes time

Starting a People First chapter takes time. It takes careful planning and thinking and a lot of discussion. It is important that everyone understands what People First and self advocacy are and why they want to form a chapter.



It is important to take enough time so that everyone understands what is going on and is able to participate in getting the chapter started. Start small and set realistic goals

It is important to have success right at the very beginning. This way everyone will feel good about the group and themselves.

START-UP STEPS TO TAKE

Here are some of the steps to take when starting a People First chapter.

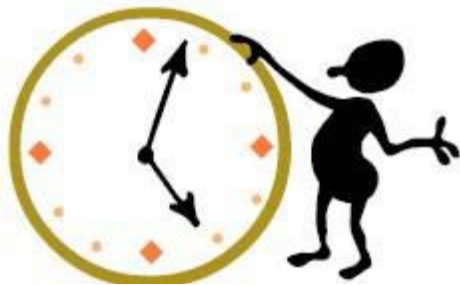
❶ Find out how other People First chapters work and learn from them

Contact a People First chapter or other self-advocacy group who can help you get started. If you have a chapter nearby invite them to visit and talk to you about starting your own chapter. The People First New Jersey organization can help you get started. You can also find the names of many People First chapters and self advocacy groups on the People First website at www.njcdd.org. You can contact these groups by letter or e-mail and ask them about their chapters.

❷ Decide what each person will do to help get the chapter started

Make sure everyone understands what needs to be done to get the chapter started. Some things that need to be done include finding a place to meet, letting people know about the meeting and deciding what is going to be on the agenda for the meeting.

If you want, you can set up an "organizing committee" to get the chapter going. Just remember it is important that everyone be able to participate and be a valued chapter member. Successful People First chapters find ways to get every member involved in the group.



❸ Set up a time and place for a meeting

A time and place needs to be set up for the first meeting. Find an accessible place to meet that is close to the bus lines. Try and find a place to meet that is not where the members live or work. Some ideas for places to meet could be a church, a school or a local government office, or restaurant conference rooms.

Make sure the day and time you meet is good for everyone. Make sure the day and time you meet is not the same day and time when people are already involved in other things.

④ Let people know about the meeting

Let as many people as you can know about your meeting and that you are starting a People First chapter. The more members you have in your chapter, the stronger your self-advocacy voice will be for yourselves and the community.

Talk with your friends about what you are doing and encourage them to come to your meeting.



⑤ Decide on an agenda for the meeting

An agenda is a list of what will be discussed in a meeting. It is important to have an agenda so that everyone knows what needs to be discussed and the meeting does not get sidetracked. For more information on agendas see the handbook section on meetings.



In deciding an agenda make sure that everyone gets a chance to speak and participate during the meeting. It is important to share power so that everyone feels like an important and equal member. Get everyone involved in the group. Use easy to understand words and pictures during the meetings to make sure everyone understands what is going on.

In the first meeting focus on making sure everyone understands what People First and self-advocacy are and why you want to meet as a group. Use can use a video as a way of introducing self-advocacy to new members or have people from other self advocacy groups talk about what self-advocacy means to them.

Don't elect officers at the first meeting. Wait for two or three meetings. This gives everyone a chance to speak and get to know the other members before you vote.

Plan to do some fun things together as a group during the meeting. Make people feel good about being there. Have refreshments and a "social time" at the end of the meeting.

Thank everyone for coming to the meeting and make sure they know when the next meeting is before you adjourn. Hand out calendars so everyone will know when the next meeting is.

START-UP DECISIONS TO BE MADE

The key to success is to make the correct decisions when starting a People First chapter.

❶ Decide on the purpose for your chapter

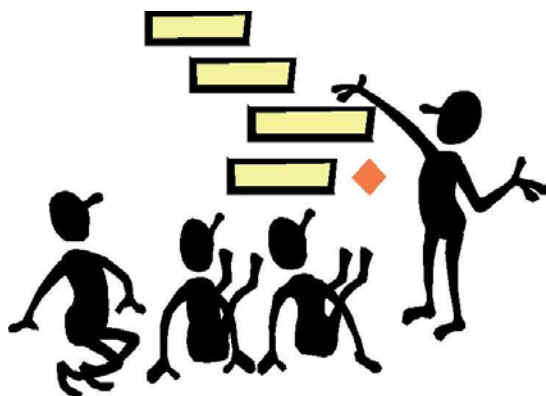
When everyone has to decide the purpose of the group it gives members lots of ideas about what kind of activities the group can do and how to organize these activities. It gets members involved.

When you have decided on the purpose of your group, write it down. This is your mission statement.

The mission statement of People First New Jersey is:

"People First recognizes that persons with developmental disabilities are people first. Our purpose is to promote self-advocacy by speaking and acting on behalf of the rights and responsibilities of all people with developmental disabilities."

❷ Decide on the rules for how chapter members will work together



As a group, make rules for how the group will work. Examples of rules include: who can be a member, how meetings are to be held, whether or not you will have dues and how they will be collected, how you will vote to decide on things, how officers are chosen, etc. Make sure everyone understands what the rules are before you vote on them.

Write down the rules you decide on. These are your **bylaws**.

See Appendix A for the by-laws of People First New Jersey.



③ Decide on the goals for your chapter

Decide on the goals for your People First chapter. Set realistic goals and keep them simple. Being able to successfully meet some of your goals right at the very beginning will make everyone will feel good about the group and themselves.

Goals will be different for different chapters. People First chapters are run by the members and the goals they set will reflect the needs of the members. Some chapters are more social and recreation oriented with their primary goal providing peer support and group activities. Others are more political with members speaking out against budget cuts and talking with legislators. Many chapters are a combination of both.

Chapter goals will also change over time. Some goals will be met. Others will change as the needs of members or the services in the community change. It is important to have the members discuss the chapter goals once or twice a year to see what progress is being made and if the goals are still realistic.

When you have set the goals for your chapter, discuss what you will do to reach your goals. Write down what you decide. This is your plan of action.

④ Decide on how to develop team spirit

It is important that People First chapters help members develop a working friendship and team spirit.

Members need to learn and practice working together and getting things done. The process needs to include all the members so everyone gets a chance to share ideas and to feel good about who they are. It is important that every member feel a part of what is happening so no one feels left out or alone.



When people get together to discuss and work on issues that are important to them there are going to be disagreements. Members need to learn how to debate both sides of an issue and come up with a group consensus without getting hurt feelings. Members need to decide how to help people get over their hurt feelings when there are disagreements in the group.

A good way to develop team spirit is to make meetings and events fun as well as work. Learning and practicing good humor will help members work better together in the chapter and community as well as in their personal lives

⑤ Decide on how to develop connections with the local community

People with developmental disabilities are an important part of their community. They live in the community. They go to school and work in the community. They shop and participate in recreational activities in the community. People First members can help teach the community that people with developmental disabilities are people with the same interests as everyone else.

