

PEOPLE FIRST PRESIDENT & ADVISOR

TRAINING MANUAL



These materials may be reproduced when used for teaching and training self-advocates

The purpose of People First is to create a self-directed, supportive community of adults who have developmental disabilities.

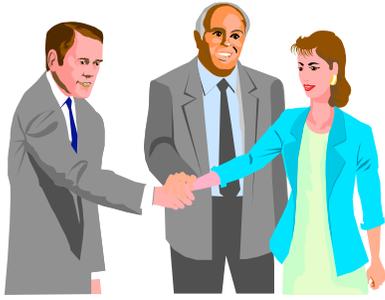
People First is a “self-advocacy” and “self-help” organization.

Self-advocacy is:

- learning how to speak up for ourselves
- making our own decisions about what we want to do with our lives
- learning to carry out our own plans

Self-help means:

- we listen to each other
- help each other with our problems
- reach out to people who are not members



People First helps the people who are members get better at these skills, by giving them a place to practice making decisions, helping others, and solving problems.

People First meetings give people a chance to learn parliamentary procedures. At the chapter meetings people have a chance to practice debating the sides of an issue, and then taking a vote.

The members of People First are trying to show other people in the community that People with developmental disabilities are regular people, who have, basically, the same interests, talents, strengths, and desires that other people have.

The members of People First want to show people who don't know about disabilities, that people with developmental disabilities are able to live and work among them.

People with disabilities contribute a lot to and enrich the communities in which they live.

The members of People First say that:

SELF ADVOCACY MEANS:

- “Feeling strong”
- “Feeling good about myself”
- “Respecting others rights, but speaking out for my own”
- “Teaching the people who would be mean to you”
- “Making my own decision about where to live and work”
- “Taking chances when you know you are right. Learning from your mistakes”

Self- Advocacy means:

- Getting all of the information
- Deciding what you want to do
- Finding out *what* and *who* will support you in doing what you want to do
- Knowing your rights and responsibilities
- Problem solving when things go wrong
- Taking charge, and speaking out on your own behalf

HOW PEOPLE FIRST WORKS

Individuals: A person decides to visit a People First meeting, to see what it is like. They like the way that they see others with disabilities following parliamentary procedure, and running their own meeting. They may decide to join that chapter of People First, or they may start a new chapter closer to home.

Advisors: Advisors are people who are not eligible to be members of People First, but who enjoy going to meetings, and working with people as they carry out the plans they have made.

Local Chapter: Local chapters meet once a month. The members learn, practice, and put self-advocacy into action by working together toward goals they set at their monthly meetings.

Regional Meetings: Many times people from several nearby chapters will work together at a project-projects like a week of camping, or a rally. These projects are decided upon by the members of the chapters, and vary from year to year, and from area to area.

State Meetings: Missouri has a statewide steering committee, which is made up of 2 members elected by each local chapter. The steering committee meets 4 times a year. The steering committee helps arrange training for people who want to start new chapters, and hosts a statewide conference once every second year.

National Meetings: The United States has a national organization of People First representatives who are elected by regional vote. It is called: Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE). SABE sponsors a national meeting on alternating years.

International Meetings: People First has chapters worldwide. There are active chapters in Europe, Africa, Great Britain, Japan, China, Korea, Canada, and other places. We meet at a worldwide conference every fourth year. April 22-25, 1998 was the most recent meeting date. The next conference is due in 2002.

Your Group: People can be as active as they like, in People First. Some chapters have an email address and they receive mail from People First members worldwide on a daily basis. Other chapters prefer to focus on their own community and the people around them.

The Mission Statement

Your Mission statement can be a big help in performing your roles as chapter members.

What is a Mission Statement?

The mission statement sums up the reason for the organization to exist.

Where do we get one?

The members of the organization write a mission statement together.

How do we get started?

Nine Steps to starting a People First Chapter

1. Make sure that everyone understands what People First and self-advocacy are. Talk about why people want to meet as a group. Write it down. This is your mission statement. The Mission Statement written by the steering committee for People First of Missouri is provided for you on the pages that follow, as an example. It is important that the members of the chapter have control right from the beginning, so that the group belongs to the members. Starting a group takes time, so that everyone will understand what is going on and can participate in starting the group.
2. Decide on the responsibilities that each person will have in getting the group going. Things that need to be decided are: finding a place to meet, finding transportation, publicity, the agenda...etc.
3. Find out how other groups work, and learn from them. Then make your own decisions about how your group wants to arrange things.

4. Decide on the rules for how you are going to work together. Things like how you will choose officers, if you will have dues, how you will vote, how you will choose an advisor. Write down what you decide. These are your bylaws. We have put the bylaws of one local People First chapter in this manual for you to look over, to get some ideas.
5. Work on developing team spirit. Work on how you will help people get over their hurt feelings when people have disagreements in the group.
6. Decide on the goals your People First chapter has. Write them down. This is the “goals” section of your strategic plan.
7. Decide on what you will do to reach your goals. Write this down too. It is your list of activities.
8. Develop connections with the local community. Be active and interact with others, both groups and individuals in the community.
9. Every so often, stop, and think over how things are going. Make changes when most of the members agree that something needs to be changed.

