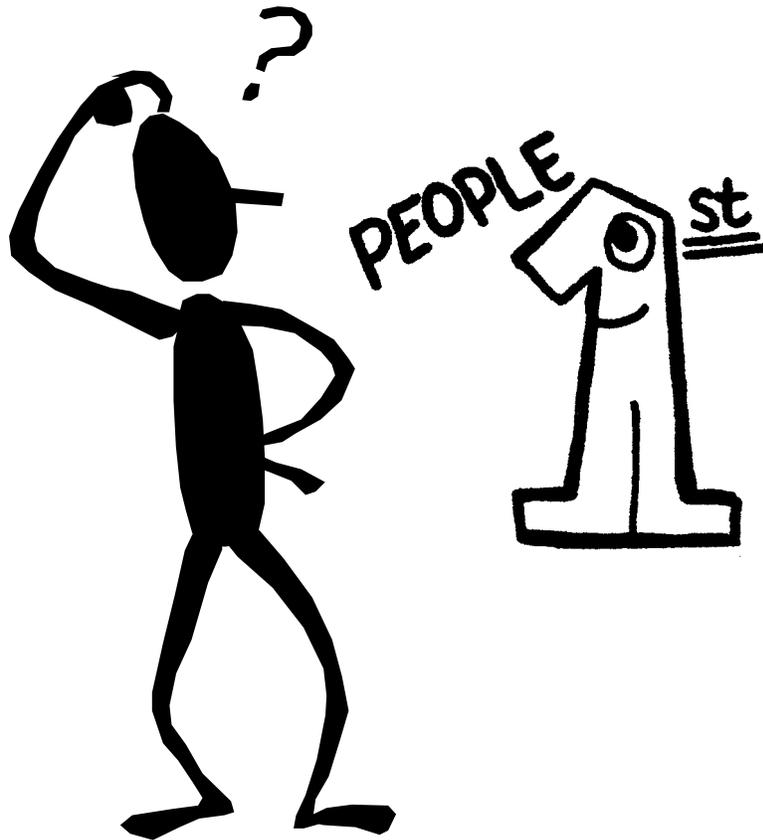


# PEOPLE FIRST CHAPTER HANDBOOK



PEOPLE FIRST OF OREGON  
2002

# FOREWARD

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

The handbook has changed and grown through the years. Other chapters have shared our material and we have shared theirs. One major change is the lack of illustrations in this version. The original Officer Handbook had many illustrations which were all drawn by group members. Unfortunately we were unable to reproduce the drawings and to make it easier to print the handbook and use it on our web site we decided not to redo them. If you would like a copy of the original handbook we will be glad to send it to you.

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.people1.org](http://www.people1.org). Good luck – and welcome to People First.

*People First of Oregon*

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PEOPLE FIRST  
CHAPTER HANDBOOK

SECTION I

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 developmentally disabled people 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 cities, and those chapters join together to make state chapters. People First is networking with other states and advocacy groups.

We live in institutions, foster homes, our parents homes, group homes, and our own apartments. We go to school, we work in sheltered workshops and in community businesses.

We serve on state and local ARC boards. We sit on the Governor's Commission for the Handicapped and State DD Councils. We have served on the President's Commission on Mental Retardation. 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 THAT WE LIVE IN?**

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, ARC Boards, and Transit Boards. We develop service projects to the communities we live in.

## **WHAT DO WE WANT?**

People First wants 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 wants 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 doesn'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 wants transportation to get where we want to go. We want 24 hour bus service. People First wants 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 to develop service projects in the communities we live in. We offer information and assistance to countries around the world in starting new chapters. We offer participation on DD Council Boards, ARC Boards, 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. We have a directory on our web site which will help you find a chapter in your own area

### **HOW DO YOU START A PEOPLE FIRST CHAPTER?**

The People First of Oregon Chapter Handbook offers information to help you start a People First chapter. If you need additional information please visit our web site at [www.people1.org](http://www.people1.org) or you can contact us directly.

# THE HISTORY OF PEOPLE FIRST AND SELF-ADVOCACY

## HOW DID PEOPLE FIRST GET STARTED?

In 1974, a group of residents who were living at Fairview Training Center in Salem, Oregon and some of their friends who had moved into the community in Salem decided to start getting together to try to get organized. We wanted to have a say in what was happening in our lives.

We decided that we wanted to have our own convention; one that we planned and where we were the speakers and the leaders in control. We did not want to just be a small part of another group, like the ARC. We wanted to be our own organization and speak for ourselves.

So we stood up and spoke up and spoke out and People First was born!



## HISTORY OF SELF ADVOCACY AND PEOPLE FIRST

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 Association for Retarded Citizens sponsored the first convention for the "mentally handicapped" in North America. The convention had for its theme "May 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 helpers 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 has 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 like the Arc but many others are independent. In some 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 PHILOSOPHY

People First is a self-advocacy organization of developmentally disabled persons 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 are developmentally disabled. Only voting members can 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 helpers working with persons in order to provide the modeling and support necessary for the development of self-advocacy and leadership skills.
- People First helpers provide modeling and support by working with persons to neutralize barriers that stand in the way of persons advocating for themselves. Helpers 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"*

Types of Chapters

Starting A Chapter

Keeping A Chapter Strong

## TYPES OF PEOPLE FIRST CHAPTERS



People First chapters come in all sizes and shapes. There is no one-size-fits-all model for organizing and running a chapter. Every chapter is unique. How the group is organized depends on the members involved, the role of the helpers and the community in which the group is located.

### THE INDEPENDENT CHAPTER

This type of People First chapter is probably the ideal for a self-advocacy group. From the time it is started, the chapter is financially and organizationally independent from any parent or professional advocacy or the service delivery system. In this regard, it is a true grass-roots organization which practices its self-reliance from the start.



#### Advantages

- Independence and self reliance.
- Avoids conflict of interest with the views of a parent or professional advocacy or service organization.
- When confronted with an advocacy issue that is in direct conflict with agency policy or procedure, members and helpers can take a position without fear of recrimination.
- Members learn how to speak for themselves without having parents or professionals speak for them because they “know best”.
- Easier to form statewide network

## Disadvantages

- Funding
- May become too disconnected from service system to promote change. To avoid this possibility, members must work hard to establish a good rapport with other advocacy and service organizations.

## THE DIVISIONAL CHAPTER



This type of People First chapter is organized as part of an parent or professional advocacy or service organization for persons with developmental disabilities like the ARC. The chapter is usually initiated by members of the sponsoring organization who then serve as the group advisors. Frequently, the sponsoring agency provides a place for the chapter to meet, a small amount of start-up money, and other services such as the use of a desk, agency telephone, and copy machine. In addition, they often invite a member of the chapter to serve on their board of directors as a consumer spokesperson.

## Advantages

- Immediate access to a variety of resources.
- Connection with sponsoring organization can serve to educate the membership of the latter about self-advocacy as well as legitimize the group in the eyes of the service system.

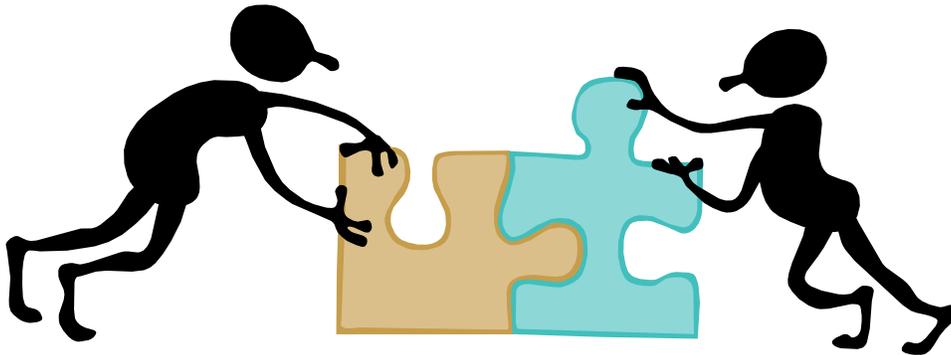
## Disadvantages

- Potential conflict of interest if there is disagreement between the chapter and the sponsoring agency.