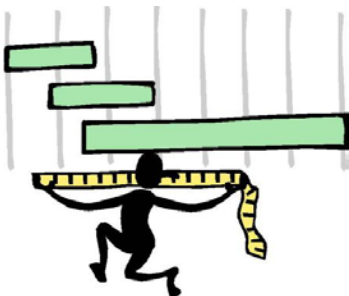


To do that it is important for members to be active and interact with other individuals and groups in their community. Members can participate on Councils, Boards, and Committees. They can develop service projects for the communities in which they live.

It is also important the people with developmental disabilities learn about the community where they live and how it works. People First can help members learn by holding workshops and inviting guest speakers such as public health nurses, policemen and local government officials.

By being active participants People First members can teach the community about them and teach themselves about the community.

⑥ Decide on how to evaluate how well the chapter is doing



It is important to periodically evaluate how the chapter is doing. Have members discuss how they think things are going. Discuss if the goals for the chapter are still the same or if they need to change. Make changes when most of the members agree that something needs to be changed..

Starting a People First chapter takes hard work and commitment from members and advisors but the results can be extremely rewarding.



After a People First chapter has been started, you need to think about how to keep the group going. All groups have “ups” and “downs.” All groups will have problems at times. One of the most important things to keep a group going over time is to face problems head on. Problems don't just go away on their own. You have to face them and try to work them out. When your group has problems, remember to give people a chance to grow and change.

Most people have never had the experience of being part of a self advocacy group like People First where they get to make the decisions and solve problems on their own. Sometimes, it is hard to be a self advocate, and people need time and understanding to work out problems and grow as a group.

STEPS TO TAKE A KEEP CHAPTER STRONG

- ❶ Make sure that everyone knows when and where the meetings are.

Call people to remind them about the meeting. Make up a meeting notice flyer and put these up. Put the location, directions on how to get to the meeting, and the phone number of who to call for more information on the flyer.

- ❷ Make sure the day and time you meet is good for everyone. Make sure the day and time you meet is not the same day and time when people are already involved in other things.

- ❸ Make sure there is a place and something for everybody at the meeting.

It is important for everyone to have something to say at the meeting and a way to feel that they are an important part of the group. The best way to keep people involved with the group is to find a way for everyone to be involved.

Committees are a good way to get everyone involved, plan things, and get things done. Committees give everyone a chance to have responsibilities and feel like an important part of the group.

- 4 Make sure the discussions in the meetings are real and important to the members.

Discussions in the meetings must be about things that are important to the members. Each group has to decide what is real and important to them. If you keep the discussions real, and on things that are important to the members' lives, then people will want to come to the meetings and take part.

- 5 Always have officer meetings

Officer meetings are a good time to learn about leadership, talk about and solve problems the group is having. The goal is for the officers to run the meeting on their own. An officer meeting should be about one week before membership meetings, to give people a chance to learn and practice their duties and to make sure everything is ready for the regular meeting.

- 6 Plan some fun things together

Don't make the meetings all "hard work." Go out and eat together, go on a camping trip together, do fun things together. Find things to do together that build "team spirit."

- 7 Don't let the meetings get boring.



PEOPLE FIRST

CHAPTER HANDBOOK



SECTION III

PEOPLE FIRST OFFICERS

“A good officer believes in People First and believes that people with developmental disabilities can speak for themselves and help make the community a better place for everybody to live”

Qualities And Responsibilities Of Good Officers

Officer Roles

Officer Meetings

The members of each People First chapter vote for their own leaders. The leaders are called officers. Only People First members can be officers.

Officers are a very important part of People First. They are leaders and role-models for the other members. How the officers act in their leadership role makes a big difference in how successful a chapter is.



KINDS OF OFFICERS

There are two kinds of officers.

- ❶ One kind of officer does everything themselves.

This makes the members feel like they can't do things on their own and they get bored. When this kind of officer leaves, everything falls apart because the members have not learned how to do things on their own and be officers.

- ❷ Another kind of officer gets everyone involved in doing things.

This kind of officer teaches the members how to do things on their own and speak for themselves. When this kind of officer leaves the chapter keeps going because the members have learned how to do things on their own and have learned how to be officers and run meetings.

It is important for People First officers to get everyone involved and to teach the members how to run meetings, speak for themselves and get things done.

QUALITIES OF A GOOD OFFICER

- A good officer is kind and polite to the other officers and members.
- A good officer encourages all the members to take part and speak during the meetings.
- A good officer respects everyone as a person who has something good to bring and say at the meetings.
- A good officer is responsible and goes to the officer's meetings and the members meeting.
- A good officer lets the other officers know if they can't come to the meetings.
- A good officer explains things to the members using simple words and examples so all the members can understand.
- A good officer practices how to be an officer by reading and using the Chapter Handbook.
- A good officer teaches the members how to be an officer and run meetings so they can get a chance to be a leader.
- A good officer believes in People First and believes that people with developmental disabilities can speak for themselves and help make the community a better place for everyone to live.
- A good officer is learning how to be a leader, run the meetings, solve problems, set goals and get things done.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF OFFICERS

- All officers should go to the Officers Meeting before the chapter meeting.
- All officers should attend their chapter meeting.

If an officer is not able to attend the meeting, they should let the president know before the meeting so someone else can take their place. The president should let the vice president know before the meeting if they cannot be there so the vice president can be ready to lead the meeting.

- All officers should learn the parts of the meeting and how to lead the meeting and the voting.

HOW OFFICERS ARE CHOSEN

The members of each People First chapter choose their own officers. They do this by holding an election and voting. The whole chapter takes part in the voting. The section on elections and voting has more information on the process of choosing chapter officers.



OFFICER ROLES

-----President-----

The president is the one that leads the meetings.

In a meeting:

- The president opens the meeting.
- The president asks the secretary to take roll call or has everyone introduce themselves.
- The president asks the secretary to read the minutes of the last meeting.
- The president asks the treasurer to give the treasurer's report.
- The president leads the talk about old business.
- The president leads the talk about new business.
- The president introduces the program for the meeting.
- The president adjourns the meeting (closes the meeting).
- When there is voting the president guides the voting.

The president goes to the officer's meeting to help plan the agenda for the chapter meeting.

The president goes to the chapter meetings. If he or she is not able to go he or she should let the vice president know before the meeting so the vice president can lead the meeting.

The president has the other officer's help in the meeting.

The president sees that someone goes to regional meetings, workshops and state conventions to speak for the chapter.



-----Vice President -----

The vice president is the one that leads the meetings when the president is absent. The vice president does everything that the president would do if he or she were there.

If the president is absent, the vice president needs to know about the president's duties. The vice president should learn about the parts of the meeting and how to lead the vote.

The vice president helps the president in the meetings when asked

The vice president goes to the officer's meeting to help plan the agenda for the chapter meeting.

The vice president goes to the chapter meetings. If they are not able to go, they need to let the president know before the meeting.

-----Secretary -----

The secretary needs to be able to read and write. In the meeting:

- The secretary calls the roll call and marks down if members are there or absent. Some chapters have the members introduce themselves instead of calling roll. If your chapter has introductions, the secretary should check off the names as people introduce themselves.
- The secretary reads the minutes of the last meeting. The minutes are notes of what happened at the meeting.
- The secretary takes notes of what happens in the meeting. These notes are called the minutes of the meeting.