The Role of People First Officers

The members of each People First chapter vote for their own leaders.

Each chapter decides how they want to hold elections, and how they will decide on who the candidates are.

In some chapters the advisor helps 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.

The advisor and the officers usually meet once between People First meetings to plan the agenda and work on special topics. Where transportation is a problem, these meetings are often carried out by using the phone.

The following pages contain a description of each of the offices that most People First chapters have. There is a description of what the job entails. This statement is usually read aloud to the group before the nomination process is started. And many groups also have the current officer speak about what the role has involved for them, in the preceding year.

The Role of People First Advisors

As a People First advisor, you are not a member of the chapter. Yet you are closely tied to the chapter, and have the best interests of the chapter and its members at heart.

You may not vote or make decisions, and yet the goals and activities of the chapter may only be fulfilled through your efforts.

It is a unique role in an organization. It calls for a person who is able to suggest and inform, without leading. An advisor is a person who is able to support other people's goals, and who works hard for other's success.

Every People First chapter deserves an advisor who is able to act as a resource person for the People First members, and who is capable of helping the members settle disputes, plan activities, and set goals which do not reflect the opinion or goals of the advisor.

Some helpful reminders are on the pages following, which will be useful in helping advisors evaluate their own performance as support people, in their role as a People First advisor.

ADVISORS:

- Give advice when asked
- Help get training
- Attend every meeting
- Work to change things that stand in the way of meeting goals

Some Thoughts People First Members Have On Advisors

DO'S:

- Know there will be disagreements
- Communicate with members
- Be honest and smart
- Follow through
- Come to all the meetings
- Back us up on rules
- Advise us
- Ask us questions
- Listen
- Ask us what we want you to do
- Take advise from us
- Learn what support each person needs
- Be a friend
- Find ways to help everyone get involved
- Make sure everyone knows when and where the meeting is

DON'T'S:

- Take over for the leader
- Dictate what we should do
- Be afraid to speak
- Make decisions without the members
- Assume that everyone agrees
- Talk too much
- Do too much for us

How To Help Officers of People First Plan Worthwhile

Meetings

1. Make sure that everyone knows when and where the meetings are.
2. Make sure the advisor knows what their role is.
3. Have an officers meeting to plan the meetings
4. Find ways to get everyone involved
5. Make sure that everyone understands what goes on in the meetings, and what is talked about.
6. Make sure that the discussions are real and important to the members during the meeting.
7. Make a 3 to 6 month plan with the group, so that people will be working toward something
8. Make sure the meetings are fun.
9. Face any problems the group is having. They won't just go away, without work.
10. Call or write to the state steering committee for ideas and suggestions. The purpose of the state office is to help all of the chapters grow.

All People First chapters follow parliamentary procedure. The steps of the business portion of the meeting should be the same, nationwide.

I. Call to order.

The President of the chapter calls the meeting to order. Many chapters use a wooden gavel (a ceremonial hammer) to tap on the table and get everyone's attention.

II. Roll call or Introductions.

In this portion of the meeting, each member says his or her own name, or it is read aloud.

III. The Minutes

The secretary reads the minutes of the last meeting. The president asks for a motion to accept the minutes as read. The

president leads the vote to accept the minutes. The members vote.

IV. The Treasurer's Report

The treasurer reads the report.

V. Old Business

The President discussed the old business. These are things that have been talked about before, but they are not completed. Sometimes he will ask for committee reports at this time.

VI. New Business

The President leads a discussion of new business. These are ideas that have not been talked about before.

When Decisions need to be made, the members of People First vote.

1. The President calls for a motion.
2. Someone makes a motion.
3. Someone else seconds the motion.
4. There is discussion.
5. The president asks for everyone in favor to say "yea" or to raise his or her hand.
6. The president asks everyone opposed to say "no" or raise his or her hand.
7. The president announces the results.

VII. Announcements

This is the portion of the meeting when people can make announcements about their own news, or news of interest to all of the members. The president will remind members of up-coming events.

VIII. The Program

This is the portion of the meeting in which it is time to learn new things or do an activity together.

There may be a guest speaker, or a video, or a project. Or just a discussion on a topic of interest to the members of the People First chapter.

IX. Adjourn Meeting

The President taps the gavel, and adjourns the meeting.

X. Refreshments

Many People First groups bring snacks to share after the meeting. This is a social time during which members just talk and relax together.

Every 3 – 6 months the members of People First should decide upon another topic of interest. All of the meetings in that time period should support the project or topic on which they decided.