- As a division of a larger organization, chapter members are ultimately vulnerable to the sponsoring agency.
- Because they are less experienced than their parent/ professional counterparts, they risk being overpowered and inadvertently relegated to a "back seat" or token position.
- Chapters starting out as a division of an existing organization sometimes find it difficult to break away from that organization without hurting feelings or insulting its membership. This can pose a great problem as members work to develop leadership skills and learn how to speak for themselves.

This type of chapter holds many pitfalls for a true self-advocacy group and is probably most appropriate as a starting point for a group which should strive for independence as it gets established. Some chapters have developed very good working relationships with the sponsoring agency, however, and find this a type of chapter very satisfying.

### THE SERVICE SYSTEM CHAPTER



This type of People First chapter is located within a service delivery system (e.g. sheltered workshop, institution, group home, etc.) where people with developmental disabilities work or live. Many chapters are started within the system because of convenience. Membership recruitment is not necessary as because the members are already there. Similarly, a meeting place is also provided, and there is obviously no need to transport people.

## Advantages

- Convenience. Members are already there, a meeting place is provided, and there is no need for transportation.
- Chapter members have the opportunity to collectively focus on issues of rights and responsibilities that directly affect them in their programs.

## Disadvantages

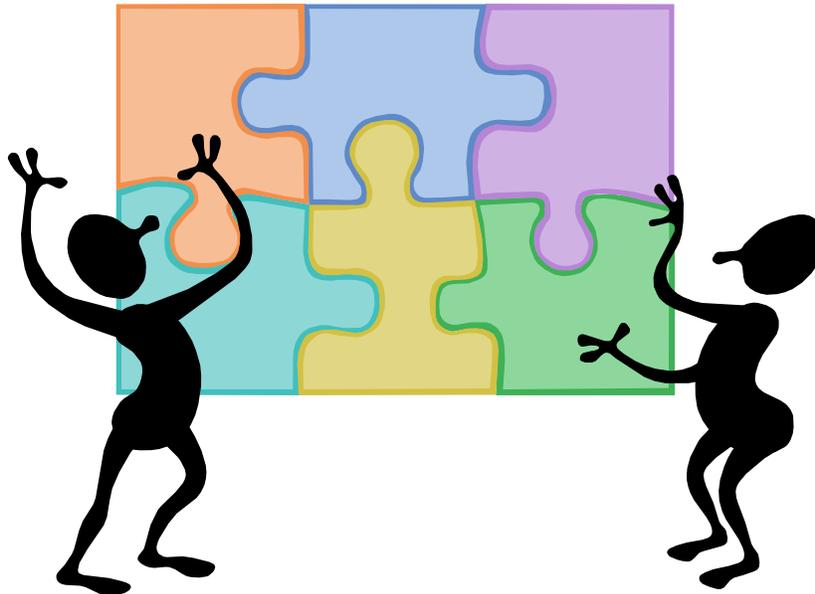
- Conflict of interest can be a serious problem if members take any position which is viewed as unfavorable by the service program.
- Members can easily be chastised for disorderly conduct, inappropriate behavior, etc., if they raise any issues which challenge the system.
- Members may have expectations that cannot be realistically accomplished in their place of work or residence.
- The chapter may become thought of as a regular activity of the service program and risk becoming merely a token self-help advocacy group.

The service system chapter works best if the group has a helper who comes from outside the system. The helper can then avoid conflict of interest problems related to their job and possibly even serve as a liaison for the members and service system personnel.

This type of chapter is most appropriate as a starting point for a group which should strive for independence as it gets established.

## THE COALITION CHAPTER

This type of People First chapter is part of a group of independent organizations that work together to protect the human and legal rights of disabled people. Rather than starting as a separate self advocacy group for people with developmental disabilities, the coalition operates with the assumption that disabled people can advocate most effectively for themselves if advocacy organizations for all disabilities unite.



### Advantages

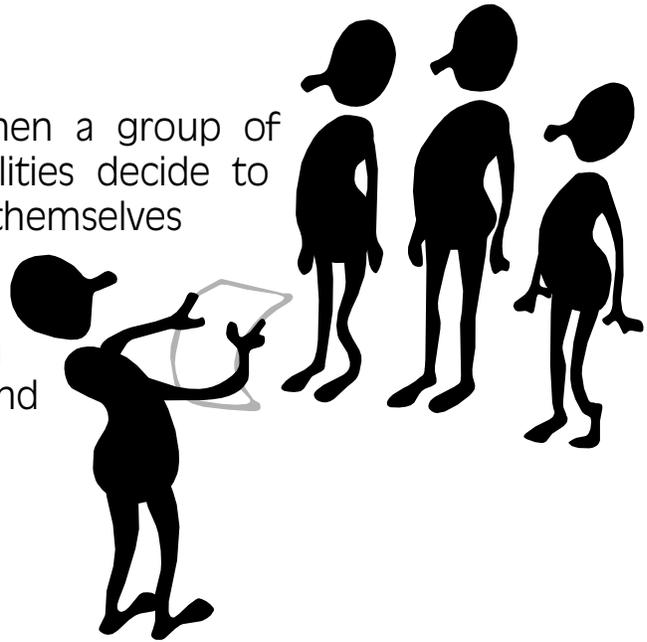
- A coalition offers the support of a larger and more diverse group of disabled people who are also advocating for themselves.
- Joining with a coalition tends to bring added legitimacy, increased political power, and an improved ability to generate funding.

### Disadvantages

- Chapter members risk being overpowered by more sophisticated and articulate physically disabled advocates and non-handicapped people.

## STARTING A PEOPLE FIRST CHAPTER

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 three important principles to remember when starting a People First chapter.

#### **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 helper is, and what goes on in the meetings.

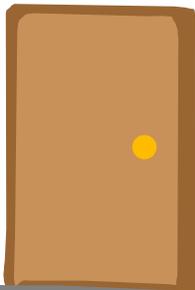
#### **Starting a chapter takes time**

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 so 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.

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

A black silhouette of a person is shown climbing the stairs. The person is carrying a brown briefcase in their right hand and has their left hand on their hip. The person is positioned on the lower part of the stairs, moving towards the door.

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. If there are no chapters near where you live contact other chapters. If your state has a statewide People First organization they 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.people1.org](http://www.people1.org). You can contact these groups by letter or e-mail and ask them about their chapters.

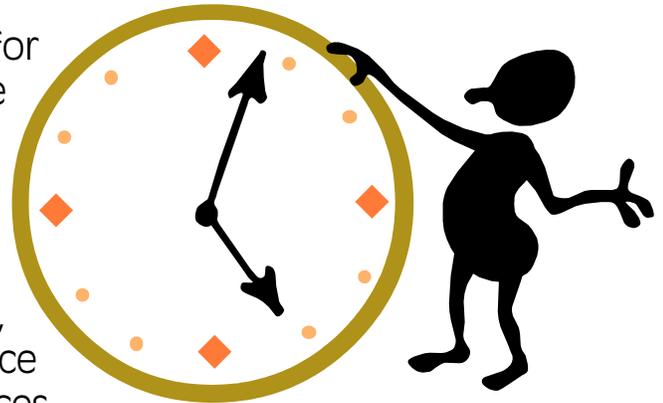
**Decide what each person will do to help get the chapter started**

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.

## Set up a time and place for a meeting

A time and place need 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 like the DD Council or a local ARC offices.



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.

## Let people know about the meeting



Let as many people as you can know about your meeting and 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. Make up a "flyer" or meeting notice and put these up in group homes, workshops and other places. Put the bus number and a picture of how to get to the meeting on the flyer. Put the phone number of someone to call for more information on the flyer.

## 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 a film like the People First video as a way of introducing self-advocacy to new members. 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

There are some important decisions to be made when starting a People First chapter.