If the president and the vice president are absent, the secretary leads the meeting. The secretary needs to know the parts of the meeting and how to lead the vote.

The secretary goes to the officer's meetings and helps plan the meeting agenda.

The secretary goes to the chapter meetings. If he or she is not able to go, he or she should let the president know before the meeting so someone else can take the secretary's place.



The secretary should keep a list of the chapter members, their addresses and phone numbers.

-----Treasurer -----

- The treasurer needs to know how to count, add and subtract money.
- In the meeting the treasurer gives the report on the chapter's money. This report is called the treasurer's report.

- The treasurer puts the chapter's money in the bank.
- The treasurer keeps track of all the money the chapter makes and all the money the chapter spends. The treasurer keeps this information in a book.
- The treasurer goes to the officer's meetings and helps plan the agenda for the chapter meeting.
- The treasurer goes to the chapter meetings. If he or she is not able to go, he or she should let the president know before the meeting so that someone can take his or her place.

-----Sergeant-At-Arms -----

The sergeant-at-arms is the person who keeps the meeting in order. If the members get too noisy, then the sergeant-at-arms calls for order.



- The sergeant-at-arms goes to the officer's meetings and helps plan the agenda for the chapter meeting.
- The sergeant-at-arms goes to the chapter meeting. If he or she is not able to go, he or she should let the president know before the meeting so someone can take their place.
- The sergeant-at-arms helps at the meetings when needed or asked.

OFFICER'S MEETINGS



Every chapter needs to have officer's meetings.

The officer's meeting is usually two to three days before the members meeting. All the officers need to meet with the advisor two to three days before every members meeting.

We have officer's meetings because this way the officers can get the agenda ready and practice being officers. This way the meetings will run smoothly and the officers will know how to be good officers and

get all the members involved.

What to talk about in officer's meetings

- Talk about and decide what will be on the agenda.

An agenda is a list of what you will talk about in the members meeting. When you make the agenda, make sure there is enough time to give everyone enough time to understand, ask questions and speak. An agenda usually has 6 parts.

1. Calling the meeting to order, taking roll, reading the minutes and the treasurers report.

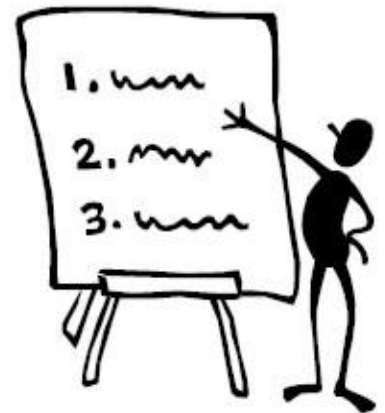
2. Old Business. Old business is business or things you have talked about before and you need to talk about more.

3. New Business. New business is things that are new that the chapter needs to talk about

4. The Program. The program is what most of the meeting will be about. The program is usually about 1/2 hour. For ideas about the program see the chapter on ideas for meetings.

5. Announcements. Talk about things that are going to happen.

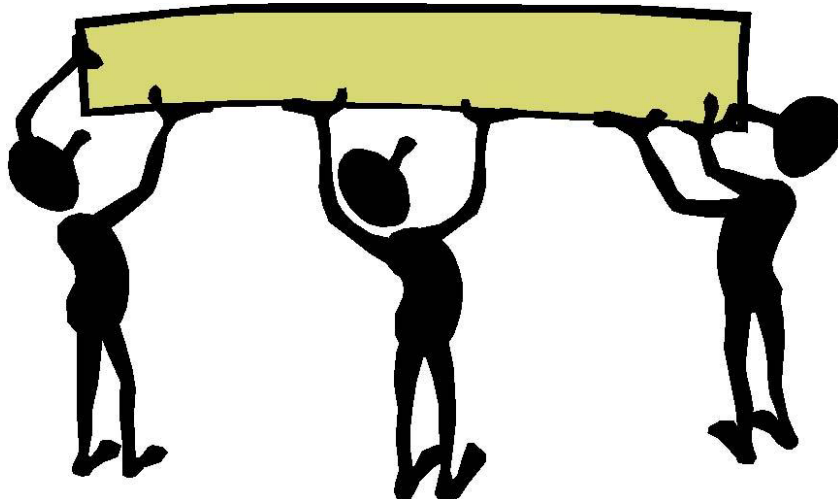
6. Adjourn the meeting. Decide when the next meeting will be.



Practice explaining things on the agenda so everyone can understand.

Write the agenda in big letters on a large piece of paper and use pictures. Put this large agenda on the wall at the meeting so everyone can see it.

- Have the secretary get the minutes from the last meeting ready for the meeting.
- Have the secretary practice reading the minutes.
- Have the treasurer get the treasurer's report ready to give during the meeting.
- Practice being officers. Practice how to open and close the meetings, how to lead the discussion and how to have the members vote.
- Talk about any problems the chapter is having and how to solve these problems and make the chapter stronger.
- Role-play and practice in the officer's meetings on how to solve problems that come up during meetings.



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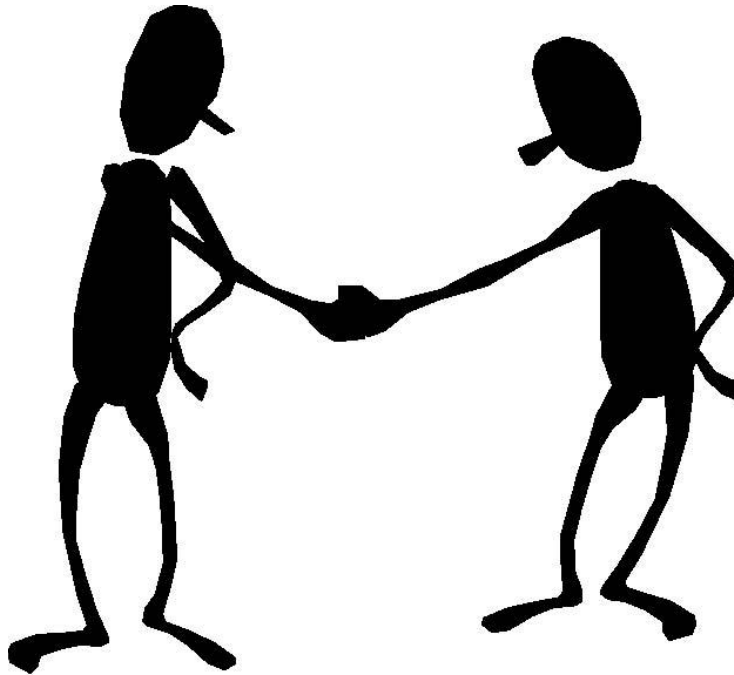
SECTION IV
PEOPLE FIRST ADVISOR

“Our advisors were good because they let us learn and move ahead at our own speed, even if it wasn’t fast enough for them.”

The Role of People First Advisor

Hints for People First Advisors

Questions To Ask Yourself as a People First Advisor



Just as there is no one-size-fits-all model for organizing and running a People First chapter, there is no one-size-fits-all model for the People First advisor. What a chapter needs in an advisor will vary depending on the members involved, the community and the way the chapter is organized.

Advisors play an important role in People First even though the chapters are run by the members themselves. Advisors are known by some chapters as advisors, allies, support people, or resource people but whatever they are called they all work for the members to assist the self-advocacy group. Every chapter needs advisors but it is important that the members be the ones in control.

When People First started in Oregon in 1974 members got volunteers to be their "advisors" since the chapter didn't have the money to hire any staff.

"Our "advisors" didn't lead us. They just helped and coached us when we asked. They helped us learn to hold meetings so we could talk about things that were important to us and not just what was important to them. Our advisors were good because they let us learn and move ahead at our own speed, even if it wasn't fast enough for them"

ROLE OF THE ADVISOR

The People First advisor:

- Helps individual members or the group as a whole in learning about self-advocacy.
- Assists in organizing and supporting the self-advocacy group.
- Assists in carrying out the self-advocacy goals of the group.

Most People First members have strong feelings about the role of the advisors in their chapter. Basically they feel that good advisors know that People First belongs to the members and not to them. They feel good advisors help but don't try and tell the members what to do. They let them make our own mistakes and this let them grow and take responsibility for what they were doing.



Some of the comments by members include:

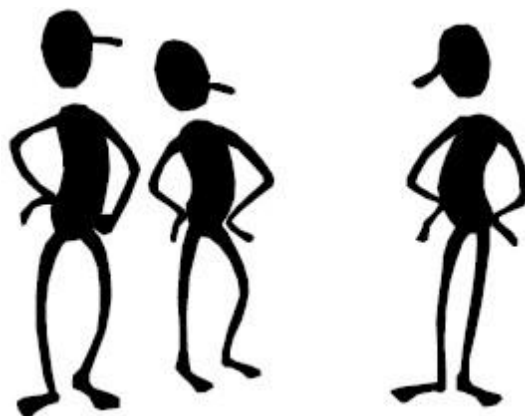
- Advisors should help us when we need it - but not too much.
 - Advisors should let members run the meetings.
 - Advisors should try to understand how members feel.
 - Advisors should care about us as people at all times.
-
- Advisors should believe in People First.
 - Advisors should work with us to get our rights.
 - Advisors should not be bossy.
 - Advisors should let us talk and run the meetings.
 - Advisors should let us try things first and then, if we need help, help us.

It is important for every People First chapter to think about and answer these three questions about their advisor.

- What do you want from an advisor?
- How do you get what you want?
- What to do if you aren't getting what you want?

Some tips for helping members get what they need from their advisors include:

- Chapter members must decide and control who the advisor is. Members should interview the advisor and decide. It helps if the advisor has some experience helping people organize into groups and knows and respects people with developmentally disabilities.
- Chapter members should be responsible for training the advisor on how to be a advisor.
- Chapter members should make up a contract on what the advisor is supposed to do. The advisor and the members should sign the contract.
- The advisor and the members should follow through on the contract. An "employee committee" can be started and meet regularly to talk about how the advisor is doing.
- If problems come up members should always communicate directly with the advisor and try and work it out. Advisors are people too and should be given a chance to learn, grow and change.



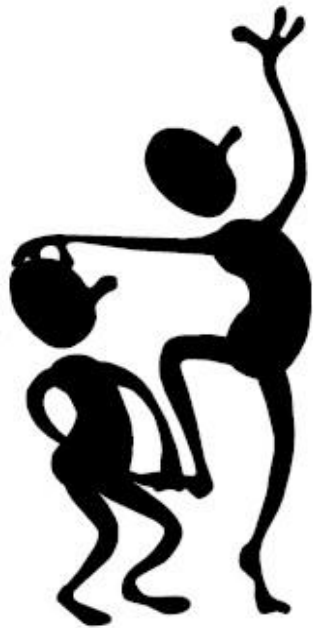
HINTS FOR PEOPLE FIRST ADVISORS

Patience.....

Patience for the self-advocacy process is critical. There is a tendency to rush people with developmental disabilities to move faster than they are ready and to put together a movement that is not really theirs. Patience allows the advisor to see the smallest changes. Patience says that the movement will take years, that we are at a given point in the development of the movement and that we have a long way to go.

Generating Excitement.....

Generating excitement is a gut level characteristic and you can tell an excited advisor by looking. A excited advisor shows involvement, facial expression, and pizzazz. A advisor must be able to laugh and cry, to be compassionate, and to be angry. An excited advisor spreads the spirit of the movement to the group. It is not useful to the movement if advisors are neutral.



Having a Vision.....

"People with developmental disabilities will become organized and will speak for themselves"

Advisors must realize that People First is a lengthy process and that growth and development happen slowly. Advisors with vision will persevere and overcome any obstacles and especially those traditional barriers between professionals. Some people just will not believe that people with disabilities can do what is actually happening with People First. Without advisors having belief and

vision in the process, the movement would be a sham. There would be no movement started without the vision and support of the advisors.

Finding Other Advisors.....

Advisors need other advisors. It is lonely without peers to share and reflect ideas with. It is the exceptional advisor who will actually show the energy and vision to be involved in a movement such as People First.

Financial Concerns.....

Many People First chapters have no ongoing funding for the organization and for carrying on the day-to-day work that happens. Support for the movement is critical but it doesn't have to be financial support. For many chapters the support is through in-kind services such as donated time of the advisors, donated use of agency phones, copying machines, and transportation.

Due to the limited income of people with developmental disabilities, membership fees are usually not a source of funding for people First chapters.

Advisors should explore potential financial resources for the movement, which could be through donations and grants. Special attention should be paid to any requirements that are tied to receiving money. Obviously a strong financial base is nice to have, but it is imperative that the self-advocacy motive behind People First does not get lost in the quest for money. Advisors must continually evaluate whether or not movement would fall apart if financial aid were withdrawn. If the movement would dissolve without financial support, then the chapter needs to realign the emphasis of the movement to avoid heavy dependence on funds.



Seeing Growth.....

Advisors must be able to understand that there are two levels of growth taking place for people with developmental disabilities as they learn to organize and become their own advocates. One level of growth can be seen by looking at the process through which People First members learn to relate to one another, make decisions, and problem solve. A second level of growth can be seen by looking at the content which is being discussed at any one time. The advisor should learn to see growth on both levels and to be excited at even the smallest gains in growth that can be seen over time.



Defining Roles.....

Advisors should avoid spending time and energy defining roles. It is easy to get caught up in word games, role games, definition games, and power games. The game of defining roles takes the energy away from what the advisors should be concentrating on. The distinction between the

members and the advisors is for discussion only. In practice the advisors and the members must put aside roles and work together. In People First the power belongs to the members. The advisor who is involved with People First must learn to be comfortable in accepting a secondary role. If there is glory to the movement, it belongs to the people.