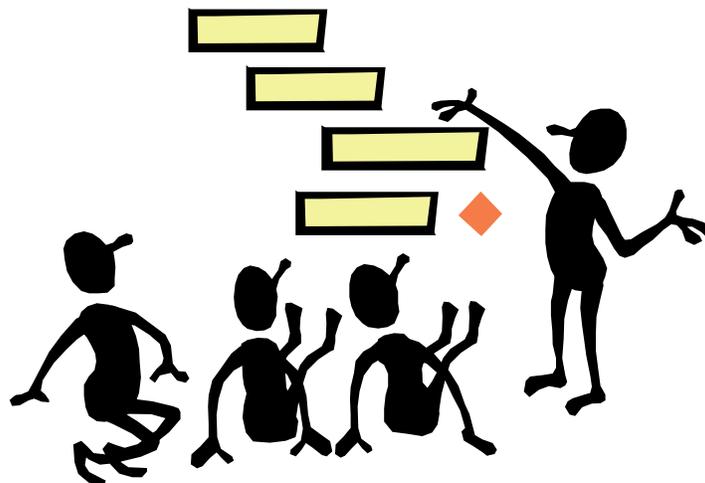
### Decide on the purpose for your chapter

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 of Oregon 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.”*



### 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.

The by-laws of People First of Oregon are:

Article 1: Anyone with a developmental disability can be a member.

Article 2: Local chapters of members hold meetings.

Article 3: Local chapters elect officers who run the local meetings.

Article 4: Representatives from local chapters attend local meetings, and also State board meetings.

Article 5: An annual meeting happens at the time of the state convention.

Article 6: State board meetings are held at least six times a year, one of which is the annual meeting.

Article 7: The board has the power to made decisions related to the People First organization.

Article 8: The board is made up of members from any or all chapters in the state.

Article 9: The board has six elected members included in the makeup of the board. They include the president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and two sergeant at arms. The rest of the board is made up of representatives from local chapters. The state officers will serve for three years starting in 1994.

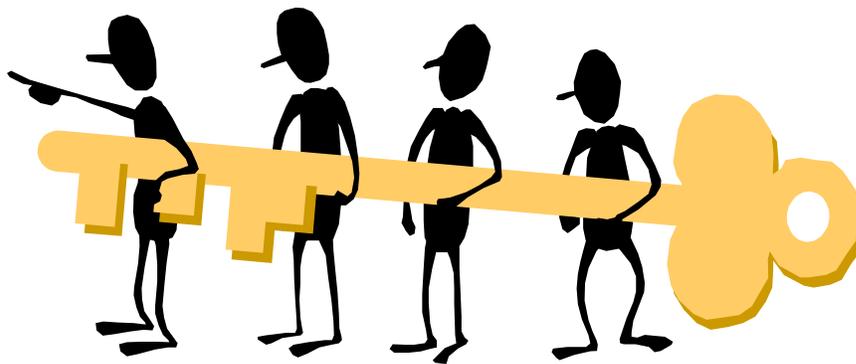
Article 10: Officers cannot hold consecutive terms in the same

position.

- Article 11: State officers must attend board meetings. If three consecutive meetings are missed, board action will be taken.
- Article 12: Decisions are made by a majority of people in attendance at a scheduled board meeting. Board schedules are sent to all known chapters in the state.
- Article 13: Annual dues are included in the annual convention registration fees.
- Article 14: All members have the right to vote at any people first meeting.
- Article 15: State elections are held every three years.
- Article 16: The annual meeting is planned by the board of directors.
- Article 17: Both the annual meeting and the annual state convention are planned by the board of directors.
- Article 18: All decisions related to People First corporation events, focus and direction will be the responsibility of the board of directors and the membership.
- Article 19: The power to alter, amend, or repeal these by-laws or adopt new by laws shall be vested in the board of directors.

## **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.

### Decide on how to develop team spirit

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



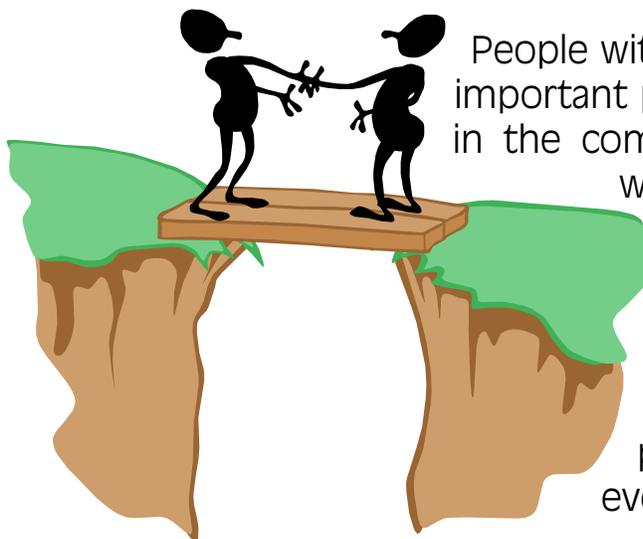
Members need to learn and practice working together and getting things done. The process needs to include all the members so everyone gets a chance to share ideas and to feel good about who

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 their chapter and community as well as in their personal lives

### 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 DD Councils, ARC Boards, and Transit Boards. They can develop service projects for the communities they live in.

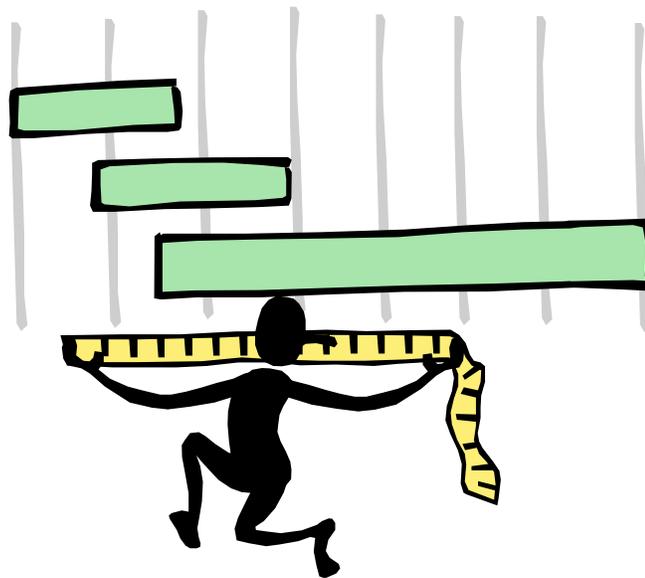
It is also important the people with developmental disabilities learn about the community where they live and how it works. People First can help members learn by holding workshops and inviting

guest speakers such as public health nurses, policemen and local government officials.

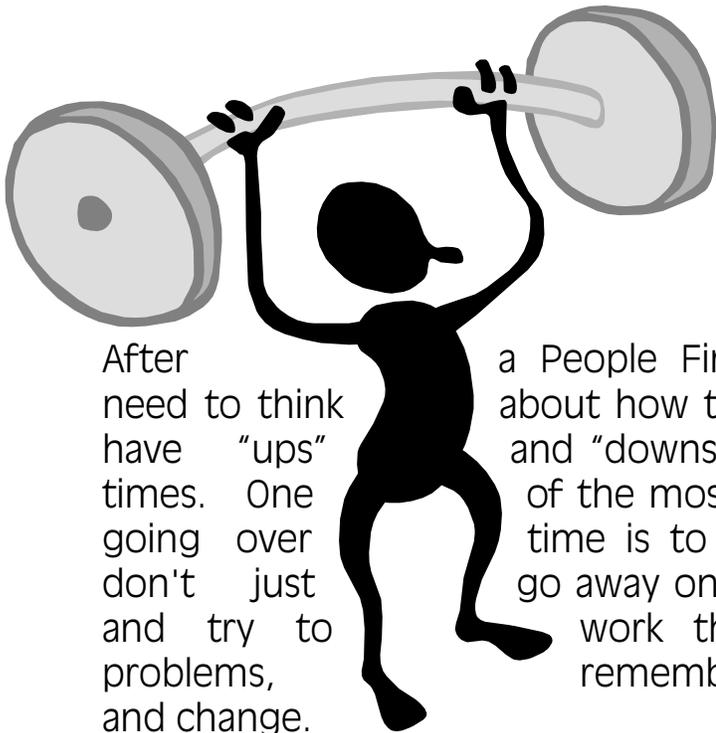
By being active participants People First members can teach the community about them and teach themselves about the community.