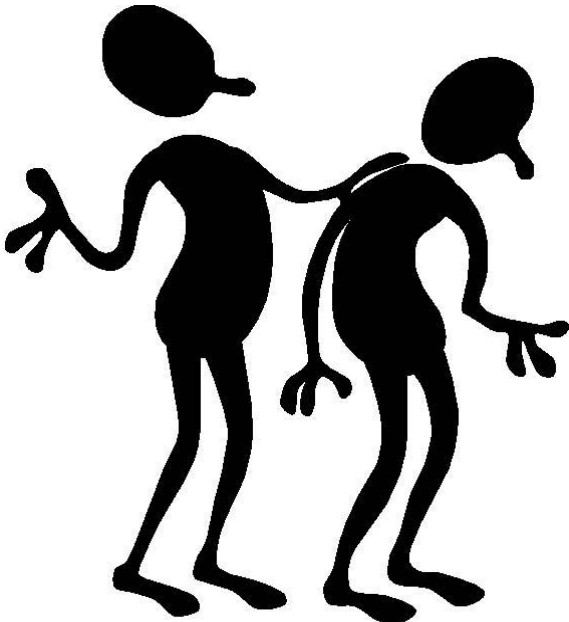
QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF AS A ADVISOR

The following questions are a good way to gauge how you are doing as a People First advisor and provide some insight to help avoid burn out.



- Am I really listening to what People First members have to say or am I imposing my point of view?
- Do I see the real human growth and potential in People First members or do I see "disability" and "limitations?"
- Have I checked out my actions and feelings with the People First members?
- Are any of my actions based upon a potential conflict of interest or need to be controlling in any way?
- Do my actions increase the self-respect, self-confidence, self-reliance of People First members and encourage them to take risks?
- Do my actions decrease the self-advocates' dependence on me?
- Do my actions increase People First member's opportunities to understand and participate in the decisions that affect their lives?
- Do my actions teach People First members a process for making decisions, solving problems, and doing things on their own vs. controlling things?
- Do my actions decrease the chances that I will be seen as a manipulator?
- Do my actions increase People First member's opportunities to understand and participate in the decisions that affect their lives?
- Do my actions encourage a positive role for a diverse membership?
- Do my actions promote respect and recognize individual growth as well as group spirit? (Lasting growth takes time.)
- Do my actions encourage and assist People First members in obtaining and understanding a wide variety of information and different points of view so that people can make informed decisions? Have my actions developed allies for the member's point of view?

- Do my actions recognize that anger is okay and indeed justified in many instances and encourage people to use anger for positive personal growth and societal change?



- Is it okay for People First members to:
 - Question my point of view?
 - Work me out of a job?
 - Tell me that they don't need me and can decide on their own?
 - Give me negative feedback about what I am doing?
 - Not see me as an authority figure
- Do I realize that advisors as well as People First members and People First chapters are fallible human beings prone to making mistakes and have problems just like anyone else and any other organization?

It is not always easy being a People First advisor but it is important to remember is that there is no such thing as an ideal advisor.

"You know what I have in mind; I have this picture of the 'ideal' advisor-what an advisor is really suppose to be. I measure myself and I always come up short. Then I meet other people and talk and I realize there isn't and 'ideal' advisor. You can try to define the role but people carry out any role in their lives in different ways. There probably is such a thing as a bad advisor but there's a whole range of ways of being a good advisor."

- Bonnie Shoultz

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SECTION V PEOPLE FIRST MEETINGS

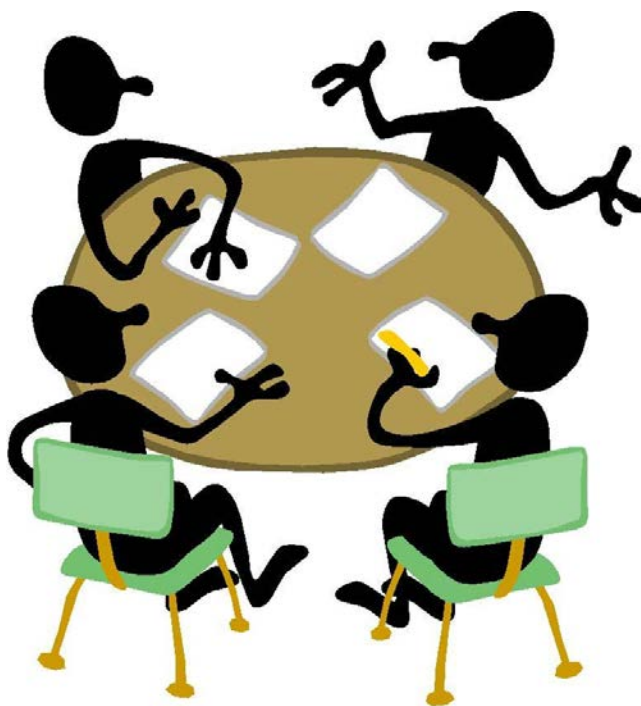
“Meetings are a very important part of People First because that’s where members learn how to become self advocates”

Tips for a Successful Meeting

Holding a Meeting Using Parliamentary Procedure

The Meeting Agenda

Solving Problems in Meetings



Meetings are a very important part of People First. People First members learn how to become self advocates by going to local chapter meetings of People First in their community. At the meetings, the members practice and learn how to speak for themselves, solve problems and help each other.

People First chapter meetings help members practice debating the sides of an issue, and then taking a vote. They offer a time for discussion where people can freely agree or disagree with each other.

During the actual meetings it is important for the advisors to relax, take a back seat, and let the process happen without becoming leaders themselves. Advisors should feel free to give opinions, suggestions, and direction to the group, as needed, without being subtly coercive.

Local chapter meetings usually happen once a month and the members elect officers to run the meetings. The members decide what they want to do in the meetings. An advisor works with the group to help them learn how to do things on their own. The meetings last about one and a half hours and the last half hour is a time for refreshments and a time to talk with old and new friends. The members take turns bringing the refreshments and collect dues to pay for the refreshments.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

- Make sure that everyone knows when and where the meetings are.
- Make sure the advisor knows what their role is.
- Have an officers meeting to plan the meetings.
- Find ways to get everyone involved.
- Make sure that everyone understands what goes on in the meetings, and what is talked about.
- Make sure that the discussions are real and important to the members during the meeting.
- Make a 3 to 6 month plan with the group, so that people will be working toward something.



- Make sure the meetings are fun.
- Face any problems the group is having. They won't just go away, without work.

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

People First meetings follow parliamentary procedure. This means that there are specific steps for the way meetings are carried out. People First meetings give people a chance to learn and practice using parliamentary procedures

1. Call the meeting to order

Call the meeting to order by the president. Some chapters use a gavel to call the meeting to order.

2. Roll call or introduction

Roll call or introduction of people present. A signup sheet may be passed around.

3. Minutes from the last meeting

Minutes from the last meeting are read by the secretary and approved by the group. The President asks for additions or corrections to the minutes. The President asks for a motion to accept the minutes. The president leads the vote to approve the minutes

4. Treasurer's report

A report from the treasurer about chapter finances is given.

5. Old Business

The president leads a discussion by the group about old business. Old business is the things that were talked about at the last meeting and need to be talked about again.

6. New Business

The president leads a discussion by the group about new business. New business is the things that have not been talked about at the last meeting. Ideas which have never been discussed before can be discussed at this time. New business includes planning by the group for where and when the next meeting will happen.

7. Announcements

Announcements are the time to remind the members of upcoming events. During announcements members can share things that are happening such as new jobs or moving to a new apartment.

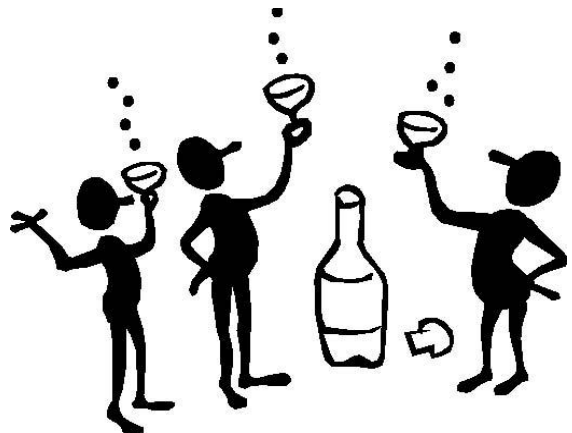
8. Program

The program is the part of the meeting for learning new things. The program should be fun and of interest to the members. The program can be things like a guest speaker or a group discussion.

9. Adjourn the meeting

The meeting is adjourned (closed) by a yes or no vote by the entire group. The president asks for a motion to adjourn the meeting and leads the vote by the group to adjourn the meeting. The president then closes the meeting.

10. Refreshments and socializing



SAMPLE AGENDA

| | |
|--|-----------|
| President calls the meeting to order | Terry |
| Secretary takes roll call Judy | |
| Secretary reads the minutes from the last meeting | Judy |
| Members approve the minutes Terry | |
| Treasurer gives report on chapter money | David |
| Old Business, the Presidents leads the talk | Terry |
| Report on last month's Convention | |
| New Business, the President leads the talk | Terry |
| Do we want to write a letter to the convention hotel? | |
| Who will write the letter? | |
| What do we want at the next meeting? | |
| Announcements | |
| There will be a dance on Friday, September 10th at 8:00 pm. at the center. | |
| Are there any other announcements? | |
| Program | |
| Today we have Mr. Smith from the Volunteer Bureau to discuss some opportunities for People first members to volunteer. | |
| President introduces Mr. Smith | Terry |
| Mr. Smith talks and answers questions | Mr. Smith |
| President thanks Mr. Smith | Terry |
| Adjourn the meeting | Terry |

The next meeting is Tuesday, October, 4th at 7:00P.M., in the senior center.

Refreshments and time to talk to friends

SOLVING PROBLEMS IN MEETINGS



During the People First meetings problems may happen. During the officer's meetings, talk about the problems that happened and what to do about them. Here is a list of some of the problems that happen during meetings. Practice and role-play how to solve these problems.

- If one member interrupts (speaks) when another member is speaking, politely ask that a member not interrupt and to give the person who is speaking a chance to finish.
- If one member talks too much and hogs the discussion, politely remind that person that we need to give everyone a chance to speak.
- If a member starts to talk about something other than the business of the meeting, (gets off task), politely lead the member back to the business of the meeting.
- If a member votes more than once, politely ask the member to vote only once and teach the member how to vote.
- If a advisor talks too much during the meetings, politely remind the advisor that the members are trying to learn how to do things on their own.
- If a member doesn't know how to make a motion, show and teach the member how to make a motion.
- If the members always seem to talk to the advisor in the meetings and not to the other members, the officers need to politely remind the members to talk to the members so the members can learn how to do things on their own.
- If the members are not talking during the meetings, the officers need to think of ways to get everyone involved.
- If a member asks a question during the meeting, the officers need to make the members question important and thank the member for asking the question. If the members question is off task, tell the member their question is important and you will discuss it under new business on the agenda.

- If the members seem bored in meetings, think of ways to get everyone involved and excited.

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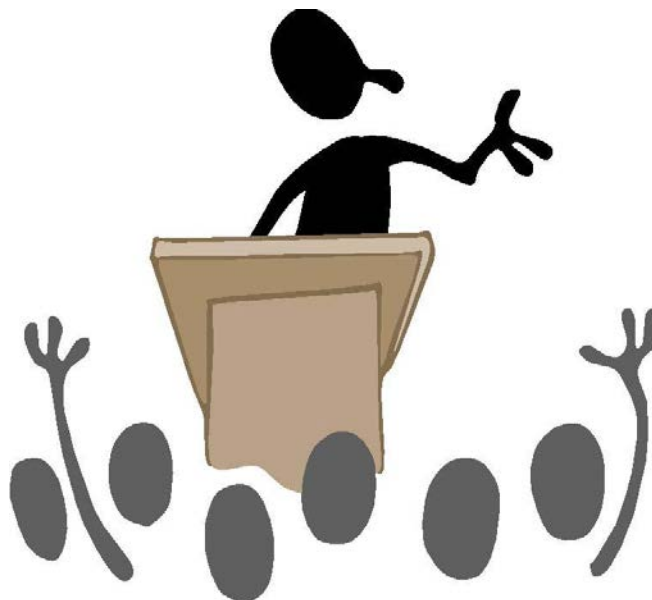


SECTION VI
VOTING AND ELECTIONS

“Voting is a right for all People First members but it is also a responsibility”

Voting on Chapter Business

Election of Chapter Officers



Voting is an important part of People First. People First members vote on business and issues that affect the chapter and they also vote in elections.

Voting is a right for all members but it is also a responsibility. Voting and elections help members learn how to debate between choices and make responsible choices and live with the choices they make. Only People First members can vote.

VOTING ON CHAPTER BUSINESS

The members of People First vote on business and issues in their chapter meetings using parliamentary procedures. This means that there are specific steps for the way voting is carried out.

- A member makes a motion.
- Another member seconds the motion.
- Members discuss the motion.
- A vote is taken of all members in favor of the motion and all members opposed to the motion. Usually voting on chapter business is done by a verbal vote or a show of hands.
- The results of the vote are announced.

ELECTION OF CHAPTER OFFICERS

The members of each People First chapter vote for their own leaders. These leaders are called officers. Elections are the process where the officers are selected. Members nominate candidates for officer and then vote on which candidate will be the officer.

Each chapter decides how they want to hold elections, and how they will decide on who the candidates are. In some chapters the advisor and the current officers discuss possible candidates who are then nominated to run for office. In other chapters, all members can nominate themselves to run for office. Most chapters have the candidates give speeches to tell the other members why they would make good officers. Then the members make up their minds and vote.