## 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 helpers but the results can be extremely rewarding for everyone involved.



## KEEPING A PEOPLE FIRST CHAPTER STRONG

After  
need to think  
have "ups"  
times. One  
going over  
don't just  
and try to  
problems,  
and change.

a People First chapter has been started, you  
about how to keep the group going. All groups  
and "downs." All groups will have problems at  
of the most important things to keep a group  
time is to face problems head on. Problems  
go away on their own. You have to face them  
work them out. When your group has  
remember to give people a chance to grow

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

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

Call people to remind them about the meeting. Make up a "flyer" or meeting notice and put these up in group homes, workshops and other places. Put the bus number and a picture of how to get to the meeting on the flyer. Put the phone number of someone to call for more information on the flyer.

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.

**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 have an important part in the group.

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.

**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.

**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.

**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." 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

# PEOPLE FIRST OFFICERS

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.

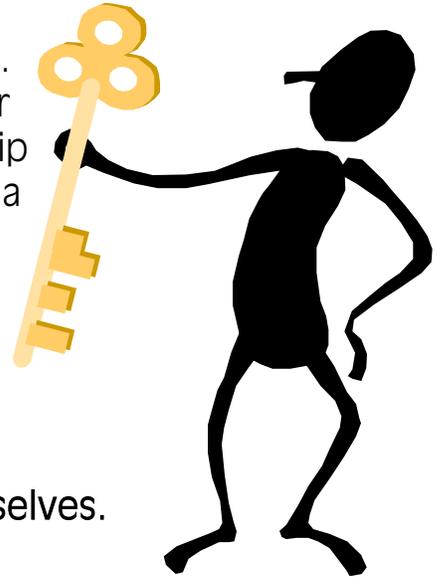
**One kind of officer does everything themselves.**

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.

**Another kind of officer gets everyone involved and 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.

## REPONSIBILITIES 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.

If an officer has two unexcused absences, the chapter should elect another person to be that officer.

- 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 officers 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 agenda for the chapter meeting.

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.

The secretary helps in the meeting when needed or asked.



### Treasurer

The treasurer needs to know how to count, add and subtract money.

In the meeting the treasurer give 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.

The treasurer helps in the meetings when needed or asked.



### Sergeant-At-Arms

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

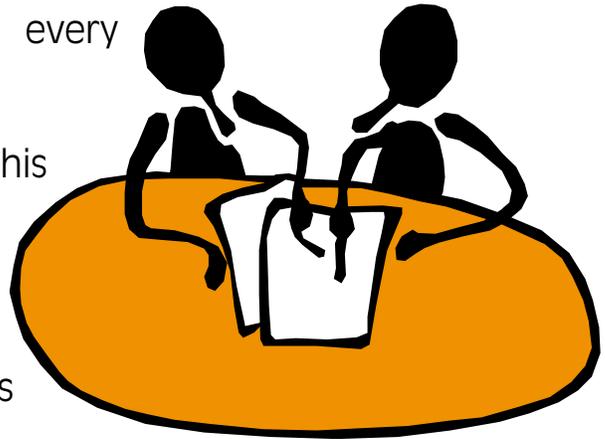
The sergeant-at-arms helps at the meetings when needed or asked.

## 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 helper 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.



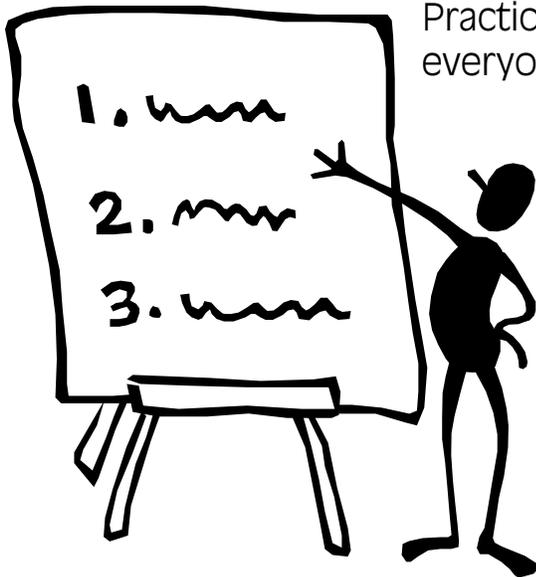
### What to talk about in officer's meetings

- 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 how to solve problems that come up during meetings.

PEOPLE FIRST  
CHAPTER HANDBOOK

SECTION IV

PEOPLE FIRST HELPERS

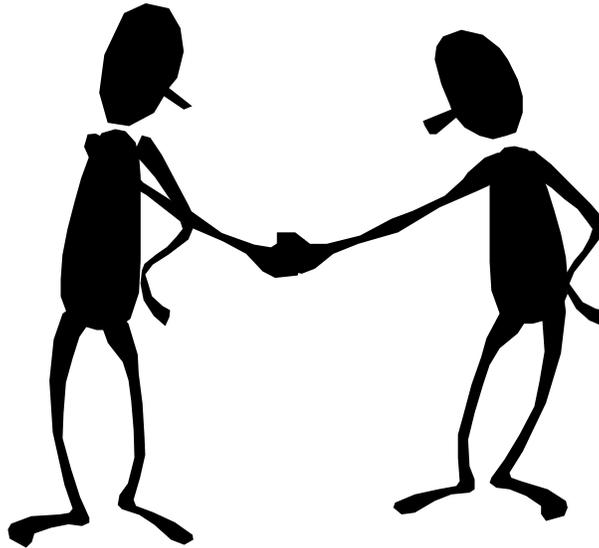
*“Our helpers were good because they let us learn and move ahead at our own speed, even if it wasn’t fast enough for them.”*

The Role of People First Helpers

Hints For People First Helpers

Questions To Ask Yourself As A People First Helper

## THE PEOPLE FIRST HELPER



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 helper. What a chapter needs in a helper will vary depending on the members involved, the community and the way the chapter is organized.

Helpers play an important role in People First even though the chapters are run by the members themselves. Helpers 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 helpers 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 "helpers" since the chapter didn't have the money to hire any staff.

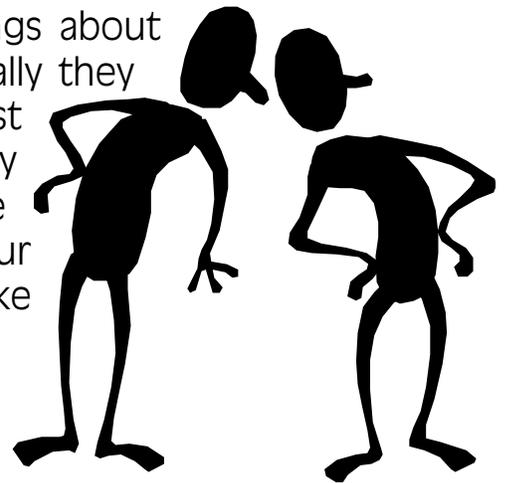
*"Our "helpers" didn't lead us. They just helped and coached us when we asked. They helped us learn to hold meetings so we could talk about things that were important to us and not just what was important to them. Our helpers were good because they let us learn and move ahead at our own speed, even if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

## ROLE OF THE HELPER

The People First helper:

- 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 helpers in their chapter. Basically they feel that good helpers know that People First belongs to the members and not to them. They feel good helpers 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:

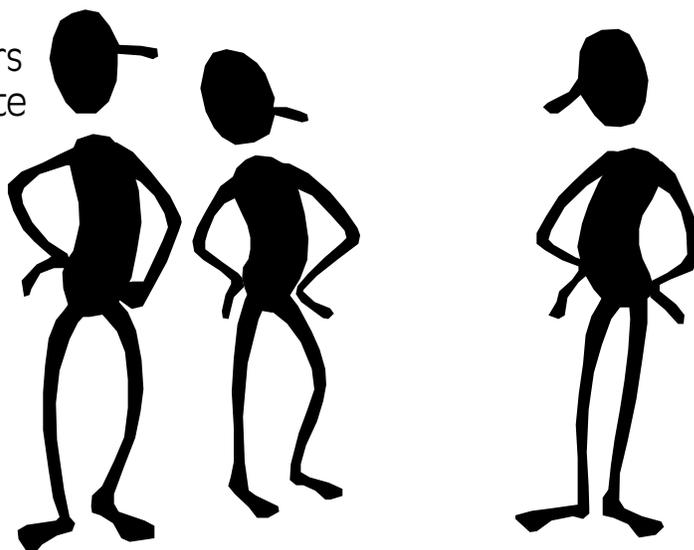
- Helpers should help us when we need it – but not too much.
- Helpers should let members run the meetings.
- Helpers should try to understand how members feel.
- Helpers should care about us as people at all times.
- Helpers should believe in people First.
- Helpers should work with us to get our rights.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

- What do you want from a helper?
- 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 helpers include:

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



## HINTS FOR PEOPLE FIRST HELPERS

### 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 helper 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.

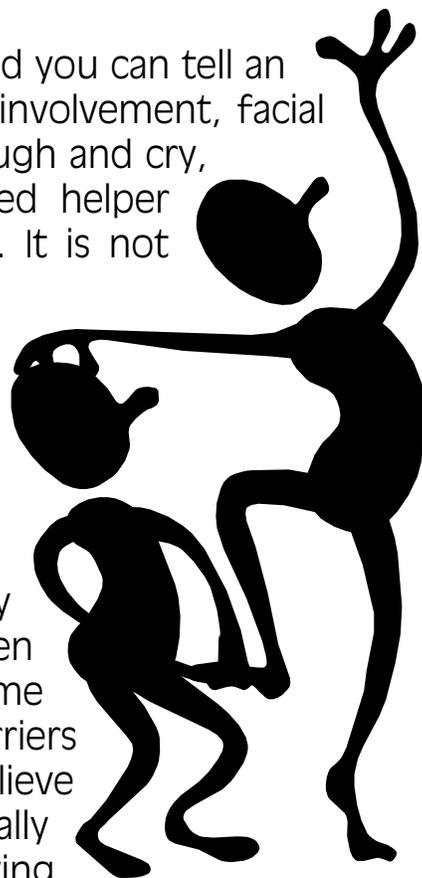
### Generating Excitement

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

### Having A Vision

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

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



## Finding Other Helpers

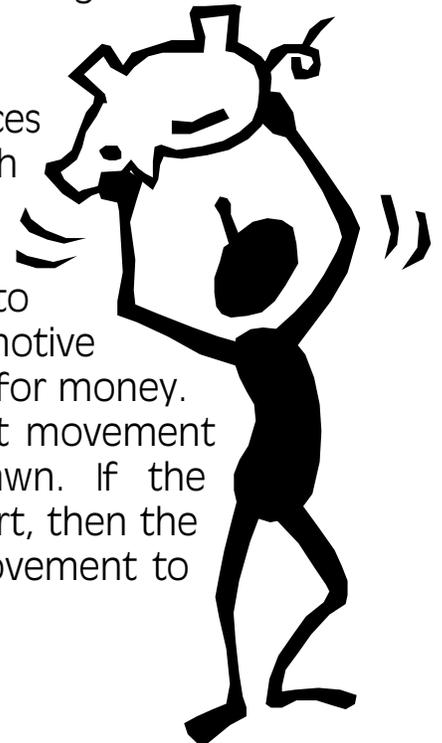
Helpers need other helpers. It is lonely without peers to share and reflect ideas with. It is the exceptional helper who will actually show the energy and vision to be involved in a movement such as People First.

## 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 helpers, 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.

Helpers 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. Helpers 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

Helpers 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 helper 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

Helpers 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 take the energy away from what the helpers should be concentrating on. The distinction between the members and the helpers is for discussion only. In practice the helpers and the members must put aside roles and work together. In People First the power belongs to the members. The helper 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 HELPER

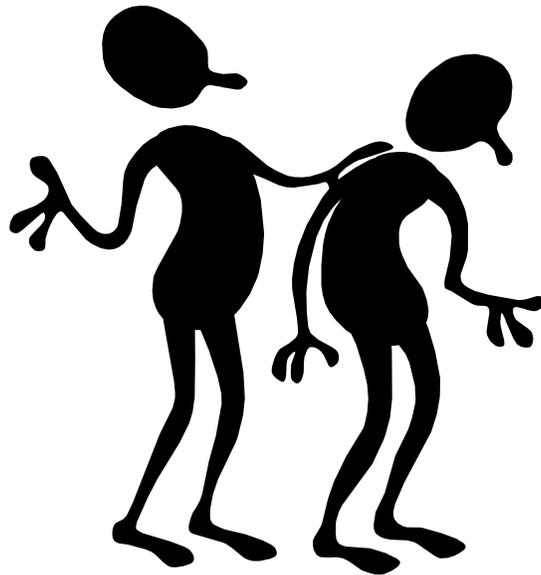
The following questions are a good way to gauge how you are doing as a People First helper and provide some insight to help avoid burn out.



- 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 members 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 members 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 members 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 helpers 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 helper 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

PEOPLE FIRST  
CHAPTER HANDBOOK

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 Procedures

The Meeting Agenda

Solving Problems In Meetings

## PEOPLE FIRST 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 helpers to relax, take a back seat, and let the process happen without becoming leaders themselves. Helpers 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. A helper 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

Calling 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 is 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.

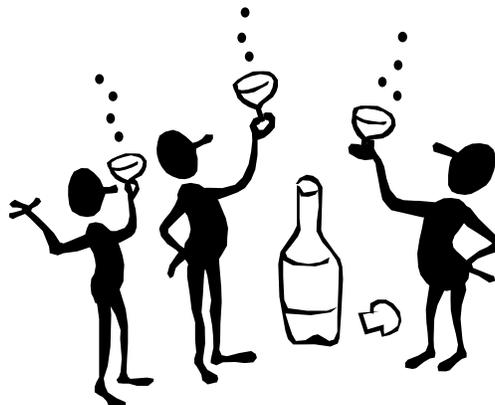
## 8. Program

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 months 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	
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 7:00PM at the senior center.	
Refreshments and time to talk to friends	

## SOLVING PROBLEMS IN MEETINGS

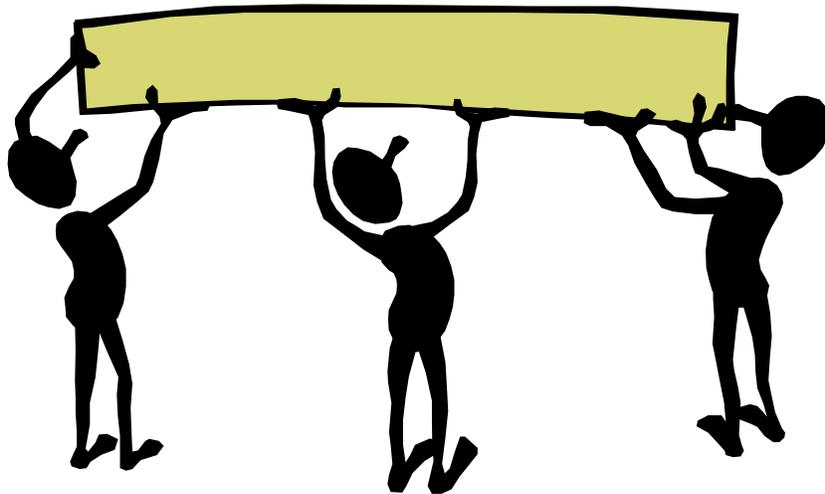


During the People First meetings problems usually happen. During the officer's meetings talk about the problems that happen and what to do about them. Here is a list of some of the problems that happen during meetings. Practice and role-play how to solve these problems during the officers meeting.