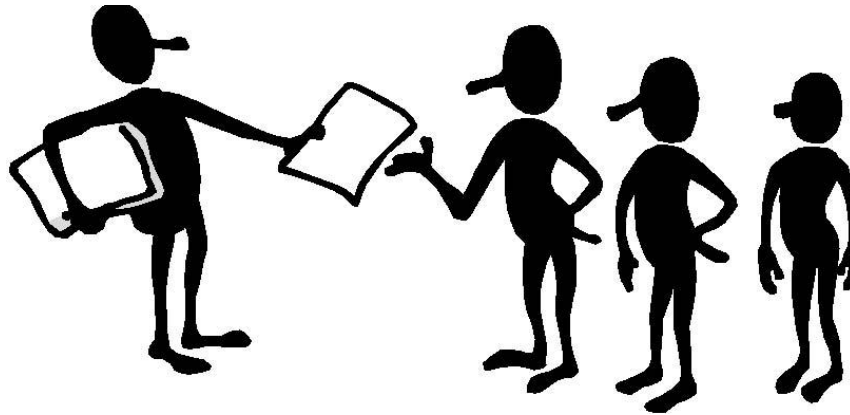
Elections are held using the following process:

- Candidates are nominated for each office.
- Each candidate nominated gives a speech.
- Members vote on the candidates for each office by secret ballot.
- The votes are counted.
- If there is a tie the members vote again on the candidates who tied.
- The President announces the winner for each office.
- The winner for each office gives a thank you speech.
- It is important the members know and understand the election process and who is running for each office. Some hints on holding elections include:

- Chapters should elect officers every two years.
- The whole chapter decides who will be their officers by voting.



- Each person running for office should give a speech telling why they would make a good officer and why the members should vote for them.



- Put pictures of the people who are running for office on the ballot box. This makes it easier for people to decide who to vote for.
- Nominations should take place at one meeting and the elections take place at the next meeting.
- Voting for chapter officers should be done by secret ballot. The secret ballot can be done by writing the name of the person on a piece of paper or by placing a piece of paper in the box of the person you wish to vote for.

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SECTION VIII
STATEWIDE ORGANIZATION

“There is strength in numbers”

Benefits of a Statewide Organization

Five Steps in Starting a Statewide Organization

People First is a self-advocacy organization. People First members learn to speak up and speak out for themselves and for others. But People First members also learn it is hard to be a self-advocate by yourself. They join together in local chapters and find there is strength in numbers and strength in sharing ideas and information. At this point the local chapters often start discussing the possibility of forming a statewide People First organization.

BENEFITS OF A STATEWIDE ORGANIZATION



- There is strength in numbers.
 - A statewide organization can help members share ideas and information.
 - A statewide organization can help members work together to become stronger self-advocates.
 - A statewide organization can help start new chapters and provide ongoing assistance to existing chapters.
 - A statewide organization improves communication between the chapters.
 - A statewide organization can plan and organize state conventions, leadership retreats and training seminars and conferences.
- A statewide organization can develop People First training materials.
 - A statewide organization can speak on behalf or with local chapter members in front of the legislature or governor.

FIVE STEPS IN STARTING A STATEWIDE ORGANIZATION

1. The Beginning

The beginning is when two or more people get together to start a group and work together. People First started in West Virginia in 1991. Now there are self-advocacy groups all over the world.

2. Sharing the Idea with Others

The idea for People First is shared by friends, letters and word of mouth. This is an “informal organizational step.” Different groups get started and often don’t know about each other.

3. Leadership Steps Forward

Leaders step forward and begin to work together to spread the word about People First and self-advocacy. Often these leaders help to start new groups and plan an organizing conference to share ideas and information.

4. Working Together

At this step, the different groups start to talk seriously about working together to form a state-wide organization. This leads to a state-wide steering committee or board of directors with officers. They work together to incorporate, raise funds, become non-profit, write grants, etc. for the organization.

5. Formal Operations

The state-wide organization opens an office and hires staff. You must be careful to hire staff that will support the members and not take over the work of the organization. Not all statewide organizations reach this point. Some have an unpaid volunteer network.

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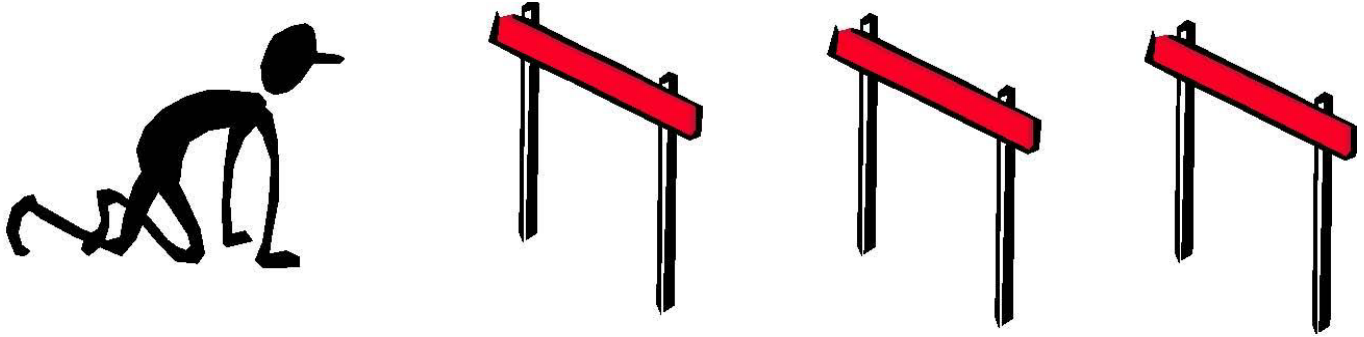


SECTION IX WORKING ON ISSUES

“Chapters are stronger and function best when members work together on issues.”

Understanding Issues

Developing a Plan for Working on Issues



People First members face many issues in their lives. As individuals members face issues each day in areas such as housing, employment, transportation, medical care, personal isolation and lack of social activities. Learning how to be a self-advocate and working on these issues is an important part of People First.

- Issues are also an important for People First chapters. Chapters are stronger and function best when members work together on issues. Working on issues teaches members about self advocacy.
- Working on issues keeps members involved and informed about things that affect their lives.
- Working on issues gives members hope that change can happen and that they can help make it happen.
- Working on issues together keeps members from getting bored with meetings.

People First works on issues at many levels

- Individual Issues such as access to services, self determination and personal isolation.
- Chapter Issues such as increasing membership, raising money or planning a workshop or convention.
- Community Issues such as transportation, housing and employment.
- Statewide Issues such as closing of institutions and educational opportunities.
- National Issues such as aging and discrimination.

These issues are all related. They involve the rights of people with developmental

disabilities to be treated like everyone else. People First helps members learn to be effective self-advocates and work individually and as a group on these issues and the others that affect their lives.

DEVELOPING A PLAN FOR WORKING ON ISSUES

People First members and chapters face many issues and it is sometimes difficult to know which ones to choose to work on. The following steps have helped others through the process of identifying an issue to work on and coming up with an action plan. The steps are part of a process called organizing for change which was developed by the Massachusetts Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities.

Step 1: Make a List of Things that Make You Angry



Anger can be used in helpful ways to bring about change. The first step in organizing for change is to make a list of things that make you angry. Ask the members of your chapter questions to get people thinking about the things that make them angry and what they do to deal with their anger. These questions can include:

- How many of you remember when you were last angry?
- How many of you were angry about something that happened to you because you were disabled?
- How many of you kept your anger inside of you? How many of you did something about being angry?
- What did you do?