- If one member interrupts (speaks) when another member is speaking, politely ask that member not to 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 helper talks too much during the meetings, politely remind the helper 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 helper 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 member's question important and thank the member for asking the question. If the member's 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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CHAPTER HANDBOOK

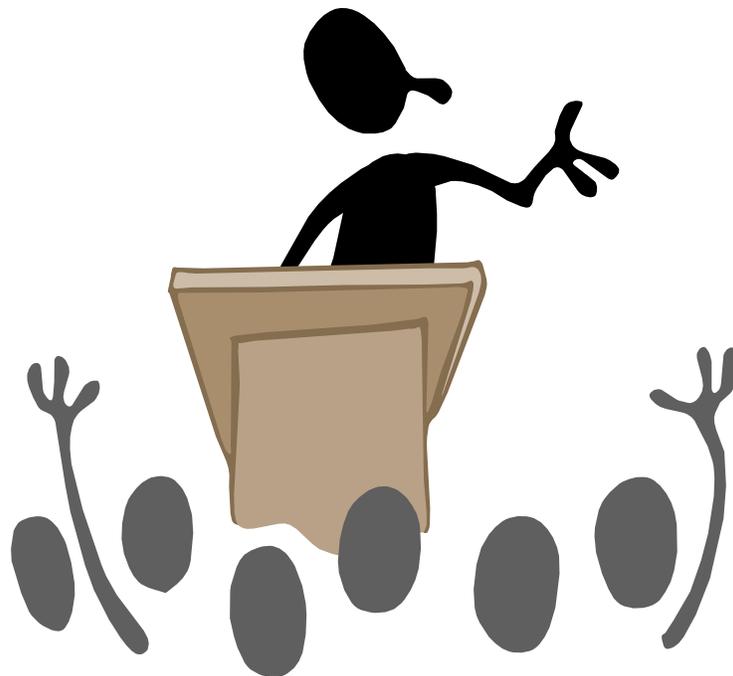
SECTION VI  
VOTING AND ELECTIONS

*"Voting is a right for all People First members but it is  
also a responsibility"*

Voting On Chapter Business

Election Of Chapter Officers

## VOTING AND ELECTIONS



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 helper 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 once a year.
- 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 VII

WORKSHOPS AND CONVENTIONS

*“People First workshops and conventions give members an opportunity to share ideas and information and have fun at the same time.”*

People First Workshops and Conventions

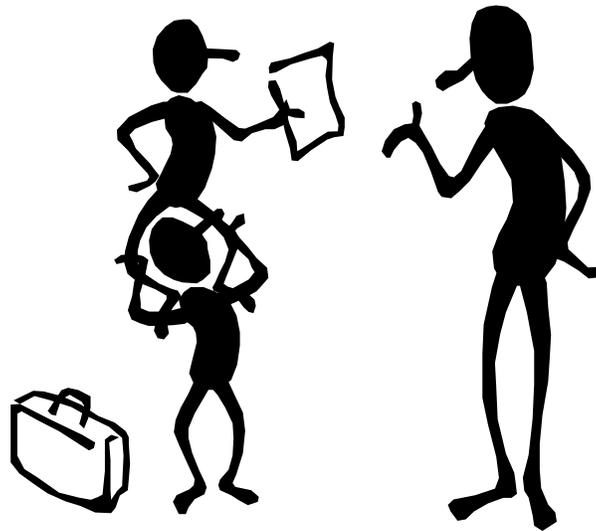
Organizing A State Convention

Sample Convention Agenda

Sample Convention Registration Form

## PEOPLE FIRST WORKSHOPS AND CONVENTIONS

An important part of People First is members getting together. People First members get together in chapter meeting. They also get together in workshops and conventions to share ideas and information. These events help members learn more about their rights and responsibilities and how to problem solve the individual and community issues that impact their lives. The events also give members a chance to get together with old friends and new and have some fun



### REGIONAL WORKSHOPS

About two times a year, local chapters that are close to each other get together for a regional workshop. In a regional workshop the members and officers:

- Give a report about how each chapter is doing and how they are learning to speak for themselves.
- Share ideas with all the members and chapters.
- Solve problems together.
- Practice leadership skills.

- Meet old and new friends.
- Have workshop meetings on things like how to be an officer, how to vote, how to make friends, how to be a self advocate, etc.
- Make decisions about the convention like when and where it will be, and who will do them and what kind of guest speakers we want.
- How to raise money for the convention

Regional workshops usually last four to five hours and are held on a Saturday. The members bring sack lunches and one chapter brings dessert and something to drink for everybody. Regional workshops are a fun time to practice self advocacy skills and meet friends.

## STATE CONVENTIONS

State conventions are a time when all the chapters in the state get together and stay overnight in hotels. A state convention is quite an experience. At a state convention, the members and officers:

- Elect state officers.
- Have eight to ten workshops.
- Give chapter reports.
- Meet old and new friends.
- Have a banquet dinner and a dance.
- Learn and grow as people.
- Practice self advocacy skills and speaking for yourself.
- Have fun and go somewhere you may never have gone before.



State conventions happen every year. It takes about a year of planning to do them right. Several different chapters do workshops at the convention and help with the convention details. Local chapters raise money to go to the convention, arrange for transportation and all kinds of details. It's a lot of hard work and a lot of fun. At a state convention all the members grow and learn from all the other members.

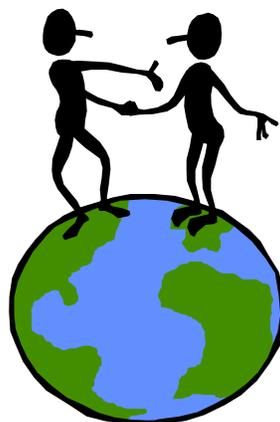
## NATIONAL CONVENTIONS

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

## INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS

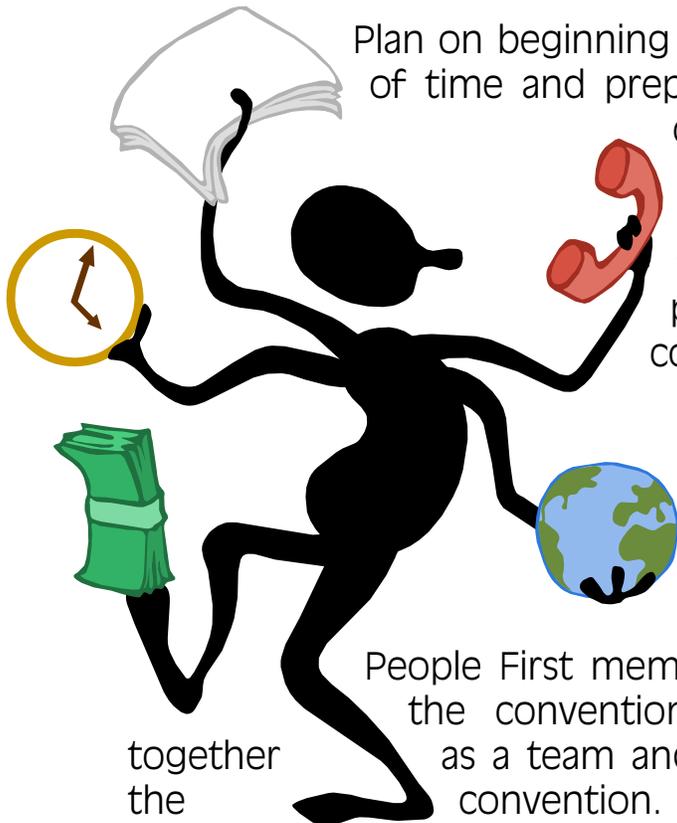
People First has chapters worldwide. There are active chapters in Canada, Europe, Great Britain, Japan, Korea and other places. People First members meet at a worldwide conference every four or five years.

In 1984 the conference was held in Tacoma, Washington. Since then, international conferences have been held in London, England (1988), Toronto, California (1993), Anchorage, Alaska (1998) and Northampton, England (2002).



## ORGANIZING A PEOPLE FIRST STATEWIDE CONVENTION

People First got started in Oregon through the experience of planning and running a convention and we have had annual conventions since we began in 1974. Your People First chapter may also be thinking about planning a state convention. Planning and organizing the convention will give members a chance to learn first hand a process for working together and getting things done.



Plan on beginning a year in advance because it takes a lot of time and preparation. It will take commitment from chapter members and helpers. If you hold your convention at a hotel, the sales staff will be very helpful to you as you plan your event. Another good place to get help is your local convention bureau.

### CONVENTION COMMITTEE

The first step in planning a convention is to form a Convention Committee of People First members and helpers to plan and organize the convention. The Convention Committee works together as a team and has overall responsibility for planning the convention. In some chapters the committee operates as a committee of the State Board. In other chapters the State Board is the Convention Committee.

### PLANNING TASKS

Planning tasks include determining the:

- Date when the convention will be held

- Location where the convention will be held
- Price package for each person coming
- Conference theme
- Speakers
- Number and type of workshops

Planning tasks also include defining the responsibilities of both the People First group and the tentative convention facility. Two of these important tasks include:

- Pre-registration and registration
- Training staff in facility where convention will be held

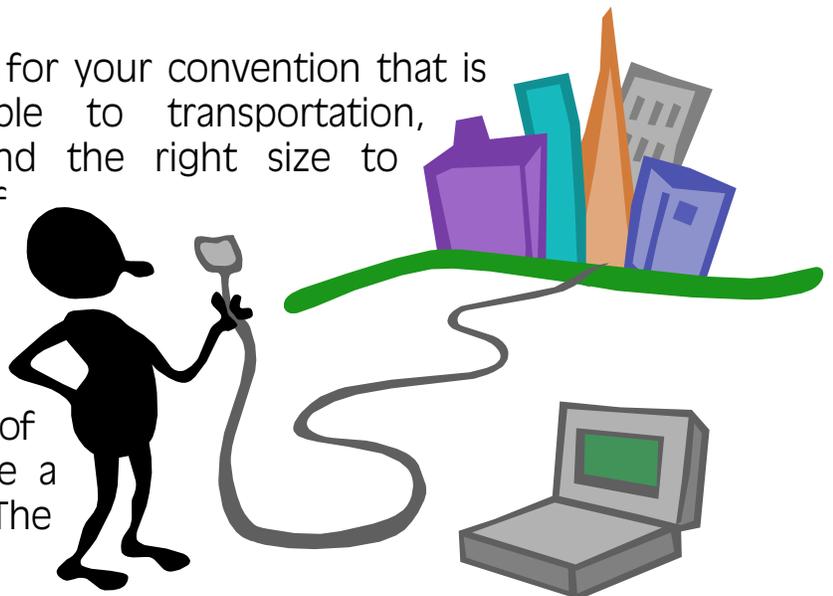
### Planning Task: Determine Convention Date

It is also a good idea to plan to have your convention over a weekend or at a time when most members and helpers are free from work responsibilities. And you may want to hold your event during the "off season," when many hotels and convention sites can give you a lower price.

### Planning Task: Determine Convention Location

It is important to select a place for your convention that is centrally located or accessible to transportation, accessible to wheel chairs, and the right size to accommodate the number of people you want to come

Where a convention is held depends on the number of people coming. Small groups of 100 to 300 people usually have a wide range of selections. The



selection process should be done by a joint committee of handicapped people and helpers who look at possible options, visit the sites, and then present the options at a state workshop. Large groups of 400 to 1,000 persons usually have one or two options available. These options are usually found in the largest city of the state. Major concerns that need to be dealt with in negotiating for any facility are:

- Is there access for wheel chair people; are doors wide enough in individual rooms? Are curbs slanted? Do bathrooms have rails? Are there stairs at the entrance?
- Can the entire group eat together and have their general seminar together? (Any split shifting of meals is very disruptive.)
- Is the facility willing to work with handicapped persons?

Due to the limited funds that People First members have it is extremely important to shop for the best deal. One of the ways to keep the price down is to strive for near maximum occupancy, which means that people will share double beds. The best convention package with the lowest prices can usually be negotiated in the off-season for convention facilities.

Negotiating with the chef around possible menus also helps keep the prices down. Food needs to be prepared attractively and tastefully. It needs to be decided whether there will be a buffet or sit down meals. With a buffet style, servers are needed and extra kitchen staff is needed to help carry the plates to the table.



### Planning Task: Determine Convention Price Package

Paying for the convention is an important consideration. Most chapters try to keep the fee low because their members do not have much money. Let people know about it far enough in advance so they can save the money to pay their own way. Some chapters do fundraising and use the money they raise together to pay for their way to the convention.



## Planning Task: Determine Convention Theme

The convention theme is very important. The theme focuses the convention on one big idea. The theme should be discussed in the chapters and generate interest and excitement.

## Planning Task: Determine Convention Speakers

Convention speakers should inspire the audience and motivate people. It is important to have one of the speakers be a person with a disability and one person to be a resource person. It is important to pick speakers as early as possible because of their busy schedules.

Things to think about when picking a speaker are:

- Can they talk about the theme? Do they know about the subject?
- Are they good speakers? Has anyone heard them speak in front of a large group?
- Do they believe in people with disabilities?
- Are they available on the convention date?
- Will they speak for free.
- Who will ask the speakers?



## Planning Task: Determine Convention Workshops

Workshops are an important part of a people First convention. This is where members get to speak up and share ideas and information. The

workshops should be small enough so every member has a chance to participate.

Workshops are usually held once in the morning and again in the afternoon. They last about 1 hr and 15 min. The groups usually have a series of questions made up beforehand and listed on chart paper taped up on the wall. These questions help the group leaders keep the discussion focused on the theme. The committee or the group leaders develop the questions for the workshops to use.

### Planning Task: Determine Registration Procedures

In discussing the responsibilities of both the People First group and the tentative convention facility the whole area of pre-registration and registration is a major item.

Forms need to be developed and mailed out. The forms should ask for basic information such as:



- Sex of participant.
- Wheel chair needs.
- Interpreter needs.
- Whether or not the person is attending with a group.
- Who the helpers are.

There needs to be a registration deadline. Money needs to be sent in at the time the pre-registration form is returned. A statement about refunds should be included. Unless the money is collected beforehand, an exact number of persons attending the convention cannot be arrived at. This number affects room assignments, food needed, and the final bill. Pre-registration includes negotiating with facility staff about who sleeps in which room, what person in each room gets the key, and trying to keep groups that come together in rooms close to

one another. It is important that your registration process is timed so that facility rooms are vacated by those using them the night before.

The registration process should take place in a room that will allow for many tables to be set up and for many people with their luggage to get through the registration process and the room with relative ease. It is helpful for there to be accessible parking and facility staff assigned to take people directly to their rooms after they register. Registration is an exciting and chaotic time. There are usually some people who come without having pre-registered and there are people who have pre-registered and at the last minute chose not to come. The actual processes of assigning rooms and collecting money at registration land themselves to active support and direction from helpers. In time helpers will have less of an active role in these complicated processes.

### Planning Task: Set Up Staff Training in Convention Facility

The facility where the convention will be housed should receive staff training before the convention. Staff training can include:

- Showing a video like the People First film.
- Sharing information about seizures and how to intervene with them.
- Discussions about the effects of mixing alcohol and drugs.
- Discussing the right that handicapped persons have to enjoy a convention in all the same respects as non-handicapped persons.