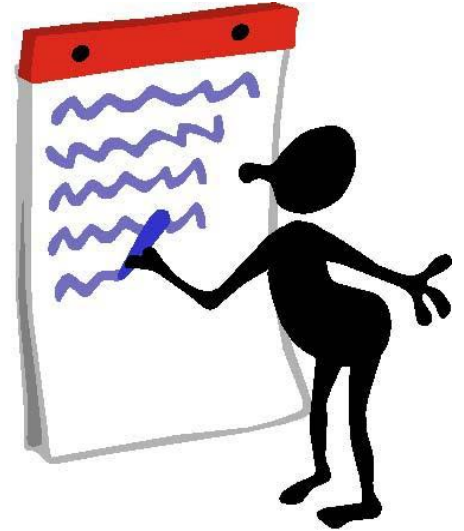
These kinds of questions are very helpful to ask yourself as you learn to focus your anger. Focusing your anger means that you understand where it is coming from and how and why you feel it.

Step 2: Turn Your Anger into Issues

The next step is to turn your list of things that make you angry into a list of issues. An issue is a problem that can be solved by working together. For example, many people are angry because they feel like they are treated like children. The issue, or problem, is that many people don't think that people with disabilities are adults and treat them like children. Once you have identified the issues, you are ready to prioritize them.

Step 3: Identify the Issues to work on

There is no way to change all problems at once even if you could identify them all. It is therefore necessary to list the issues and choose one or two issues to work on. Here are several things to think about as you make the list:



- **Realistic**
Is the issue one that you can realistically work on and have a chance to win? Members will not be able to relate to working on an issue that is not realistic to their lives.
- **Understandable**
Is the issue understandable by you, other members and the public? If people don't understand the issue, it will be impossible to work on it effectively.
- **Small**
It is better to start with a small issue and build to bigger issues. It is important to have some early successes.
- **Winnable**
Is the issue winnable or would you have to try to change the whole world? If the issue is not winnable, members will get very frustrated and give up easily.
- **Important**
Is the issue something that is really important to the members? The issue must be important or people won't want to put time and energy into working on the issue.

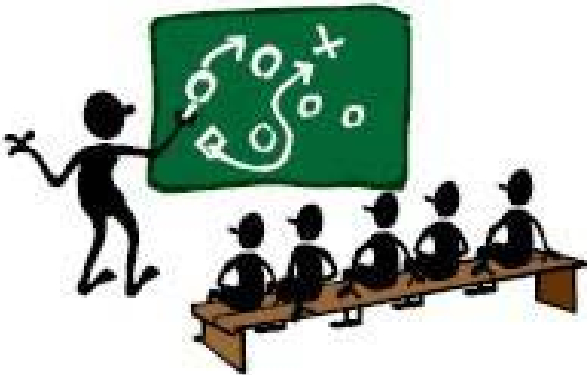
- Empowering
Will solving the issue give the members a sense of power? Power is the ability to get things done successfully.
- Involving
Involving means to give everyone a chance to participate in working on the issue. An issue must be involving or members will lose interest.

In choosing an issue, it is important to bring power to the people. Power is the ability to get things done and therefore the issue that you choose to work on must be something that can be done by the people. People First members know the issues and needs that they have better than anyone else.

It is also important to remember that it takes time to clearly and understandably identify the issues. The process of identifying issues is very important because it can be used to involve all of the members and can make the difference between choosing an issue that brings power to people or choosing an issue that defeats people.

Once the issues have been identified and prioritized, you can decide on a plan of action to reach your goal.

Step 4: Decide on a Plan of Action to Reach Your Goal



To reach your goals, you need a plan of action. A plan of action is a list of the specific things you can do to address the issue and reach your goal. A plan of action is a list of the specific things you will do to bring about change for the better.

A plan of action has two parts:

- ❶ Strategy
A strategy is the chapter's overall plan of action. In a sense, your strategy is a list of what you will do to reach your goal.
- ❷ Tactics

Tactics are smaller pieces of exactly how you will put your strategies into action. Below is an example of a plan of action using strategies and tactics. Here is an example of a plan of action for an issue.

Let's say your issue is transportation, and your goal is to get accessible buses for your community.

Strategy

Get the facts

Learn all you can about the buses, how many people could use the buses, what times of day they would use the buses, who makes the decisions about the buses, who controls the money for buses, etc.

Get support from others

Get support from others, such as other self-advocacy groups, churches, businesses, agencies that work with people with disabilities, public citizen support, and, if necessary, support from the city or county council, state legislators and other elected officials, unions, and groups outside your city or state.

Tactics

Tactics are also very important. Some tactics are safe and easy to do, and some tactics are risky and harder to do. For example, writing someone a letter is usually easier than a face to face meeting. It is usually best to start with a safe and easier tactic and build to a riskier and harder tactic. This is called the Escalator Principle.

Some tactics in our example might include:

- Writing a letter to your local transit authority.
- Meeting with the head of the transit authority.
- Meeting with local and state officials.
- Getting the media involved.

It is important to make sure everyone understands and agrees on your strategies and tactics before you put your plan into action. You can always change your tactics as you go along.

Step 5: Put Your Plan into Action

It is important to go through all of the steps before you put your plan into action. When you go through all of these steps, you will have a better chance at resolving the issue. Remember to start with small and winnable issues and build to bigger issues.

It is also important to remember that sometimes the issues you are working on won't get resolved the way you want them too. This is because it is hard to change systems. But working on issues is just as important as resolving them. When you put your plan of action to work, you feel good about yourself because you are organizing for change and working together to get things done. A good issue and a good plan of action can make a stronger chapter.



PEOPLE FIRST
CHAPTER HANDBOOK



SECTION X

RESOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

RESOURCES

In addition to this handbook there are many resources available for People First and other self-advocacy groups.

Here is a listing of other People First chapters and some of these also provide resource information including:

- People First of Washington
- People First of Missouri
- People First of Illinois
- People First of Tennessee
- People First of Central England
- Speaking For Ourselves

There are many other sources for self-advocacy resources on the web including the following sites:

- The Arc bibliography section at www.thearc.org
- Advocating Change Together at www.selfadvocacy.com
- Clearing House on Aging and Developmental Disabilities at www.uic.edu/orgs/rrtcamr/advocacy.html
- Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) at www.sabeusa.org
- Roeher Institute at <http://indie.ca/roeher>
- Syracuse University Center on Human Policy at <http://soeweb.syr.edu/thechp/selfadvo.htm>
- Quality Mall at www.qualitymall.org
- University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration at www.ici.coled.umn.edu/ici

You can also contact us directly if you have questions or need more information.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the beginning of this handbook we told you how this handbook is an outgrowth of the original People First Blueprint and the Officer Handbook written by People First of Oregon members. We obtained permission to use the content of the original, and although some changes and updates were made, basically the information is still the same as they wrote it. Our debt to the vision and hard work of these first People First members is immeasurable.

As we updated and revised material we also included thoughts and ideas from other chapters just as they have shared our thoughts and ideas in their material. People First is about people with developmental disabilities learning to speak for themselves and share ideas, friendship and information. In that spirit we give permission to freely copy and share this handbook. For the same reason we do not give permission for this handbook to be reproduced or included in any material that will be used commercially or sold.

We hope this handbook has been helpful to you as you begin the exciting People First process. If you need additional information or have any questions please let us know. And once again, welcome to People First.

People First New Jersey