Sensitizing staff has been extremely helpful and seems directly related to the overall smoothness of the convention process. .

## SAMPLE CONVENTION AGENDA

Oregon People First Convention  
2000

### Opening Doors to the New Millennium

WHO:

All People First Members in Oregon

WHEN:

September 2nd & 3rd

*Room Registration begins at 3:00 Saturday*

WHERE:

Downtown Portland Marriott, Front Street

#### WHAT:

- Workshops start at 1 pm. Saturday
- Dinner & Dance Saturday Evening
- Sunday Breakfast Banquet
- Meet New and Old Friends
- People First items for Sale
- Time for Chapters to Tell What has been Going On
- Art Show & Gallery

#### COST: (includes everything listed above)

- One person in a room=\$135
- One person in a bed=\$90 per person
- Two people sharing a bed=\$70 per person
- Saturday Only workshops, dinner, dance=\$35

#### TO REGISTER:

Fill out the enclosed form.

Send check or money order for registration payable to People First.

Send form and money to:

People First

P. O. Box 12642

Salem, OR 97309

DEADLINE:  
August 5, 2000

REFUND:  
May be available through request made to the Board after the convention.

QUESTIONS? Call  
Joan South in Eugene--541-682-3695  
Dennis Heath in Salem--503-362-0336  
Bill West in Portland--503-223-7279

PLEASE NOTE:  
People First requires that helpers come to assist people with special needs. Transportation to the convention is the responsibility of People First members and helpers.

## SAMPLE CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM

### People First Convention Registration Form

Facility Name and Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Contact or Staff Person: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

- Each shaded box represents one room at the downtown Portland Marriott.
- If you are registering one person who will have his or her own room, list one person in the box (\$135).
- If you are registering two people who will each have their own bed, list them in one box (\$90 per person).
- If you are registering four people who will share a room and beds, list the four people in one box (\$70 per person).
- If you are registering a couple who will share a bed in a room by themselves, list them in one box (\$70 per person).

**Please note:** If you want your own bed even if you are sharing a room, you will need to pay \$90. Roommates will be assigned as needed to fill rooms and beds (e.g. one person paying \$90 will be added to a room with only one person who is also paying \$90; one person paying \$70 will be added to a room with three other people paying \$70).

\$	Name (Please put a * by names of staff)	M/F	Special Needs (mattress pad, accessible room, dietary needs)	Smoker
\$	Name (Please put a * by names of staff)	M/F	Special Needs (mattress pad, accessible room, dietary needs)	Smoker

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SECTION VIII  
STATEWIDE ORGANIZATION

*"There is strength in numbers"*

Benefits Of A Statewide Organization

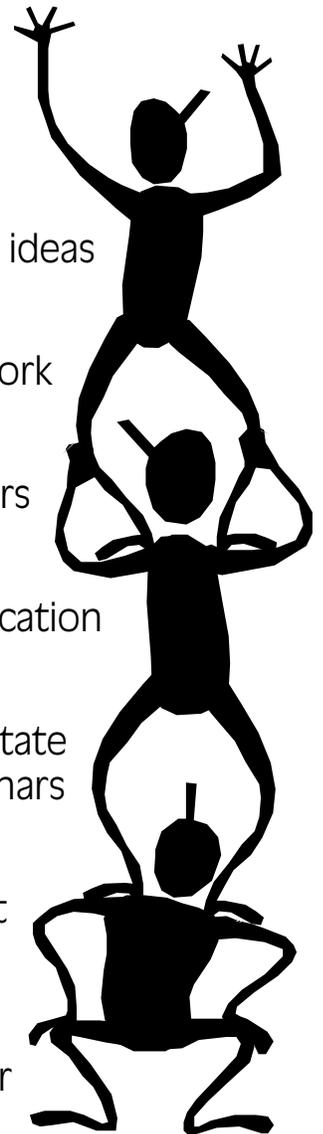
Five Steps In Starting A Statewide Organization

# FORMING A STATEWIDE PEOPLE FIRST 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 Salem, Oregon in 1974. 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 who 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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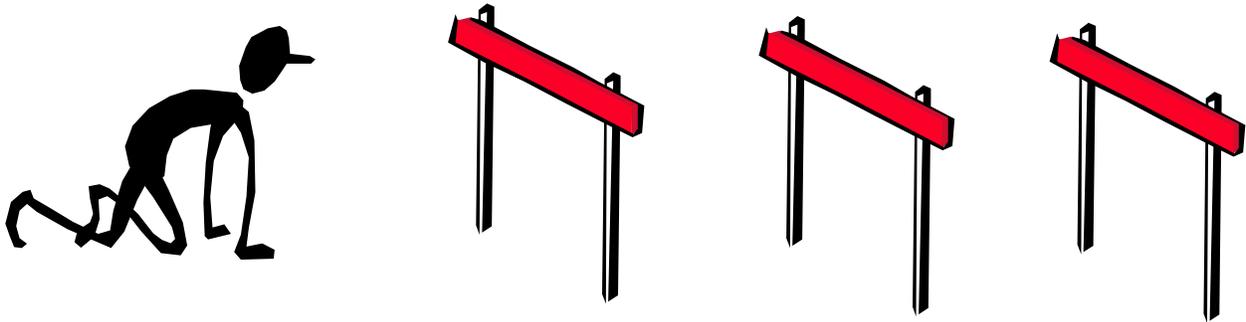
SECTION IX  
WORKING ON ISSUES

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

Understanding Issues

Developing A Plan For Working On Issues

## 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 effect 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:

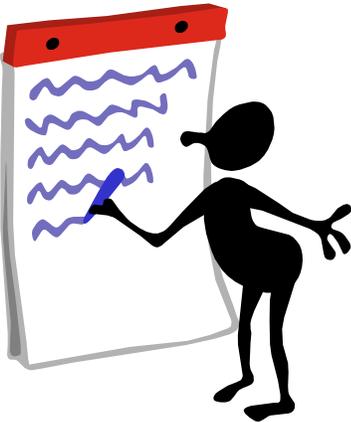
- How many of you remember when you were last angry?
- How many of you were angry about something that happened to you because you were disabled?



- 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 giving 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.

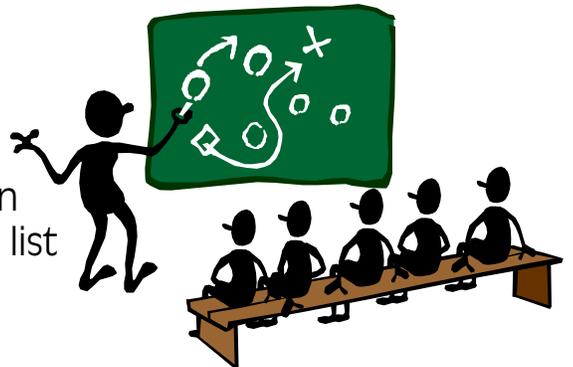
#### **Step 4: Decide on a Plan of Action to Reach Your Goal**

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:

##### **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.



##### **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.



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SECTION X

RESOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## RESOURCES

In addition to this handbook there are many resources available for people First and other self-advocacy groups. Because resource contact information changes so often we are not providing a list here. Instead you can find resource information on our web site at [www.people1.org](http://www.people1.org).

Our web site also has 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](http://www.thearc.org)
- Advocating Change Together at [www.selfadvocacy.com](http://www.selfadvocacy.com)
- Clearing House on Aging and Developmental Disabilities at [www.uic.edu/orgs/rrtcamr/advocacy.html](http://www.uic.edu/orgs/rrtcamr/advocacy.html)
- Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) at [www.sabeusa.org](http://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](http://www.qualitymall.org)
- University of Minnesota Institute on Community Integration at [www.ici.coled.umn.edu/ici](http://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 have made some changes and updates but 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 of Oregon*

